

The Johnson & Johnson bridge to employment initiative: building sustainable community education partnerships

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to demonstrate that a specific business/education partnership model – bridge to employment (BTE) – benefits society by re-establishing the critical connection between academic achievement and practical application, i.e. the connection between the world of school and the world of work. Representatives of the corporation engage community stakeholders to identify opportunities in the schools where Johnson & Johnson support and volunteerism can help make a difference in the lives of young people.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports on an existing school to career program that was developed in the USA but has recently been adapted to meet the needs of Ireland's education community.

Findings – Past research has shown the importance of linking academic studies with real world applications to improve educational outcomes for pre-college students. The BTE program has been shown to have positive benefits for students, schools, communities and Johnson & Johnson employees. In addition, BTE may provide a possible solution to the declining number of students pursuing health care careers.

Originality/value – This paper looks at a unique US-based business/education intervention from the perspective of stakeholder engagement. Second, the paper provides an example of a US education model's application to a European Union context.

Keywords Schools, Careers, Employees, Health education

Paper type Case study

The Bridge to Employment Program was established in 1992 within the office of Corporate Contributions at Johnson & Johnson to expose young people to health care careers and to help them understand and experience careers in real-work settings. As part of a community responsibility strategy, the corporation literally set out to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. The program is designed to provide benefits to selected communities, employees and the health care industry. Representatives of the corporation engage community stakeholders to identify opportunities in the schools where Johnson & Johnson support can help make a difference in the lives of young people. Support for the initiative comes from Johnson & Johnson in the form of grant dollars as well as employee volunteerism and strategic guidance and direction.

The initial motivation to create this program was driven by the unacceptable number of young people leaving school before graduation, often due to a sense of boredom and disconnect between the classroom and what they refer to as the "real world." Even successful graduates have little familiarity with the range of exciting career options that await them, especially in the fast growing field of health care. A secondary motivation in developing the program was to provide structured opportunities for Johnson & Johnson employees to work with students and to demonstrate their own sense of social responsibility.

Finally, the program is helping meet the growing demand for healthcare workers by introducing young people to healthcare careers. By intervening early in a student's academic life, the bridge to employment (BTE) program is, in essence, an effort to build

health care capacity. BTE is one way Johnson & Johnson can enhance the health care sector while other programs supported by the corporation address management training and leadership (Agyeman-Budu and Welvaert, 2006).

BTE is designed to reestablish the critical connection between academic achievement and practical application – the connection between the world of school and the world of work (Brooks *et al.*, 2005). BTE helps young people build viable futures by introducing them to a broad array of careers in health care and providing them with real world experiences that link back to their classroom studies. BTE supports educational reform by communicating to students, especially those most at-risk of dropping out, that learning can be meaningful, engaging, and relevant. Throughout all BTE programs, elements are specifically designed to meet local needs.

Like many other *Fortune* 500 companies, Johnson & Johnson became concerned with the declining quality of US secondary education. As other nations seemed to be outpacing the US in terms of providing relevant and rigorous education, a sense of urgency swept through corporate America[1]. This concern led to a dramatic increase in corporate workforce and education initiatives. Indicative of this concern, philanthropic support of education continued to grow through the last two decades. Corporate support of education in 2005, according to a 2006 report, approached \$4.5 billion (Business Education Network, 2006).

