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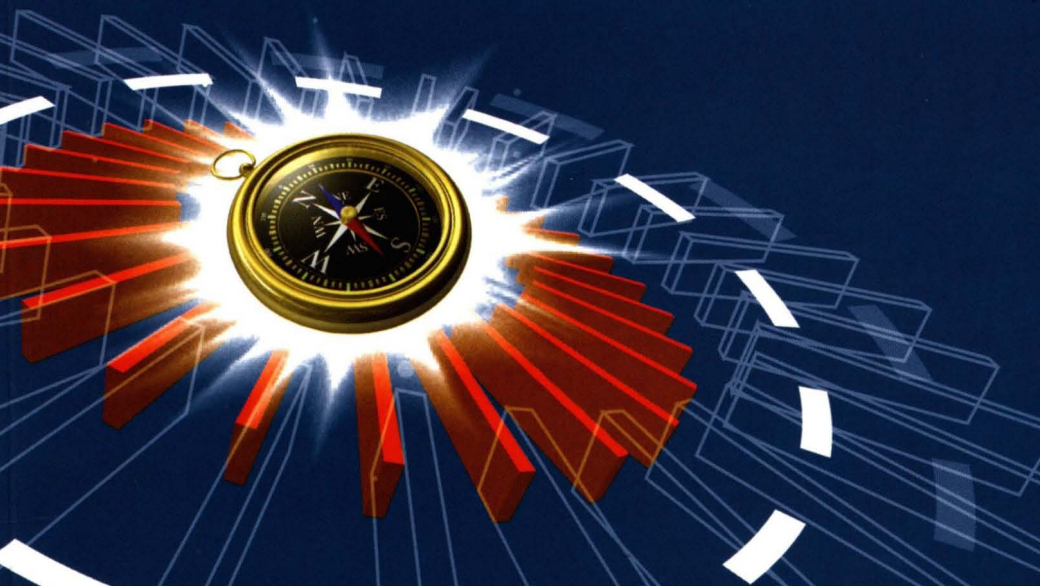
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The Importance of Academicians' Involvement in Community Service

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of academicians' involvement in community service. Undisputedly, strategic partnership in community service offers numerous benefits to academicians, universities and community groups. For those reasons, the focal point of this paper is to recognise the three major thrusts of community service, that is, the benefits and impacts of the service on 1) the academicians themselves, 2) the university, and 3) the community groups. It is found that community service is able to develop skills and enhance morale among academicians, reinforces the corporate image of a particular university and most importantly, contributes to breaking down barriers between community and university. This paper clearly signifies numerous reasons why it is essential for academicians to comprehend that in this day and age, community service is no longer an option to them. As a final point, this paper also highlights evidence that indicates communities now have higher expectations towards the university establishment than before. Thus, universities should now think of themselves as part of the community and should actively encourage their academicians to be actively involved in community service.

Keywords: *community service, community groups, strategic relationships*

Introduction

Among the important roles of a university is its contribution towards the betterment of a society. One of the strategies is through involvement in community service. Universities and community have realised the importance of collaborations as part of imparting knowledge for future development. Recently, messages can be obviously seen through the encouragement by the top management of a university, pushing its academicians to actively participate in community service. Universities in developed countries such as the USA, have a rich history of university-community collaboration through cooperative extension, linkages with other community groups and focus on participatory research for faster

future development (Lynn, 2000). In addition, the outcomes of community service indicate that proper implementation among academicians not only enrich their teaching experience, but also promote reflection on the long term benefits of community relationships (Joseph et al., 2007).

Community service offers academicians with plenty of opportunities to apply the knowledge obtained from past experience, readings as well as research and publications to a real world environment. Even though there are many different interpretations, objectives, and contexts under which a community service is implemented, the core concept is that the intention for that engagement will be able to provide positive changes to both community and the university. Undeniably, the resultant goal of community service is to increase an academician's self-reflection, self-discovery, acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge (Joseph et al., 2007).

However, as an academic institution, an issue that has been raised in many debates is whether or not universities should meet obligations and moral expectations at the level of the community. Should universities, together with their academicians, be responsible and accountable to other stakeholders' expectations such as those of the local communities' and non-profit organisations'? What has led universities to get involved in community service? The answers for these questions are varied. Among them are encouragement from the Ministry of Higher Education, commitment from the top management of a university and increased demand from community that has made community service no longer optional. Or at least, from the point of view of the community, community service is no longer an option. Universities are expected to give something to the society and the communities as part of their social obligation. Batstone (2003) stated that universities should act as a responsible vehicle for social good today as a condition for creating community value. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to bring to light benefits that can be gained for the universities, the academicians and the community from the service rendered to the community.

