

Identifying stakeholders in a Portuguese university: a case study

La identificación de los stakeholders en una universidad portuguesa

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Abstract

The stakeholder theory proved highly useful to some specific organisations with dispersed powers, such as is the case of universities. This theory may serve to explain the focus on varying communities in the environments surrounding these organisations as well as the relationships between organisations and communities. However, identifying and prioritising the different stakeholders to a university has not proven an easy question to resolve. Given the effective management of university stakeholders necessarily requires the correct identification of just who they are, this article seeks to identify, classify and rank the stakeholders of a university based upon a case study. To this end, we reviewed previous studies sharing similar objectives. After finding that university stakeholders have rarely been identified by empirical means, we carried out a case study on a Portuguese state university that sought to identify and qualify the importance of the respective stakeholder through such means. A series of interviews were held with fifteen individuals, connected with the institution, three from each hierarchical university level. Following content analysis of these interviews, a list containing 21 stakeholders was resulted, duly classified by importance. The final results found students, the teaching and/or research staff and employers identified as the main

stakeholders. Furthermore, findings pointed to stakeholders connected to research are gaining greater importance in the contemporary university environment. Indeed, the list clarifies the complexity of universities in identifying 21 distinct groups of stakeholders making this type of organisation a managerial challenge. Given this, stakeholders need to be attributed priorities, with some prevailing over others, as it would seem impossible to attribute equal attention to them all.

Key words: stakeholders, stakeholders theory, universities, university management, university stakeholders, strategic management, stakeholders management.

Resumen

La teoría de los *stakeholders* ha demostrado ser muy útil para algunas organizaciones específicas con competencias dispersas, como es el caso de las universidades. Esta teoría puede servir para explicar el enfoque en diferentes comunidades en los entornos que rodean a estas organizaciones, así como las relaciones entre las organizaciones y sus comunidades. Sin embargo, la identificación y priorización de las diferentes partes interesadas en una universidad no es una cuestión fácil de resolver. Teniendo en cuenta que la gestión efectiva de los *stakeholders* de la universidad requiere, necesariamente, la correcta identificación de los mismos, este artículo trata de identificar, clasificar y jerarquizar los grupos de interés de una universidad basándose en un estudio de caso. Para ello, se llevó a cabo un estudio de caso en una universidad estatal portuguesa que trató de identificar y calificar la importancia de los *stakeholders*. Se entrevistó a 15 personas de la institución, tres de cada nivel jerárquico de la universidad. Tras el análisis de contenido de estas entrevistas, se identificó una lista de 21 actores, debidamente jerarquizados por importancia. En los resultados finales, se considera que los principales interesados son los estudiantes, el personal docente e investigador y los empleadores. Además, los resultados señalaron que los interesados vinculados a la investigación están adquiriendo mayor importancia en el entorno de la universidad contemporánea. De hecho, la lista pone de manifiesto la complejidad de las universidades con la identificación de 21 grupos distintos de *stakeholders*, por lo que este tipo de organizaciones se convierte en un desafío para la gestión. Dicho lo anterior, a los *stakeholders* deben atribuirse prioridades, de modo que algunos prevalezcan sobre los demás, ya que parece imposible otorgar la misma atención a todos ellos.

Palabras clave: *stakeholders*, teoría de los *stakeholders*, universidades, gestión de universidades, *stakeholders* de universidades, gestión estratégica, gestión de *stakeholders*.

Introduction

Despite the term 'stakeholder predating' the work of Freeman (1984), it was his stakeholder theory that popularised it. Although stemming from a term used in the strategic management of organisations, many fields of management where not other academic fields currently deploy the term stakeholder to indicate persons or groups that are in some way related to a specific organisation.

Following the appearance of stakeholder theory in the 1980s and its development in the 1990s, especially through the works of Goodpaster (1991); Clarkson (1995); Donaldson and Preston (1995); Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997); Rowley (1997b); and Frooman (1999) among others, this theoretical approach gained ground among management academics and practitioners as a new managerial model able to reach beyond shareholders, employees, suppliers and clients as the main parties interested in company activities (Clarkson, 1995).

In addition to these interested parties, this theory suggest that all other parties with interests, hence also stakeholders, be taken into consideration when defining the actions to be implemented by organisation managers. Such parties, previously attributed relatively little importance within the scope of company objectives, were listed by Freeman (1984) as the authorities, the local community, the media, among others. These entities influence and are influenced by organisations in general terms and should be taken into account by the senior management running a specific company.

The theory in question proved highly useful to some specific organisations with dispersed powers, especially public and complex organisations (Beach, 2009), such as is the case of universities and hospitals. In these cases, the management of stakeholders has gained ground as a viable alternative among new forms of organisational management.

In the specific case of universities, stakeholder theory may serve to explain the focus on varying communities in the environments surrounding these organisations as well as the relationships between organisations and communities (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno, 2008). However, identifying and prioritising the different stakeholders to a university has not proven an easy question to resolve.