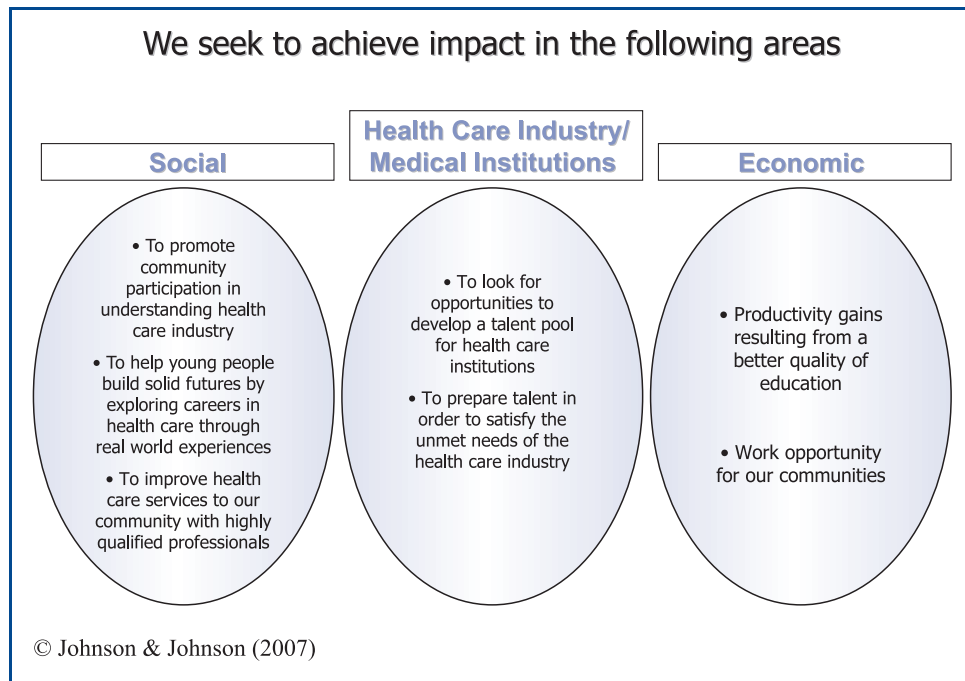
Although many solutions were proposed and implemented, the idea of work-based learning was adopted as a possible approach that might make a difference. As a broad strategy, work-based learning ranges from the German apprenticeship model to career academies to internships. These issues received formal attention from US lawmakers when, in 1994, the School to Work Opportunities Act was signed by President Clinton (Steinberg, 1998). While the legislation provided monetary support to states, the law and its funding mechanism were designed to sunset in 2005. New models were piloted and a great deal of activity took place in a large number of US states on many different scales (Bailey, 1995). However, many educators and business leaders continue the work of integrated classroom and workplace learning opportunities with the same sense of urgency that was felt before 1994. Many of the most successful school-to-career efforts went beyond philanthropic support. Since work-based learning demands the participation of employees, there had to be a business case to attract broad participation. For many companies, there was the perception that they were helping to solve a national problem while others benefited directly by hiring better-prepared students.

Before designing the BTE intervention, management at Johnson & Johnson was informed by several academic research studies as well as data on school drop out rates, access to higher education, college success and workforce issues. For Johnson & Johnson, the motivation was and is grounded in Our Credo responsibility to the community. The Johnson & Johnson Credo outlines the corporation's responsibilities to customers, employees, the community and shareholders. For more than 60 years, this document has guided the corporation's business decisions as well as provided a framework for social responsibility.

Founded on a common core of proven school-to-career principles, BTE creates opportunities for businesses, educators, community groups, and parents to build long-term partnerships. These partnerships can have a meaningful impact on students' future success in the workplace, and by extension, produce broader educational and economic effects within the communities in which these partnerships operate. Unlike other school-to-career efforts, this program is less about preparing for an immediate career and more about being prepared for secondary education. The healthcare industry hires very few employees without advanced degrees (Figure 1).

The worldwide contributions program at Johnson & Johnson is based on a culture of caring that is the hallmark of its family of companies. Beyond financial support, the company's efforts are based on partnerships with outstanding not-for-profit and government organizations with the objective of improving the quality of life in communities around the world, especially those that are economically disadvantaged. The Academy for Educational Development (AED), a leading healthcare and education NGO, acts as the program manager and coordinates strategic as well as logistical elements of each BTE site. AED

Figure 1 Bridge to employment project impact



brings a wealth of resources to the BTE project ranging from social marketing to research and evaluation. Since BTE is one of the company's key education programs, a great deal of resources are invested in managing the partnership with AED and Johnson & Johnson affiliate companies to make the program as impactful as possible.

