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Empowerment and legitimization of effected communities in post-disaster reconstruction

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to establish the key role of power and legitimacy attributes in effective community participation in post-disaster reconstruction (PDR) projects.

Design/methodology/approach – The research applies a qualitative research approach in conjunction with a case study method, using semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling techniques. The principal source of data were semi-structured interviews of affected community members and other stakeholders of a post-natural disaster reconstruction project initiated in the aftermath of 2005 devastating earthquake in Pakistan. The interviews were undertaken between October and December 2016.

Findings – Participation of affected community is significant for the success of a PDR projects; however effective participation cannot be ensured without empowerment and legitimization. In context of post disaster reconstruction; both, power and legitimacy attributes have a direct effect on effective participation of the community.

Originality/value – This paper has explored the relationship of stakeholder's attributes with participation and have also proposed an attribute model for future PDR projects. Adoption of attribute model will enhance the chances of success of future PDR projects.

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Keywords: Stakeholder; Participation; Reconstruction; Power; Legitimacy; Urgency; Salience; Disaster Management; Pakistan

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1. Introduction

Stakeholder theory, introduced by RE Freeman in 1984, has become a popular and widely used theory in management scholarship [2, 3]. Stakeholder is an individual or group who can affect or can be affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives [4]. Mitchell et al. (1997:p853) mentioned that stakeholder theory is articulated in the basic principal

– who or what really counts? In this principal who or what is the stakeholder and it provides the guideline to the managers about ‘to whom they must pay attention’, however it is very difficult for an organization to identify stakeholders and their interests [5]. In order to identify the stakeholders and their interests, Mitchell et al (1997) presented attribute model and identified three basic attributes of stakeholders i.e. Power, Legitimacy and Urgency. Several researchers used these attributes to describe stakeholder theory in project management and other fields or research [6]. The interests of stakeholders could be catered to through their active involvement as suggested by participation theory. Participatory theory requires that individuals who are affected by a decision, should be fully, fairly and democratically involved in the normative process of decision making [7]. The new century is more stakeholder focused and both, stakeholder theory and participation theory advocates catering to the needs and interests of stakeholders and their involvement in the decision making process. Overall stakeholder theory in conjunction with participatory theory provides guidelines for practitioners; and have accentuated the notion that participation of stakeholders could impact positively. Theory can be developed and examined in a particular context [8], therefore, this research paper, through a qualitative research approach and case study design, and remaining within the boundaries of stakeholder and participatory theory, investigates the relationship of power and legitimacy attributes with affective participation of affected community in a specific context of post-natural disaster reconstruction. A community that has been affected by a disaster, naturally has the ‘urgency’ attribute, however, power and legitimacy is also needed to perform their role more effectively to ensure success and sustainability of a PDR project. This research has also proposed an attribute model for implementation of future PDR projects. This model will ensure effective participation of the affected community, which ultimately increases the chances of success and sustainability of a PDR project.

2. Background

This section provides overview of stakeholder theory, participation theory and brief introduction to research setting/context in order to clearly understand the background and objective of this research study.

2.1 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory has burgeoned in recent years and has gained centrality in management research [4, 9]. In contrast to the traditional business objective of the profit oriented firms – maximization of return on investment to the owners – the stakeholder theory asserts that business should also consider the interests of individuals or groups affected by the business [3]. Research by Mitchell et al. (1997) presented three attributes; Power, Legitimacy and Urgency; to identify stakeholders and their salience and interests. They described ‘salience’ as a measure to associate their significance as perceived by the managers. In other words, stakeholder salience is the degree to which managers give priority to each stakeholder’s claim [10]. Power is “A relationship among social actors in which one social actor, A, can get another social actor, B, to do something that B would not have otherwise done”; legitimacy as “A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of any entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” and urgency as “The degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” ([2]p:869-871). On the basis of these three basic attributes, Mitchell et al. (1997) divided stakeholders into eight different groups. The stakeholders with only one attribute – Dormant, Demanding and Discretionary – has the low salience. The salience of Dangerous, Dominant and Dependent is moderate because of having combination of two attributes. The ‘Definitive Stakeholders’ are the only stakeholders who claims all three attributes and possess the high salience. Therefore, role of definitive stakeholder cannot be avoided or compromised [2].

This seminal contribution of Mitchell et al. (1997) gained attention of numerous subsequent researchers to deliberate the role of stakeholders in various research fields including strategic management [11], corporate social responsibility [12], project management [6, 10], stakeholder management and participation [13, 14], crisis management [15], environmental management [13]

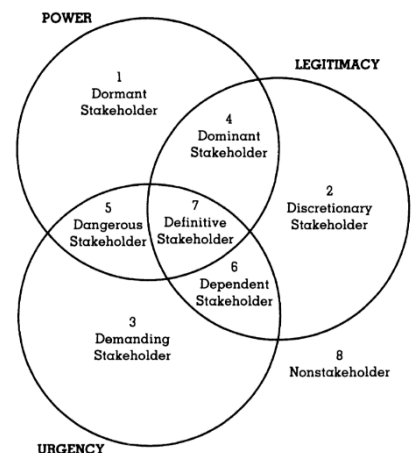


Figure 1: Different groups of stakeholders on the basis of three basic attributes – Source [2]p:874

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