The identification of university stakeholders forms part of the stakeholder strategic management process, which requires: first, identification of the groups relevant to organisational management; second, determining the participation and importance of each respective stakeholder; third, how effectively the needs and expectations of each group are currently being met; four, modifying corporate policies and the ranking of priorities in accordance with stakeholder interests (Freeman, 1984; Polonsky, 1995).

Correspondingly, the effective management of university stakeholders depends upon appropriately identifying just which entities fit into this category. Despite some efforts towards this end, in studies by Burrows (1999) and Jongbloed et al. (2008), there are still only rare research literature references to empirical definitions and classifications of the importance of stakeholders to a university. Hence, the main objective of this research was, based upon a specific case study, to identify and classify the importance of a university's stakeholders within an empirical framework.

The main contribution of this research relates to this empirical identification of university stakeholders with its low incidence in the literature. With this list of stakeholders, duly classified by importance, we are thereby positioned to ascertain their expectations and needs as well as develop some management actions that seek to meet their respective requirements, aspirational or otherwise, as well as put forward the management actions needed to deal with them bringing about more efficient university management and achieving the main objectives set to a university.

The article is therefore structured as follows: firstly, there is a review of studies identifying university stakeholders. Subsequently, we describe the respective research process, detail the analysis of the data gathered before setting out our conclusions and recommendations and the limitations to the research undertaken.

Stakeholders in universities

According to Bjorkquist (2008), universities have, for many years, been considered in isolation of the prevailing socio-economic and political

environment. However, current demands on universities mean they have to demonstrate their relevance to society, with one approach being to integrate universities through the participation of external actors, that is, the stakeholders.

To Burrows (1999), universities are increasingly called upon to attain efficient and reliable management standards, with responsible utilisation of the resources allocated to them. Society expects these institutions to do more with less and, simultaneously, to prove their continuous improvement. Within this climate of added responsibility, discussions inevitably turn to the myriad of stakeholders connected to these educational institutions, each with different and frequently conflictual expectations. It is generally maintained that universities aware of their participants and understanding their expectations are better able to meet stakeholder needs, foreseeing threats and environmental opportunities and incorporating overlooked perspectives or marginalise restrictive factors.

The communities, or the stakeholders, that a university should take into consideration are made up of organisations and groups of individuals. According to Amaral and Magalhães (2002), the stakeholder holder concept in Higher Education may refer to: a singular or collective entity with a legitimate interest in Higher Education and as such, holds rights of intervention. However, this begs the question: just who are a university's stakeholders? Burrows (1999) answers this and includes entities with regulatory powers, clients (students, parents, employers, etc.), employees (teaching staff, administrative personnel), competitors, donors, communities (teaching systems, chambers of commerce, among others), governmental organs, non-governmental regulators, financial intermediaries, the various partnerships established, among others.

According to Jongbloed et al. (2008), students represent a core group for Higher Education. When duly satisfied, they recommend the institution to other potential students and also return for further study later in their careers (Alves and Raposo, 2006). According to Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001), former students may also be important stakeholders to teaching institutions as they may engage with their alma maters from positions of power within the labour market. Meanwhile, Brown (1999) holds that Higher Education stakeholders should be identified across different levels: teaching, degree, educational institution, market, political and society in general. Each level requires different approaches and strategies.

Thus, a whole host of studies identify university stakeholders. Despite such identification, this research does not necessarily focus upon stakeholder theory nor even deploy the techniques appropriate for such identification. A summary of the studies listing university stakeholders is set out in Table 1.

TABLE I. Studies defining Higher Education institutional stakeholders

Research	Higher Education institutional stakeholders
Weaver (1976)	Government, institutional managers, teaching staff, consumers (students, their families, employers and society in general).
Smith and Cavusgil (1984)	Providers of financing or products or services, regulatory agencies, actors (such as the media and professional bodies that convey messages as to the university both to students and employers), student parents.
Conway, Mackay and Yorke (1994)	Primary: students. Secondary: paying entities, educational authorities, Tertiary: accreditation entities, former students, employees, parents.
Kotler and Fox (1995)	Foundations, former students, local community, the public in general, the mass media, potential students, registered students, supervisory bodies, student parents, managers and technical staff, teaching staff, university bodies, competitors, suppliers, business community and government entities.
Taylor and Reed (1995)	Teaching staff, education boards, university boards, competitors, suppliers, the business community, government agencies, foundations, former institutional members, the local community, the public in general, means of communication, potential students, current students, accreditation and supervisory institutions, student parents, managers and employees.
Sandison (1996)	Students or pupils, teaching staff, administrative personnel, service personnel, suppliers, parents, government, trade and industry and other teaching systems.
Rowley (1997a)	Students, parents and family, the local community, society, government, senior institutional management, local authorities, current and future employers.
Reavill (1998)	Students and their families, employees and lecturers, suppliers of goods and services to the university, the Secondary school sector, other universities, trade and industry, nation, government, local and national tax payers, the professional orders.
Macfarlane and Lomas (1999)	Students, employers, professional associations, the government, the academic community and society in general.