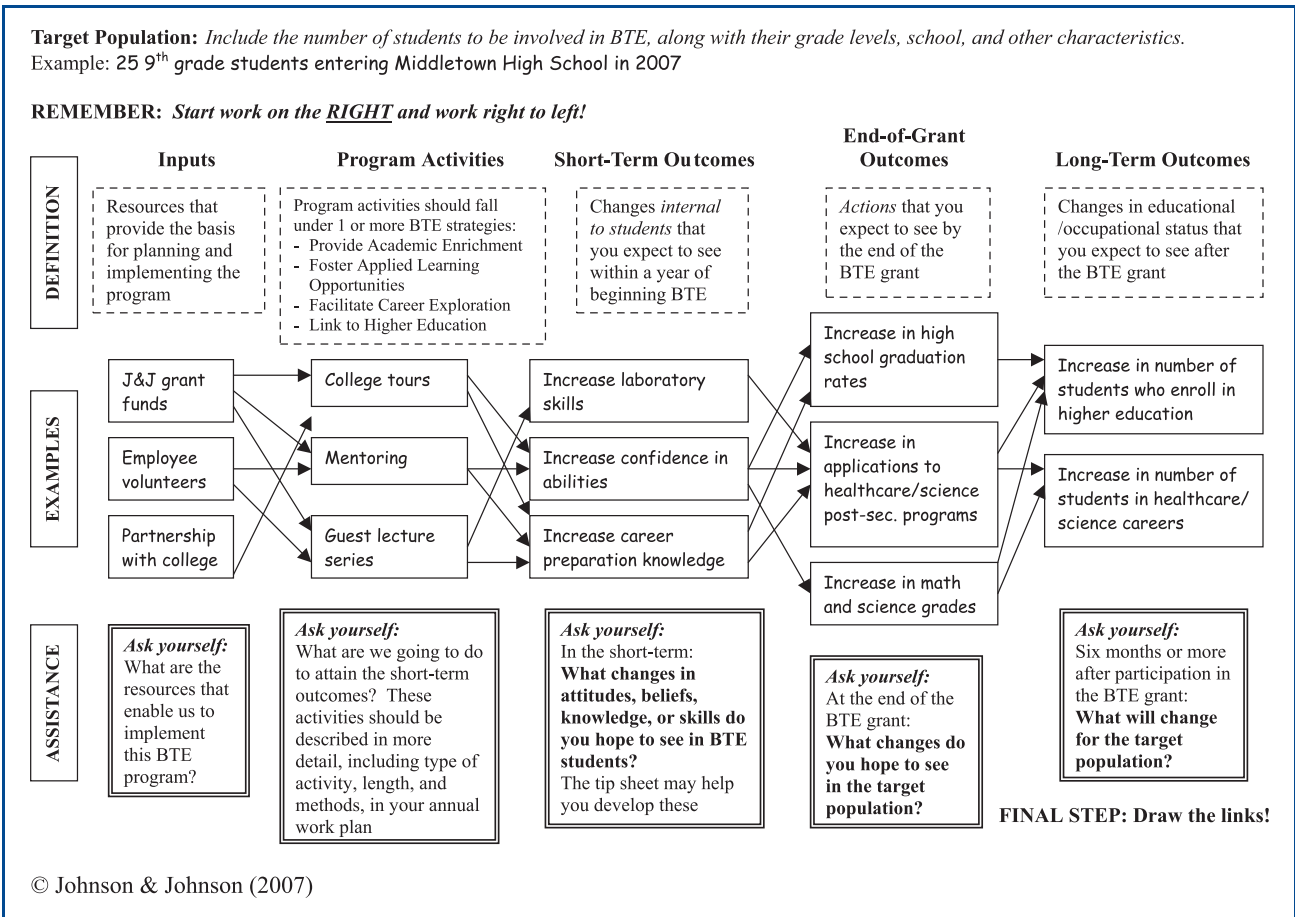
What exactly are the returns on the corporation's investment? Unlike European apprenticeship models, the Johnson & Johnson program does not train students to join its workforce, at least not directly. Instead, the BTE Program looks at having a positive impact on students, Johnson & Johnson employees, and the community at large. Most of the program's measurement and evaluation focuses on the students where evaluators measure quantitative gains as well as their qualitative learnings. The program is evaluated by third-party researchers and a common survey instrument is used at each site. In addition to measuring short-term student achievement, the evaluators look at post-secondary plans and progress as the students make their way into their chosen careers (Figure 2).

