

**Special Issue associated with
IFKAD 2022 – Track on Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge
Management**

**Call for papers
*Stakeholder Engagement: (Re)thinking Value Creation Processes in
the Networks***

Background

The Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) has become one of the most widely used frameworks in the corporate social responsibility context, and its application has been credited with being able to keep together the ethical, social, and economic aspects of doing business (Kujala and Korhonen, 2017). Therefore, companies may be able to do well by doing good (Falck and Heblich, 2007), when they are able to redefine how they create value (Freeman, 2010).

Stakeholder engagement – i.e. all the practices that an organisation undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organisational activities (Greenwood, 2007) – has been considered one of the main topics in stakeholder management theory (Freeman, 1984; Freeman and Liedtka, 1997; Greenwood, 2007).

According to some scholars (e.g., De Colle, 2005; Mainardes et al., 2012), stakeholder-engagement practices are about being able to continuously interact with the whole set of actors that operate in the company environment to create a set of bi-directional knowledge flows linking together the actors in a stakeholder network (Rowley, 1997; Surroca et al., 2010; Sciarelli and Tani, 2013).

Stakeholder-engagement practices may give companies, including small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) (Camilleri, 2019), several advantages. Specifically, these practices may assist companies in reducing market transaction uncertainty (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Harrison et al., 2010), as well as in improving company legitimacy (Burchell and Cook, 2006), to build goodwill and improve cooperation among engaged stakeholders (O’Riordan and Fairbrass, 2014).

At the same time, these practices may prove useful in creating a stakeholder synergy that helps improve stakeholder-oriented companies value-creation processes (Tantalo and Priem, 2016), as these companies will be able to leverage their stakeholders’ knowledge and resources to plan and implement innovative collaborative strategies (Caputo et al., 2018; Correia Loureiro et al., 2020; Tani, 2020).

Several authors (Harrison et al., 2010; Aarikka-Stenroos et al., 2017) have highlighted how managers can exploit the interactions with stakeholders to understand the resources that are present in the complex stakeholder network and to get access to them. At the same time, as discussed by several scholars (Freeman, 1984; Jones et al., 2018), the various stakeholders are usually connected, and the interaction of the company with a single stakeholder may influence – positively or negatively – its ability to successfully engage with other stakeholder groups.

Combining stakeholder resources with their own, companies may learn to create new products that are better suited to serve stakeholders' demand, and that can make the company's operations, its goods, and its services more sustainable (Andriof and Waddock, 2017).

When companies succeed in adopting a more intensive approach to stakeholder engagement, they may become more innovative (Lopatta et al., 2017; Leonidou et al., 2020), leveraging these relationships for both exploration and exploitation processes (Ayuso et al., 2011; Shams et al., 2020).

Furthermore, stakeholder-engagement practices are increasingly relevant in re-designing the value-creation processes from linear models to circular ones (Mishra et al., 2019; Ki et al., 2020). In this context, the stakeholder-engagement strategy should be based on principles such as involvement, dialogue and effective fulfilment of stakeholder expectations (Salvioni and Almici, 2020) as a way to move from an 'engagement of stakeholders' approach to an 'engagement with the stakeholders' as a more effective way to design new value-creation processes (Devin and Lane, 2014; Civera et al., 2019).

Despite the relevance of this topic in the stakeholder management literature, there are still some potential gaps to study in order to comprehend how these processes can become more effective.

On the one hand, according to some scholars (e.g., Rowley, 1997; Freeman et al., 2007; Harrison and Wicks, 2013), stakeholders can gain power and legitimacy from the networks of relationships into which they are embedded, but only a few studies (e.g., Tantalò and Priem, 2016; Tani, 2020; Velter et al., 2020) have addressed how the interdependence of the actors in the stakeholder network may affect the processes to engage them. In particular, according to some scholars (e.g., Svendsen and Laberge, 2005; Sciarelli and Tani, 2013; Rowley, 2017; Skilton and Purdy, 2017), managers should not interact with the stakeholders considering only the direct, one-to-one relationship with each of them, as the company behaviour with one stakeholder could affect the expectations and the perceptions of all the other stakeholders that are linked to them.