Duderstadt (2000)	Internal: students, teaching staff, employees, management bodies. External: government, local communities, the public in general, the media, politicians.
Rosenberg (2000)	Students, former students, student parents, employers, governmental bodies, professors, employees, the local community.
Costin (2001)	Graduate and post-graduate students, former students, recruiters, executives, accreditation agencies, university management bodies.
Tam (2001)	Students, employees, teaching and other staff, government and their financing agencies, accreditation providers, auditors and evaluators (including professional organisms).
Amaral and Magalhães (2002)	Students, parents, employers, state, society, Higher Education institutions themselves (in relation to the system).
Baldwin (2002)	Current and potential students, management and academic staff, employers, government, families, accreditation agencies, foundations, professional companies, the local community, society in general.
Watty (2003)	Government, quality agencies, individual academics, students, employers, the country and society in general.
Zait (2006)	Middle School students (future university candidates), current university students, former students, university professors, employers and public opinion in general.
Giesecke (2007)	Ministry of Education and accreditation authorities, main political parties, large non-governmental organisations.
Pachuashvili (2007)	Students and their parents, colleagues, international institutions, donor organisations, academic oligarchy, religious groups, the business community, accreditation organisms, political parties and other interest groups.
Slantcheva (2007)	State authorities (accreditation agencies, government, legislators), professional and business groupings (trade unions and provincial councils, religious institutions), students (parents, role models), rival institutions, donors and foundations, international organisations and associations, the cultural framework (potential students, Secondary school career guidance providers, students, parents, the media, neighbours, community).
Suspitsin (2007)	Students, employers, corporate sponsors, industrial and privately owned organisations, other educational organisations.
Blazey, Ashiabor and Janu (2008)	Students, teaching staff, employers, professional associations, former students.
Jongbloed et al. (2008)	Internally: students, employees, the research community and the management. Externally: the research community, former students, companies, social movements, consumer organisations, governments and professional associations.

Matlay (2009)	Internal stakeholders: students, teaching and research staff, administrators and the management. External stakeholders: parents, students and business persons as well as various representatives of companies, trade, professional entities, government and community.
Nishimura and Okamuro (2009)	Companies, other universities, research institutes, incubators, financial institutions.

Source: self-produced.

As Table 1 shows, university stakeholders are perceived to be many in number and varied in type depending on the respective mission the university seeks to fulfil. They may be classified as either internal or external, individual or collective, academic or non-academic. Hence, we may conclude that identifying and categorising university stakeholders is a complex task (Jongbloed et al., 2008).

Conway, Mackay and Yorke (1994) highlight how Higher Education has multiple stakeholders, simultaneously complementary and contradictory. Correspondingly, on occasion, the different desires and needs of distinct stakeholders may enter into conflict and hinder strategies designed to effectively meet needs (taking into consideration the expected results) and efficiently (with the minimum level of resources). According to Bertrand and Busugutsala (1998), universities should, beyond identifying their stakeholders, recognise their respective different needs and demands. The authors divide up the demands and needs across three distinct levels: non-student demands and needs, such as the scientific fields, professional entities and employer associations and society as a whole, students as individuals demands and needs, and the demands and needs of target student groups with specific characteristics and who the university should provide with specific and carefully defined services. These are just some of the various proposals seeking to ascertain the stakeholders appropriate to universities.

However, reality shows that, traditionally, universities have focused their attention on a limited set of specific stakeholders, in particular, professors, managers, funding administrators, donors, accreditation agencies and students. However, while these groups may be among the most important participant actors within a university level institution, an exclusive focus on these groups obscures other, and increasingly critical, circles (Burrows, 1999).

Research methodology

Given this is exploratory and initial research, this case study required a qualitative methodology, based upon extended interviews (Yin, 2003). This exploratory study was deemed necessary given the scarcity of empirical studies identifying and categorising university stakeholders. In this way, this research incorporated an exploratory-qualitative methodology due to the lack of studies identifying stakeholders in universities. The main objective was to set out an initial list of stakeholders to render research continuity.

Case study and interviewee selection

We opted in favour of a Portuguese public university for this case study. The choice was due to the fact these universities are located in multifaceted contexts, in conjunction with public and private universities and polytechnics and neither excessively private nor excessively public (Portela et al., 2008). This diversity enables the utilisation of results obtained across various different realities. Portuguese public universities are currently facing the highly competitive environment that is unleashing profound changes impacting on Higher Education worldwide, as identified by Levy (2008), and hence represents an increasingly challenging context demanding ever rising levels of efficient management by universities.