Responsibility to community

While it would be difficult to find an American corporation not involved in improving education in their local community, support of education with measurable results is not so common. The bridge to employment program was designed to improve both outcomes for individual students and the overall community at large. However, the measurement of student outcomes is easier to gauge than the effect BTE has on the community. According to the philanthropic standards outlined by Michael Porter, business-education partnerships can be easily seen as improving the competitive context of the affected communities (Porter and Kramer, 2002). In other words, if no action is taken to prepare our public school students for the knowledge economy, our communities will suffer as businesses will lack qualified workers (Jenkins, 2006). It can be argued that BTE has the potential to change both the social and economic context of a given community.

The BTE program engages stakeholders directly in the design and implementation of the specific interventions. When a site (community) is selected, the first step is to survey current education initiatives and company-sponsored outreach. The second step is to meet with community leaders to identify specific needs and gaps. The third step is to convene

Figure 2 Bridge to employment program model guide



potential partners in designing an appropriate intervention strategy. The result of this strategic planning process is a three-year plan with clear roles and responsibilities.

As a result of intensive stakeholder engagement, the program falls under the ownership of multiple parties. The program is managed locally and guided by a steering committee that often includes members of the education community, NGOs, parents, students and Johnson & Johnson employees. Inherent in this process is the goal of building long-term, sustainable relationships among all of these stakeholders. It is safe to say that the process of developing and implementing the BTE project builds social capital and societal legitimacy in each of the selected communities and, in some cases, regions. Key elements of a successful BTE partnership include:

- commitment from all partners involved;
- effective management and leadership;
- structured work-based learning component;
- links and exposure to higher education;
- high expectations and accountability;
- a system for evaluation and continuous improvement; and
- a plan for institutionalization of the partnership.

In terms of grant support, the projects are funded for four years. Time and resources are allotted for the planning and stakeholder engagement process. The planning and

implementation of the BTE program follow a path of evolution that is broadly similar to the *Stages of Corporate Citizenship Developmental Framework* recently published by The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College (Mirvis and Goggins, 2006). In the early phase, BTE partners work to establish credibility and trust in the program's aspirations. Second, partners come together to create the capacity to manage the projects. Third, an element of coherence is evident as the program moves into implementation. Finally, the commitment from stakeholders will hopefully sustain the program after grant-funding cycle has ended.

Responsibility to employees

The Johnson & Johnson culture has always encouraged employees to engage with their communities. As a socially responsible corporation, there is a consistent demand on the part of employees for help in volunteer placement in the community. The BTE program provides a formal mechanism to involve employees in the education issues in their communities[2]. Johnson & Johnson employees are better able to understand the competitive context of their communities while they interact with a future generation of scientists and health care professionals. The corporation is pleased to share labs and offices and parts of the workday with the students. Most important, these students are exposed to Our Credo and the distinctive Johnson & Johnson culture and expected workplace behaviors.

Perhaps the most important attribute of the BTE program is the emphasis on a customized local design based on the need of a particular community. This is the key reason that this program is initiated only in communities where Johnson & Johnson has a presence. The local employees are involved in every stage of the program design from selection of NGO partner to the actual interventions. The largest challenge came in 2004 when the corporate center in New Brunswick, New Jersey was asked about the possibility of creating a BTE program in Cork, Ireland.

