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Knowledge Management of Student Engagement in University Management: A Case Study of Soka University

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This case study of knowledge management of student engagement in university management examines a university which is aiming to be managed as “student-centered university”, in order to generate a theoretical model of student engaged university management.

This study refers precedence researches of Knowledge Management, “Sankaku¹” theory, case studies of student engagement in quality of higher education and university management in European countries, and Knowledge Management in higher education.

Students are becoming a major focus of university recently. A university which is centering their students as its first priority could be called as “student-centered university”. These types of universities understand that the driving force behind their decision would be students and also some of them are supporting student activity as known as student-initiated faculty development, Gakusei FD in Japanese, to accelerate an innovation on their own university. Since our society has been changed to so-called “Knowledge Society”, the environment of university is experiencing many impacts. This study employs perspectives

¹ This Japanese word could be translated as engagement, participation, and involvement. The concepts of “Sankaku” contain wide range of ideas which would be phrased as engagement, participation, and involvement.

of Knowledge Management and Knowledge Management on organizational knowledge creation theory.

This study set the major research question:

MRQ: How have students been contributing on creating, sharing, and applying knowledge about university management?

Also three subsidiary research questions:

SRQ1: What kinds of schemes of student engaged university management have been structured and how?

SRQ2: What kind of students' knowledge has been created, shared, and applied and how?

SRQ3: What are the effects of student engaged university management?

To answer these research questions, data was collected and analyzed thorough interviews with representatives of faculty, staff, student, administrative board, and, some students who commits to student engaged university management, documents analysis of various brochures of Soka University and articles from *Journal of Soka Education Research* and *Soka Education*.

The case analysis found the followings:

SRQ1:

Soka University is “student-centered university”. There is a board meeting called “Zengaku Kyogikai” which includes president, administrative chief, and dean of faculty, staff chief, and representative student and many committees under the board meeting for making their own university better. Majority numbers of student participate student only conference in order to make a proposal for university management.

Those schemes of student engaged university management is founded by principle² of Soka University. There was a tuition issue at the beginning of Soka University and they solve the issue with cooperation of students and administrative board. From that point they started the board meeting and it is still running efficiently in student engaged university management. This principle of Soka University is actualized as students are managing to hold entrance ceremony and graduation ceremony, and campus tours. Student activities have

² Students are major focus of university. All students are encouraged to engage university management even if its issue refers to tuition.

been running ever since the beginning of university, a strong trust relationship is built among student, faculty, and staff therefore it is possible to be cooperative each other.

Also peer support is an important factor for student engaged university management. Student, who experiences student engagement, would start having a will of contribution for their university. Peer support activity gives them an opportunity to have such experience.

SRQ2:

Student of Soka University has been learning their university principle by speech from university founder. Founders' speech is collected and published by student, and they use those publications as textbook for understanding principle. Also, student passes down tips of how to conduct school events, for instance entrance ceremony, to next fellow student. This would go generation after generation and could make school event success easier.

University principle is shared among students by dialogue. This dialogue is appropriate to boost mutual understanding and relations of trust between student, faculty and staff. Dialogue also is a foundation of cooperating student, faculty and staff.

SRQ3:

Student and their engagement is necessity in Soka University. It suggests that there is a strong trust based relation between student, faculty and staff as very new way of how their relations would be. They are sharing university principle and goal.

Peer support and opening a class which has been initiated by student as student-initiated faculty development would make an innovation of their education advance. Student engaged university management presents student very Soka University like student experience. Experienced student would make a difference and Soka University more Soka University.

As a theoretical implication, this study proposes a Knowledge Management model of student engaged university management. The model works with four phases. 1) "Student voice" is collected by student themselves. 2) Student gathers them as a proposal. 3) Members of faculty, staff and students together reform the proposal as official decision. 4) Members of faculty, staff and students cooperate closely for implementing what they decide to do.

1) and 2) are led by student, 3) and 4) are cooperative work of student, faculty and staff. From the perspective of Knowledge Management, "student vice" could be understand as data and information, and the proposal would be group knowledge. Group knowledge becomes a new knowledge as synthesizing knowledge of university management from each faculty, staff and student. When they are at the phase 4), group knowledge is not group knowledge

anymore because their decision must be run by more than a group, it should be operated by organization size. At the phase 4), an organizational knowledge will be generated.

As practical implication, this study found that schemes of university management and mindset of student, faculty, and staff are should be at the specific degree of participation. It definitely is important that they are being ensured as very participative for running student engaged university management. Their mindset and scheme should be well balanced as very participative.

Finally, this case study suggests future research. Since this case study is an *extreme case*, it is needed to find usual case. Also, starting a research on other case from European countries is encouraged because they have advanced student engagement schemes. It would inform Japanese university for applying student engagement method as university management.