To choose the university, we opted for an institution receiving an intermediary classification in the Portuguese public university ranking table, a ranking detailed in Portela et al. (2008). The criteria adopted here sought to avoid distortions that might arise should the choice be made in favour of an institution near the top or the bottom of this ranking. Among the universities positioned mid-table, we looked for the entity containing the greatest degree of diversity possible and providing courses across all fields of knowledge. Contact was correspondingly made with a mid-ranked university and that otherwise met the research demands. Following initial contact, this university authorised the project to go ahead and hence no other institution had to be contacted.

As regards the selection of interviewees, analysis was made of the institution's hierarchical distribution as well as the various areas in which teaching and research services are provided. The interviewees were chosen

randomly with the only criterion being ensuring heterogeneity. To this end, interviewees representing the full scope of the faculties were chosen so as to factor in perceptions of the different university departments and faculties into the interview process.

Two individuals from each hierarchical level of this university were chosen: professors or researchers, employees, degree directors, department heads, faculty presidents or research centres, the rector and administrative management, with a total of 14 individual respondents.

Thus, after choosing the 14 respondents, contact was made and interviews were scheduled for the near future. Furthermore, one former university head was interviewed to provide the 15 key respondents enabling the proposed generation of a list of university stakeholders.

Data collection technique

Following this definition of the research methodology, the selection of the case study to be studied and the individuals to be interviewed, the data collection instruments were selected. In qualitative research, data collection primarily involves extended personal interviews, based upon semi-structured questionnaires.

The 15 interviews were first scheduled and carried out over the period between 22nd February and 12th March 2010, and always with the prior agreement of respondents as to participation in the research project. The questionnaire was structured as follows:

- Basic interviewee characteristics in terms of current functions, length of service in the university and academic background.
- Presentation of the research project and its objectives.
- Questioning as to the interviewee perception regarding the mission(s) of universities.
- Questioning as to their understanding as to what a stakeholder is (with due explanation should the term not be known or whenever there is a perception distinct to the original concept as proposed by Freeman, 1984),
- Spontaneously requesting a list of university stakeholders according to the interviewee's point of view.
- Requesting a classification of the importance of each stakeholder spontaneously cited by each respondent.

- Questioning on the stakeholders traditionally regarded as university stakeholders, should they not have been listed spontaneously: students, student families, Secondary schools, employers, research partner/client companies, national government, university suppliers, other universities or Higher Education institutions (publics or private).
- Requesting the placing of the stakeholders suggested (in the item above) in the list classifying the importance of those spontaneously mentioned.

The interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes and were all recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis techniques

For data analysis of this research, given its inherently qualitative nature, the means of analysis selected was content. This analysis served the objective of identifying university stakeholders through the perception of the university mission and through the application of codification (Denscombe, 2003), with recourse to Atlas.ti software (Muhr, 1995). This type of analysis seeks out the regularities and variations based upon repetition of observations and affirmations. This is in efforts to quantify qualitative based data (Denscombe, 2003).

In this specific instance, the codes were pre-established for those words most commonly encountered in the interviews and that referred to university stakeholders. With the data uploaded into Atlas.ti software, the codes were created by the system grouping interviewee responses into regularities and similarities in accordance with the pre-established codification. Thus were we able to jointly analyse all interviewees, resulting in a ranking of the codes presents for the data collected from respondents (from most commonly present to least frequently present). This analytical process resulted in the generation of a list of university stakeholders.

Data analysis

Following the interview and transcription phases, the data collected were uploaded into Alast.ti software for codification. The codes used refer to university missions, the stakeholder concept and the primary stakeholders to be highlighted by Clarkson (1995), especially employees, suppliers, shareholders, competitors and clients. With the Atlas/ti outputs, analysis of the data collected was undertaken.

To identify university stakeholders, we need first to confirm a common perspective, shared across all institutional hierarchical levels, on the prevailing organisational mission. Taking into consideration how a university is an organisation with dispersed powers with diverse and ambiguous missions (Baldrige, 1983), the correct identification of stakeholders must firstly confirm that the traditional university missions (teaching, research and services to society), described by Clark (1983), are understood similarly by everybody and were utilised by respondents in setting out the university's stakeholders.

Analysis of the mission began with the individuals who form the foundation of a university: the teaching staff and employees engaged in non-management positions. As regards the interviews of two professors, there was a clear perception of the university mission in terms of teaching, research and extension. This perception also extended to the employees. The two respondents from this hierarchical level, utilising different words also nominated the three traditional university missions.

Moving upwards through the university's organisational hierarchy, the next level includes the degree directors. Of the two interviewees, it soon became clear that one focused far more on the teaching mission stating that «... the training of students should seek to meet the needs of the marketplace...», while also emphasising the importance of the other university missions in referring to research and the rendering of services externally as the other facets of the institutional mission. However, the other degree director described the university mission as «... creating knowledge, conveying knowledge and ensuring the bond between the university and the surrounding environment, particularly the private sector...». This rationale was again encountered in the interviews with department heads.