The company's presence in Cork, Ireland comprises three operating units: Janssen Pharmaceutical, DePuy Ireland and newly arrived Centocor Biologics. Ireland has recognized the need to prepare more young people for careers in science. As the company's presence in Ireland increases, the need for qualified scientists will also increase. The rapid growth of Ireland's economy has placed a great deal of attention on the education system and its relationship to changing workforce (Higher Education Authority, 2003).

The primary intent of the program was to engage representatives from each of these businesses in the planned BTE program. From the community, the following organizations were invited to participate in stakeholder dialogue around planning the BTE intervention: Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), University College Cork (UCC), Terence McSwiney Community College, North Monastery Secondary School, Mayfield Community College, Junior Achievement Ireland, the Community Foundation for Ireland, and Business in the Community.

The community representatives and Johnson & Johnson executives agreed upon targeting specific disadvantaged areas of the Northside of Cork to increase the number of students going to targeted third-level courses offered by CIT and UCC. According to the grant application:

The program will encourage and support students to apply for science-based courses at the third level, and to improve their capacity to cope with the demands of study at third level while significantly raising their awareness of the opportunities for employment within the industry[3].

A range of activities have been designed to achieve this goal and include: site visits to Johnson & Johnson companies, visits to CIT and UCC, parent workshops, career awareness session, and college preparation workshops.

Research on selected BTE sites has proven the positive benefits of the program for young people, their schools, their communities, and business partners. Great things happen when caring organizations join forces to help young people achieve their goals. It is the hope of Johnson & Johnson that the BTE model and the lessons learned from a decade of experience in a wide variety of locations will spur other communities to establish

school-business partnerships of their own. Johnson & Johnson management is convinced that the returns far exceed the investment and believe that businesses have a great deal to offer students and schools beyond financial resources.

A new sense of urgency exists for BTE as it enters the twenty-first century. A growing shortage of healthcare workers threatens communities around the globe[4]. In addition, access to higher education is a serious issue in many parts of the world. If society views business as "the elephant missing from the classroom," BTE can provide a model to make positive community and societal change in solving the workforce shortage while also allowing more students to pursue higher education (Nimmo, 2006). In addition, there is increasing evidence that students are ill-prepared to join the workforce of the twenty-first century. High school, two-year colleges, technical schools and four-year colleges are being pressured to place more attention on basic knowledge and applied skills. Not surprisingly, BTE addresses the 11 applied skills outlined in a recent study resulting from a survey of more than 400 US-based companies (Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006). This study, published in 2006, also reveals that businesses perceive that both K-12 systems and four-year colleges and universities are responsible for developing workforce readiness in new entrants to the workforce (Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006).

In the coming years, assessment of the program will focus on measuring more accurately how bridge to employment provides benefits to selected communities, employees and the health care industry. Long-term goals for the program include replication in Latin America, Asia, Scotland and Africa. In each region, the challenges are dramatically different although the need for BTE-like programs is common. In all cases, helping to build the healthcare workforce of tomorrow is critical to all members of society. Beyond the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship, this initiative, grounded in the Johnson & Johnson Credo, is a testament to the belief that indeed a corporation can demonstrate, through stakeholder engagement, concern for the wider social good[5].

Notes

1. The alarm over national competitiveness has sounded again (Olson, 2006).
2. Howard Gardner addresses this issue in his discussion of scientists and their sense of responsibility to the public (Gardner *et al.*, 2001, pp. 8384).
3. Excerpt from unpublished grant application submitted by the Community Foundation for Ireland, August 10, 2005.
4. According to a recent report, "In many African countries health worker migration contributes to the health workforce problem. For example, of the 1,200 doctors trained in Zimbabwe in the 1990s only 360 remain there today. More than half of the physicians trained in Ghana during the 1980s practice abroad" (USAID, 2004).
5. The authors pose the question, "Might corporate citizenship really be seen as a new, more humanistic way of conducting business, bringing together a concern for wealth creation and a concern for the wider social good?" (McIntosh *et al.*, 2003, p. 221).

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