Introduction to Service-Learning

Service-Learning is a pedagogical tool that ensures that curriculums at universities and HEIs include courses and activities that foster civic responsibility while providing solutions to community problems and developing students' employability skills. The concept operates under the assumption that through service and work oriented toward real problems, students develop a stronger grasp on their competencies, which will help them apply their acquired skillset in their future work to a greater effect. Furthermore, it provides students with an authentic leadership experience in which they are faced with identifying a community-oriented project, executing a plan, and completing the tasks (Robinson & Torres,2007).

Service-Learning has been classically and extensively applied to promote service to communities, however, it can and has also been applied to companies and businesses. In this case, students can undertake projects or activities that aim to utilise and develop relevant employability skills by working on company projects or providing a solution to the community through the company. This includes the entire spectrum of companies and businesses - startups, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) or corporations. The only thing that changes is the motivation of the stakeholders and the scope of the projects. These businesses can benefit from the knowledge and skills of students whiles allowing students to practise and develop real work experience.

In the context mentioned above, a paradigm shift that extends the concept of Service-Learning to reinforce university-business linkages to promote graduate employability is foreseeable. Here the curriculum is geared towards providing solutions through the lens of the industry for the benefit of all stakeholders. This reinforces the need for partnerships between universities and businesses. This model bridges the original definition of Service-Learning and the task and advantages of common internships. It not only calls for closer cooperation between the university and companies but also enables greater output for both stakeholders and enhances the intended effects of cooperation.

Given the structure, strategy, requirements, and objective of Service-Learning, the curriculum can be developed to include courses where students can earn academic credit hours. With this focus, credits will be given for the work done in the field (work time at the company) and work done in the classroom.

Examples of Service-Learning involving the industry include:

1. Research activity between student and company to find solutions to company problems and eventually the society (example, thesis writing)
2. Idea Competitions with start-ups, small and medium companies, and large multinational companies. Example: Online Marketing Challenge at Leipzig University
3. Independent consulting with a company to solve a specific industry (company) problem.
4. Service-Learning external projects (for example, organising, planning, and coordinating a workshop in collaboration with a company).

In the end, Service-Learning is to provide hands-on experience for students by partnering with the industry. In essence, the student will be able to understand better, apply and always remember the theories and concepts taught in the classroom as they solve real problems for the company or the community. Service-Learning can also serve as a module that sets a pace for students in setting a career path.

Reference

Robinson, J. S., & Torres, R. M. (2007). A case study for service-learning: What students learn when given the opportunity. NACTA Journal, 2-8.