As regards faculty presidents, there is lesser importance attached to teaching with the research facet emerging first and foremost. A similar

vision was also perceived at the top of the university's administrative structure. One manager was very direct as regards the mission: «...high level training, carrying out fundamental and applied research, enhancing the value of knowledge obtained in social and economic terms». This vision was similar to that of the other manager interviewed who stated:

The fundamental objective of the university is the rendering of services of certified quality. These services relate to teaching, research and development and the provision of other services to the community. This is a universal mission that differentiates the university from other types of higher education institutions.

At the top of the university hierarchy, a vice-rector and a pro-rector were interviewed. The perceptions remained broadly consistent. The pro-rector set out the university mission as «... teaching, research and the provision of services, primarily focused upon the transfer of technologies and the cultural diffusion of the knowledge acquired within the walls of the university». The vice-rector held the same perspective affirming «... teaching or training, research as a means of technological development, the transfer of technologies and knowledge, connections with the environment surrounding the university».

Finally, a former rector was also interviewed. Despite no longer holding a position in university management, the experience built up over the course of many years as a leader in the Portuguese state university system served to contribute towards the research under description here. According to the former rector: «The university's mission is complex, diverse [...] involving the production and promotion of knowledge as well as outreach activities and serving the needs of society».

Therefore, taking into consideration the diverse perceptions captured by the interviews, we may consider that, transversally, across all hierarchical levels of the university, there is a very similar emphasis on the traditional mission of the university (teaching, research, outreach) to the extent even of sharing the same line of thinking. Thus, if the mission is perceived pretty much consensually, perceptions as to the stakeholders derive from the same assumptions.

The second point on the interview script is related to respondent knowledge and understanding of the stakeholder concept. This question, as the preceding, sought to outline differences in understandings of the

terminology that might influence responses about university stakeholders. As the term 'stakeholder' derives from management, more precisely the field of strategy (Friedman and Miles, 2006), it might be expected that the term would be unknown to professors and non-teaching staff in fields other than that of management.

To this end, when interviewing respondents, emphasis was placed on first probing their level of awareness as to the term. Where the interviewee stated that they were not aware of the stakeholder concept or their awareness was significantly different from the traditional concept (defined in accordance with Freeman –1984– as an individual or group of individuals affecting or affected by organisational objectives), the interviewer provided due conceptual clarification.

This happened in the case of one professor, one-degree director, with two department presidents, with one faculty president and with the vice-rector. Their backgrounds are in healthcare, the natural and physics sciences and arts, hence the term was new to them. In these cases, the Freeman (1984) concept was presented and explained to the respondents. Meanwhile, the other nine respondents came out with definitions broadly in keeping with the original definition.

This stage proved important in defining the term for those who were not aware of it as well as aligning the perceptions of those who had some knowledge on the stakeholder concept. Correspondingly, given this shared line of thinking as regards the mission of the university and the subsequent standardisation of the stakeholder concept across all respondents, we were now able to proceed with the main questions reflecting the objectives of this research: who are the university's stakeholders and what importance should be attributed to each stakeholder listed by the respondent.

The choice of university stakeholder incorporated a two-fold strategy: the spontaneity of responses and the suggestion of non-listed stakeholders. In the first stage, respondents would come up with their own list of university stakeholders without any prompting from the interviewer. After drawing up an initial list of stakeholders, the interviewer reviewed the stakeholders mentioned and requested respondents rank them in accordance with their respective importance (from most important to least important). In analysing the spontaneous interviewee answers and the later classification by importance, we reached the results set out in the Table II.

TABLE II. Stakeholders listed in interview and classified by importance

Interviewee	Stakeholders Listed by Order of Importance
Professor A	Students, secondary schools, employers, public and private companies (contracting of services, cooperation in research or the acquisition of technologies), government institutions (national government, municipal councils), public services.
Professor B	Senior university management (rectory, the board in general), professors and researchers, employers, research partners, professional associations.
Employee A	Students, companies as employers, companies as research clients, suppliers, employees.
Employee B	Students, professors and researchers, employees, companies as research clients, other universities and higher education institutions (public and private), research agencies, local community, foreign students, national government and ministries, local state authorities.
Degree Director A	Employers, research partner companies, business associations, local political entities, the local community, ministry of education, other universities (competitors), research agencies (incubator companies), professional orders, accreditation bodies.
Degree Director B	Students, national government and its ministries, research partner companies, senior university management (rectory).
Department President A	Students, employees, secondary schools, research client companies, the scientific community and its publications, patent offices, the local community (especially companies and local service providers).
Department President B	Students, employers, student families, Portuguese society in general (especially taxpayers), the local community.
Faculty President A	National government, local public authorities, research partner companies, the local community.
Faculty President B	Students, employers, ex-students, professional orders, professors and researchers, national government, CRUP (Council of Rectors of Portuguese Public Universities), the scientific community.
Administrative Manager A	Students, ex-students, companies (both as employers and as research clients), local and national public authorities, the local community, society in general, ministry of education, the European Union, other higher education institutions.
Administrative Manager B	Local public actors, public authorities in general, incubators, research and development poles, business and commercial associations, investors (such as business angels, risk capital companies, investors in general).

