EVALUATION

Project name: Identifying Critical Stakeholders for Sustainable Products (WP082)
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Stakeholder roles for successful innovations

TransForum problem
The TransForum KOMBI approach assumes that stakeholders are necessary to bring a project to success. Evidence for this assumption exists for specific stakeholder configurations in many cases. Generic roles of stakeholders in successful projects have not been identified. More insight in generic roles of stakeholders would be helpful to design new and review existing project teams.

Aim

Most stakeholder research is based on studying named stakeholders in specific projects. This provides a very high level of detail for the specific case. Also it makes it possible to point out the critical stakeholders in the specific case that made the project a success (or did limit the success). Of course each project has multiple stakeholders. The critical stakeholders are not always the same, as it is at least in part dependent on other stakeholders in the project, which stakeholder holds a critical role at what time in the project. Thus the whole stakeholder configuration is essential to determine the critical stakeholders.

The focus on a specific project, with named stakeholders, in a specific configuration makes generalisation of the results to other, and new cases difficult. To overcome this problem stakeholders have to be studied at a more abstract level. This means we have to move away from named stakeholders, to a more generic role a stakeholder plays in an innovation process. It is also likely that roles that stakeholder adopt within stakeholder configurations, determines which stakeholder roles are critical success factors.

Thus the aim of this research is to find configurations of stakeholder roles that lie behind successful innovation.

Set-up
In the first phase of the project a theoretical framework how to generalise and classify stakeholders is developed.

This framework is the basis of (ongoing) empirical studies, that will consider several innovations projects aimed at increasing sustainability.

Projects within TransForum will be studied, but also projects outside TransForum will be included. The reason for this, is that TransForum has a specific stakeholder position in its own projects, where it is to a large extent an active partner (through its project directors). The inclusion of projects outside TransForum with a different structure will help interpret (a) to what extent the TransForum approach distinguishes itself from other stakeholder teams in innovations (b) where the TransForum approach differs in terms of stakeholder roles and configurations (c) give some further ideas about successes in TransForum compared to other project structures.

Based on these cases studies, generalised conclusions about critical stakeholder roles underlying successful innovation will be derived.

Main findings

The theoretical framework explains that stakeholder analysis can be conducted at three levels. Those of the individual stakeholder, at the level of roles these stakeholders play in the innovation process, and at the level of stakeholder configurations.

From the theoretical framework it became apparent that there are different types configurations of stakeholder roles that may lead to succes. However there is no clear overview, which stakeholder role configuration is more succesful.

One key element that allows different stakeholder configurations to be successful is that different stakeholder configurations may thrive depending on different management mechanisms among the stakeholders.

Innovation projects and research have generally focused on a single mechanism within one project, i.e. that mechanism that seems most relevance to the case in hand. There is however little knowledge which mechanism is most successful, for which stakeholder configuration.
In an taxonomy of the most reported mechanisms, a distinction between implicit governance mechanisms (e.g. social control) and formal mechanisms (e.g. monitoring) is made.

Based on the first case studies, it is hypothesized that rather than a single governance mechanism, in reality multiple mechanism co-occur in projects. The current study (including TransForum projects) aims to identify recurring combinations of mechanisms. This in turn will help to identify succesful stakeholder roles configurations. Which in turn will help to identify the necessary stakeholder roles for a project.

Conclusions

(1) Named stakeholders can be interpreted as fullfilling a more generic stakeholder role. Following this theoretical framework the many different stakeholders can be classified as being examples of stakeholders roles. This allows generalisation across project, but necessarily loses some of the details in case studies on specific projects.

(2) Stakeholder configurations are require network governance mechanisms to remain stable. There are of several of these mechanisms. It is likely that more than one mechanisms is applied within the same network (simultaneously or sequentially). Identifying consistent groups of mechanisms in successful projects will give insights which stakeholder role configurations can be successful.

Meaning for TransForum

This project provides generic insights in stakeholder role configurations for innovation projects.
It gives indications:
(1) which roles of stakeholders have to be fulfilled; in which configuration based on type of project and stage of a projects. (work in progress)
(2) which combinations of implicit and explicit network governance mechanisms are to be used in successful stakeholder configurations
(3) how the TransForum stakeholder role (i.e. the project director) can be fitted into a successful innovation project.

Implications for MA
This project is looking at the larger class of innovations towards sustainability, and is therefore applicable to all innovation in a stakeholder context, of which metropolitan agriculture is a good but not the only example.

Implication for connecting values
This project describes how named stakeholders can be classified as being examples of stakeholder roles in the configuration of their network. This allows for developing projects where stakeholder roles are

specified before the team is constructed. This makes it less likely that an unsuccessful stakeholder group is composed. Additionally, it allows evaluation of ongoing projects to see whether the stakeholder roles with regard to introducing new stakeholders when necessary. This allows flexibility for the project to adapt to evolving stages during innovation.

Implications for the agro-innovation-structure
Being able to predefine the necessary stakeholder roles allows projects to be created where the relevant stakeholders are present at the relevant moment in time. It will also help creating flexibility in innovation, as some stakeholder roles lose importance while other roles are added during the evolution of a project. Application of these ideas will allow more flexible configurations of stakeholders in innovation projects, where the most successful configuration for each stage is leading.