Literature Review

Literature has indicated that community service is widespread most in developed countries. In the UK, a rapid growth in community service was noted during the 80's and 90's. Similarly, The Conference Board's (1993) survey of 454 businesses carried out in the US showed that 90%

employees have formal community service programmes. In addition, The Charities Aid Foundation's (1998) study indicated that one in three large UK organisations have formal community service programmes. Smaller organisations are also involved in community services. A survey by the British Chambers of Commerce (1996) indicated that at least one in three organisations donates its time and services to the community.

According to Graff (2004), there is a worldwide rise in community service. It is proven by the increasing number of people engaged in community-needs oriented service, honouring the outstanding achievement of people engaged in service, and meeting the professional needs of those who work with service organisations such as a university (Tuffrey, 2003; Logan, 2002). In 2003, almost 18 million people in England and Wales volunteered formally at least once, with 22% formal community service at least once a month (Wild, 1993). The community service tasks vary but the most popular ones include raising and handling money, organising or helping to run an activity or event, being a leader or member of a committee, giving advice, information or counseling, and providing transport or driving (Joseph et al., 2007).

In most of the literature reviews, what is noteworthy is an increase in the integration of community service efforts into existing corporate social initiatives by organisations and the increasing tendency to link the employees' efforts to organisation's goals such as strong corporate reputation. Obviously, the prevalence of community service is striking.

Benefits and Impact of Community Service among Academicians

Zappala and Cronin (2002) stipulated that from the academicians' perspective, community service has shown great evidence that it is able to increase motivation, improve their morale and commitment to the university. Along the same line, Muthuri et al. (2006) claimed that community service motivates and enhances social cooperation, reciprocity, social trust, generosity, resource exchange as well as fostering university-community relationships. A study carried out by Tuffrey (2003) revealed that community service is able to improve and strengthen communication, teamwork, and creative thinking. Wymer and Samu (2003) added that community service does not only contribute to increased satisfaction, motivation, and loyalty but it also contributes to developing skills and attitudes that make a positive contribution to work performance.

Benefits and Impact of Community Service to University

Graff (2004) postulated that investing in community service has the potentials of enhancing a university's reputation, increasing the enrolment rate, increasing employees' motivation and loyalty, lowering employee absenteeism, enhancing academicians' competencies, attracting government officials, strengthening teamwork and skill acquisition, as well as producing greater attractiveness to prospective academicians. Graff also claimed that stories about community service generate significantly greater media coverage for the sponsoring organisations for both the public and private agencies.

A study carried out by the Nottingham University Business School showed that universities that were involved in community service perform up to 5% better in all areas (Tuffrey, 2003). In addition, community service can enable universities to demonstrate a caring attitude towards the community, improve communication among academicians working together on community projects, and bridge the gap between the university and the community.

In another research, Bush (2003) posited that based on the evidence from a research study sponsored by Barclays Bank, organisations that encourage community service can have a positive impact on 1) change management and innovation, 2) employees' morale and work performance, 3) training and development, and 4) recruitment and staff retention.

Benefits and Impacts of Community Service to Community

Community service produces several benefits for the community. Graff (2004) attested that the community can gain several benefits from the service such as enriched community life, community organisations with more human resources and a wider variety of skills delivering enhanced health, education, and social services, citizens with access to more and augmented programs and services, new partners for government agencies in service provision, and enhanced historical, artistic and cultural richness to enjoy.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that universities nowadays receive higher expectations from community than ever before. Communities expect universities to conduct themselves in a socially responsible manner and in ways that enhance rather than jeopardise the society's well-being. Universities should think of themselves as part of a community and should actively encourage their academicians to utilise their skills and experience for the benefits of the community. Whether community service will continue to grow, it all depends on the worldwide acceptance and maturity of the concept, its integration into the organisations' goals, its effective practice and the development of useful forms of measurement. Changes in dynamism in universities management, perceptions among academicians, economy and social systems will also affect its growth. Undeniably, community service is one of the most powerful ways in which universities can fulfill their social responsibility towards their stakeholders and the society.

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