Rectory Member A	Students, research partner companies, public companies in general, professors and researchers, members of staff, local public authorities, incubator companies, general board.
Rectory Member B	Students, employers, society in general, local community, governmental institutions, the scientific community.
Ex-member of the Rectory	Students, professors and researchers, employees, taxpayers, national government, research client companies, employers, local public authorities, families of students, Portuguese society.

Source: self-produced

In summary, a total of 44 different stakeholders were obtained. Analysis of table two reveals a lack of consensus across the respective hierarchical levels despite the shared understanding as to the missions of a university and the stakeholder concept itself.

One example of this lack of consensus is the student as stakeholder. The majority of respondents listed the student as the main stakeholder. However, four interviewees did not even mention the student as stakeholder. A similar situation took place with other university stakeholders deemed traditional, such as teaching staff and researchers (mentioned only five times), employees (also named only five times), companies in general terms (as employers listed nine times while getting eleven references including as research partners/clients), other Higher Education institutions (competitors – with three references), national government (six times) and local public authorities (again with six mentions).

Thus came into effect the second strategic phase in order to understand the lack of uniformity in the answers given. This involved presenting respondents with the stakeholders deemed primary according to stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Goodpaster, 1991, Clarkson, 1995; Frooman, 1999; Friedman and Miles, 2006, among others), specifically, members of staff, shareholders, competitors and clients, when these had not already been spontaneously listed by respondents.

As university employees, we may consider the lecturing/research staff and the respective support staff. Correspondingly, we questioned respondents who did not mention either one or the other spontaneously and received a range of explanations:

- One degree director alleged: «I have my doubts as to whether professors and staff are stakeholders as, to me, they are part of the organisation and should follow the instructions handed down by the university». This same rationale was observed in the responses given by one rectorial team member and one department head.
- However, one faculty president put forward the idea that «the professor and the administrative staff are only stakeholders where they have the autonomy to take decisions [...] and thus influence the path the university takes»,
- One professor held the following opinion: «The professor, researcher is only a stakeholder when actually contributing in some way towards improving the university».
- According to the other degree director «Neither employees nor teaching staff are stakeholders. The only members that might qualify as stakeholders are those more experienced professors, the university 'stars', able to attract more resources to the institution».
- Other respondents claimed simply to have forgotten teachers, researchers and employees and subsequently confirmed they all represented stakeholders of a university.

As regards shareholders, in the case of Portuguese public universities, the national government may be deemed the main 'shareholder', after all, this is the source of a major part of university resources and represents the true owner of these institutions, in addition to the taxpayer or Portuguese society in a generalised sense. As regards national government, when suggested to those interviewees who had not included it in their stakeholder list, all affirmed that this was a stakeholder wielding strong influence over the university and hence cannot be overlooked. In contrast, suppliers, and without exception, were not considered as stakeholders by those interviewees who had not previously mentioned them.

In relation to competitors, other universities and Higher Education institutions (publics and private), disagreement resulted. According to one respondent from the rectorial team:

I do not see how other universities and polytechnics are able to influence our university [...] perhaps in the question of broadening our student numbers or when disputing revenues allocated to public projects [...] even then, I do not see them as a stakeholder. They'd be more a frequent or occasional partner.

This same rationale was presented by one of the professors, who also discarded partners as institutional stakeholders.

Meanwhile the other professor disagreed with this position: «Thinking it through, other universities compete with ours and we have to be the best to win more resources [...] thus, it is very important to accompany the actions taken by our competitors». A similar opinion was given by one of the employees and by one-degree director. However, one faculty president went still further:

I agree that other universities are our competitors and, therefore, are stakeholders [...] but we need to remember that this applies not only to Portuguese universities but also to universities all over the world as we live in a globalised past...". These perceptions demonstrate that other universities and institutions may appropriately be considered as belonging to the group of a university's stakeholders.

Finally, university clients. Within this perspective, clients themselves may be perceived in various different ways: students, families of students, Secondary schools, employees, partner companies and research clients. Proposing these groups as university stakeholders led to some fairly diverse opinions.

In the case of employers and companies as partners/research clients, there were no doubts as all respondents who had not nominated them first time around attributed them important university stakeholder status. As regards Secondary schools and student families, there was no consensus. On the one hand, interviewees, such as one of the professors held that the Secondary school system had little or no influence over a university with the same logic applied to student families. On the other hand, as one of the administrative directors stated: «Secondary schools may suggest this university or that university to students, depending on the relationship between the university and this level of schools». This opinion was also extended to the question of family influence over the choice of potential students.