When managers consider the structure of the stakeholder network in defining their engagement processes, they may become more effective in locating the stakeholders that have access to the various resources needed for the company's value-creation processes (Vandekxerckhove and Dentchev, 2005; Harrison et al., 2010; Strand and Freeman, 2015). Furthermore, even if in a specific moment, the structure of the stakeholder network can create advantages for some of the actors (Garriga, 2009; Rowley, 2017), management may influence its evolution when it is able to understand the network structure and apply this

knowledge to their engagement processes as a way to become a more important actor (Phillips, 2003; Maak, 2007). In a similar way, managers should consider that even the stakeholders themselves can leverage the resources they have access to in order to obtain an edge in influencing and engaging companies (Frooman, 1999; Frooman and Murrell, 2005).

Accordingly, a gap emerges regarding how companies can openly engage with the stakeholder networks they are embedded into, moving from creating value for each stakeholder category to a value creation process with and for the stakeholders (Freudenreich et al., 2020). Hence, it appears critical to explore how companies can capitalise strategic resources from a 'value network' perspective (Bocken et al., 2019), which is understood to be the locus where mutual value exchanges between stakeholders and organisations occur.

On the other hand, recent studies have looked at the new digital technologies (Bogers et al., 2019; Viglia et al., 2018; Troise et al., 2021) as collaborative platforms, where stakeholders, and companies as well, may share information and experiences; discuss products, services and opinions; provide ideas or give feedback for new products and services. In particular, due to the vibrant development of information communication technology (ICT) solutions, organisations are increasingly experimenting with value-creation practices in digital environments (e.g., crowdsourcing, open innovation and crowdfunding initiatives) (Malhotra and Majchrzak, 2019) where managers and entrepreneurs can act as organisational decision-making systems to engage and enable their stakeholder networks. Therefore, stakeholders may decide on their own involvement in the organisational value-creation activities, taking advantage of digital technologies and collaborative platforms. However, only a few scholars (e.g. Ihm, 2015; Camilleri, 2019; Okazaki et al., 2020) have looked into the effect that these new platforms can have as tools for stakeholder-engagement processes.

Possible Topics

The purpose of this Special Issue is to deepen the understanding of value creation processes in Stakeholders' Network Engagement. The Special Issue will welcome both theoretical and empirical studies, using a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, that advances the extant knowledge on Engagement Processes in the Stakeholders' Network.

Research questions and topics explored by potential contributions to this Special Issue could include, but are not limited to, the following aspects:

1. How can companies effectively engage their stakeholders' network, going beyond the dyadic approach?
2. Which measures, and/or tools, can help companies to become more effective at dealing with stakeholder engagement practices in the complex, multi-relationship network linking the company and its stakeholders?
3. How can stakeholders leverage their networks in order to be more effective in influencing companies?
4. How can stakeholder engagement processes help companies to become more effective in knowledge resources integration for both opportunity recognition and exploitation?
5. What is the role of stakeholder engagement in helping companies to tackle new, innovative, processes such as those related to the sustainable and circular economy?

6. How can new information and communication technologies help companies at becoming more effective at stakeholder engagement activities?
7. What is the role of modern digital platforms, such as social media and crowdfunding/crowdsourcing platforms in stakeholder engagement?

Submission Instructions

Submission Opening Date: 01 October 2022

Submission Closing Date: 31 December 2022

Submissions must be original and must not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Papers that are suitable for publication in the Special Issue will be double-blind reviewed as per the BEER review process guidelines. The final decision will be based on the relevance for the Special Issue, technical quality, innovative content, and originality of research approaches and results.

Authors should refer to the author Guidelines for instructions on submitting to BEER. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/26946424/homepage/forauthors.html>

Submissions should indicate the special issue and then “Stakeholder Engagement: (Re)thinking Value Creation Processes in the Networks” when prompted/

Guest Editors

- Mario Tani, PhD - Department of Economics, Management, Institution - University of Naples Federico II, Italy - mario.tani@unina.it
- Prof. Aidan O’ Driscoll, PhD - School of Marketing - College of Business - Technological University Dublin, Ireland - aidan.odriscoll@tudublin.ie
- Prof. Sergey A. Yablonsky, PhD - Information Technologies in Management Department - Graduate School of Management - St. Petersburg University, Russia - yablonsky@gsom.pu.ru
- Lucia Michela Daniele, PhD - Department of Economics - Università degli Studi della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Italy – luciamichela.daniele@unicampania.it

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