And when the student as stakeholder was raised to the four respondents who had not mentioned students, two of them confirmed students were important stakeholders. However, a degree director put forward the position: «The student has to be seen as the final product of a university

and the influences that the university experiences are from the surrounding external environment so that the 'student-product' becomes the best that meets market needs». The faculty president proved emphatic in stating that «the student is part of the process and not a stakeholder». Hence, we perceive that the more traditional visions on the main university stakeholders do not generate a broad consensus and diverse visions may guide a university to serve the needs of one or other stakeholder in particular.

Following discussion with respondents over the stakeholders put forward, the interviewer then asked each respondent to position the non-mentioned stakeholders on the previously generated list (Table II) while this process only included those stakeholders that interviewees did accept as stakeholders in the subsequent discussion. These additions made up a new list for each respondent set out in Table III, in which the stakeholders inserted are highlighted in bold. Following this expression of the importance attributed by respondents, the interview ended.

TABLE III. Final list of accepted university stakeholders and classified by importance

Interviewee	Final List of Stakeholder Provided in Order of Importance
Professor A	Students, secondary schools, employers, public and private companies (contracting of services, cooperation in research or the acquisition of technologies), government institutions (national government, municipal councils), public services.
Professor B	Senior university management (rectory, the board in general), national government, students , professors and researchers, employers, research partners, professional associations, employees, other higher education institutions .
Employee A	Students, companies as employers, companies as research clients, suppliers, employees, professors and researchers, national government, other higher education institutions, secondary schools, student families .
Employee B	Students, professors and researchers, employees, employers , companies as research clients, other universities and higher education institutions (public and private), research agencies, local community, foreign students, national government and ministries, local state authorities.
Degree Director A	Employers, research partner companies, business associations, local political entities, the local community, national government , ministry of education, other universities (competitors), research agencies (incubator companies), professional orders, accreditation bodies.

Degree Director B	Students, national government and its ministries, employers , research partner companies, senior university management (rectory), other higher education institutions .
Department President A	National government , students, professors and researchers , employees, secondary schools, research client companies, employers , the scientific community and its publications, patent offices, the local community (especially companies and local service providers).
Department President B	Students, employers, student families, Portuguese society in general (especially taxpayers), national government , the local community, other higher education institutions .
Faculty President A	National government, local public authorities, employers , research partner companies, the local community, other higher education institutions .
Faculty President B	Students, employers, partner companies/research clients , ex-students, professional orders, professors and researchers, national government, CRUP (Council of Rectors of Portuguese Public Universities), the scientific community, employees , other higher education institutions .
Administrative Manager A	Students, ex-students, companies (both as employers and as research clients), local and national public authorities, the local community, society in general, ministry of education, the European Union, other higher education institutions, professors and researchers , employees , secondary schools , student families .
Administrative Manager B	National government , local public actors, public authorities in general, incubators, research and development poles, employers , partner companies/research clients , business and commercial associations, investors (such as business angels, risk capital companies, investors in general), students , professors and researchers , employees , other higher education institutions .
Rectory Member A	Students, research partner companies, employers , public companies in general, professors and researchers, members of staff, national government , local public authorities, incubators companies, general board, other higher education institutions .
Rectory Member B	Students, employers, partner companies/research clients , society in general, local community, national government , governmental institutions, the scientific community.
Ex-member of the Rectory	Students, professors and researchers, employees, taxpayers, national government, employers , research client companies, employers, local public authorities, families of students, Portuguese society, other higher education institutions .

Source: self-produced

With the finalised individual lists, the next step was to unify them and provide a final and overall report on university stakeholders. Firstly, stakeholders may be grouped by similarities. For example, business angels, risk capital firms and investors were brought together in a group entitled 'private financiers' while incubators, technological parks, patent agencies, research centres and external researchers formed a group denominated 'research and development actors', the rectory team, management boards and CRUP were merged to form a group named 'senior university management', among others. These groups replaced the stakeholders listed, taking their respective positions in the classification rankings of each respondent.

This merger of stakeholders by similarity or complementariness provided a list of 21 stakeholders. In order to attain the final list the number of mentions of each of these 21 stakeholders was totalled and weighted in accordance with its position in the classification awarded by each interviewee. This involved a specific formula written by the researchers so as to attain the final stakeholder classification:

$$FC = \sum_{i=1}^{13} (14-i) * n \quad (1)$$

With: FC = final classification

i = stakeholder position in the individual ranking

n = number of occasions this stakeholder appeared in ranking positions

14 = maximum number of stakeholders cited by an interviewee

To explain the underlying logic, the student stakeholder crops up ten times as the number one stakeholder, once as second stakeholder, once as third stakeholder and once as tenth stakeholder. Utilising the formula given above:

$$CF = (14-1) * 10 + (14-2) * 1 + (14-3) * 1 + (14-10) * 1 = 157 \text{ points} \quad (2)$$

The same logic was applied throughout the remaining twenty other stakeholders. Following this calculation and the summation of results, the final list set out in the Table IV.

TABLE IV. Final list of university stakeholders

1	Students
2	Teaching staff and/or researchers
3	Employers
4	Research and development partner companies
5	National government / ministries / accreditation bodies
6	Municipality hosting the university (local public authorities)
7	Non-teaching staff
8	Other universities and/or higher education institutions (public or private)
9	The university's surrounding local community (population, company, services)
10	Secondary level schools
11	Student families
12	Research and development actors (incubators, technological parks, patent agencies, research centres, external researchers)
13	Portuguese society in general
14	Senior university management (rectory team, general council, CRUP)
15	Professional orders
16	Private financiers (business angels, risk capital firms, investors)
17	Business/commercial associations
18	Ex-students
19	Scientific communities and their publications and output
20	European Union
21	International students

Source: self-produced.

Despite countless studies (see Table 1 on the theme of university stakeholders) pointing out various stakeholders, there was no indication that such identification had been carried out empirically. Hence, these results provide a step forward in the research on university stakeholders and consequently organisations with dispersed powers.

Conclusions and recommendations

The end of this research project arrives with some conclusions of particular relevance. One relates to the missions in effect at the university subject to analysis. The results of the data collected across all institutional hierarchical levels demonstrate that the traditional missions of a university are known and understood by the entire university hierarchy, from the bottom to the top. This finding is a point favourable to the stakeholder management of this university as the objectives prove to be common to everyone involved. According to Cohen and March (1974), one of the fundamental issues to complying with a university's mission is that everyone involved is aware of and grasps its content, a core factor for being able to respond to the needs of society in general.

Another finding was the spread of the stakeholder concept into areas beyond the field of management. Despite only two interviewees having any specific training in management, only six of fifteen respondents were unaware of the term. Hence, for at least seven of the interviewees with backgrounds not in management (healthcare, the natural sciences and the arts) have already understood what a stakeholder is. This finding serves to demonstrate that both the concept and stakeholder theory itself has been gaining ground in other fields (Clarkson, 1995), demonstrating its utility for purposes not foreseen by Freeman (1984) when setting out his theory, for example, in the way doctors consider their patients as stakeholders or even in the way an engineer might perceive the end users of a project also as a stakeholder. The spread of the term into fields beyond the scope of management may make a significant contribution towards the implementation of stakeholder theory based management models.

Nevertheless, the main contribution of this research refers to the empirical basis for our list of university stakeholders. Despite the diverse earlier proposals, for example the Burrows list (1999), the empirical identification of university stakeholders has been rare throughout the literature. Without surprising, our list did confirm some of the longest standing suppositions, such as the student being the main stakeholder (Weaver, 1976; Smith and Cavusgil, 1984; Conway et al., 1994, among others), followed by the teaching/research staff and employers. Such empirical findings strengthen the need to focus university efforts and resources on these three groups of stakeholders, something usually carried out by universities' managers already.

Another finding on the list produced refers to the research component, which has been gaining in importance within university environments. It may now be perceived that there is a strong concern within these institutions to nurture the development of more applied technologies, serving the needs of private sector entities as well as the perception that the university should be in far closer interaction with the marketplace, as already forecast by Clark (1998) and Etzkowitz (2003). This perception has proved to be of benefit to companies receiving knowledge generated within universities as the fourth most important university stakeholder, and ahead of the public authorities (local and national), for example.

Indeed, the list clarifies the complexity of universities in identifying 21 distinct groups of stakeholders making this type of organisation a managerial challenge. Given this, stakeholders need to be attributed priorities, with some prevailing over others, as it would seem impossible to attribute equal attention to them all (Jensen, 2002).

Finally, being an initial exploratory study, the results showed a much diversified range of stakeholders. This high (and not surprising) number of stakeholders was expected and intentional, as it was the objective of this study to identify empirically the several stakeholders of the universities. With the results found it is possible now to study each stakeholder individually in order to develop specific relationship strategies for each of them.

Correspondingly, it would seem logical to state that this research merely represented a first step towards building up a modern management model for universities based upon their shareholders. Therefore, prior to any making of proposals for new types of university management, our recommendation is that there is further statistical confirmation of the list generated by this exploratory research given its core research limitations stemming from the size of the respondent group as well as data collection took place in but one university.

In order to ensure a list better reflecting actual conditions, this 21-stakeholder list must be tested at other universities that operate similar management models as well as surveying all employees, academic staff and others at these universities. Such continuity of the study set out here would result in a more robust stakeholder list as well as better adapted and able to serve as the foundations for future management actions and models for universities generally.

Indeed, as regards this research project, qualitative in nature, the limitations stem from the methodology, as the number of interviews does

not enable generalisations to be drawn and there was only restricted representation of each hierarchical level of the university. In addition, there is also a qualitative dimension given the data was only collected from a single university. In this way, confirmation of Portuguese public university stakeholders requires quantitative research to statistically confirm the initially obtained relationship.

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