

## **Developing A Networking Culture For Marketing An Open And Distance Education University: An Innovative Growth Driven ‘Strategy-Structure’ Nexus For Zou Rpcs.**

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**Abstract:** *With universities competing to increase their influence in society, the role of programme co-ordinators in shaping competitive positioning of Zimbabwe Open University need to be capitalised. The regional programme co-ordinators (RPCs) need to carry out a variety of work that require more interactions with internal units and external organisations located around and away from their physical location. The RPCs are currently receiving two formal sources of instructions from the matrix structures of the Regional Directors and the Faculty Deans. The structure is negatively perceived as locking value and potential of RPCs in their efforts to position the university through value creating interactive networks with both internal and external stakeholders. The researcher proposed to use a networking structure around regional programme co-ordinators to ensure increase in enrolment, rebranding of the university, linking the university to industry ,delighting stakeholders and improvement on corporate innovativeness in the ODL environment are realised. The study took a quota sample of 60 regional programme co-ordinators from all the 10 regional centres of Zimbabwe Open University. The preferred internal network and external network stakeholders were analysed and the results indicated that respondents accepted them as viable opportunities for harnessing information and material resources for university growth. The study proposed a networking model for empowering the ODL RPCs through internal and external interactive linkages.*

**Keywords:** *Networking culture, Stakeholder delight, Regional Programme Co-ordinators, Regional Campus, Faculty Centre, Internal networks, External networks, Marketing Concept.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Zimbabwe Open University was born out of a need to make university education and its value accessible to the then forgotten urban and rural sections of the Zimbabwean and world society. The March 1999 ZOU Act of Parliament gave the institution the mandate of reaching out to the Zimbabweans and other nationalities with open and distance higher education diploma and degree programmes. ZOU was tasked to achieve this using learner centred tutoring approaches, responsive and market driven learning facilities, offering effective community service leadership, and multi-dimensional communication with internal and external stakeholders.

The achievement of the initial penetration into the market for distance education was facilitated by adopting a matrix structure, where regional programme co-ordinators received instructions from both regional directors and faculty deans. The matrix structure achieved greater results for the university since it added the required flexibility and open decision making within the university. This gave a great advantage to ZOU since other competing universities were maintaining their rigid single-campus tall structures. Many students preferred ZOU since it was more flexible and user friendly to formally employed students, mothers, fathers, and other time pressured students(Nesheim, Olsen and Tobiasen, 2011). ZOU’s matrix structure was able to go to the society at that point using regional campuses and regional campus staff. Research findings by Vutete and Uzhenyu(2016) in a similar study on the effectiveness of matrix structure in ZOU’s operations, however, established that matrix structure is now limiting the internal and external marketing role of regional programme co-ordinators as they are locked into the dual command relationships.

Such matrix structure was perceived as creating a culture of fear, uncertainty, mistrust, intermittent work overload, reduced innovation , over expectations by those dual command bosses and general loss of competitive advantage(Galbraith, 2008; Middleton, 1967). The matrix structure was also viewed as consciously and unconsciously supporting inwardness and internal focus of RPCs to the detriment of long term and community based external university goals as given in the Act. While freely conceding that the Regional Directors’ and Faculty Deans’ efforts are effective in achieving the administration of core teaching and learning processes, their ability to raise ZOU to a tall and world class university cannot be ascertained in an environment where their key subordinates (regional programme co-ordinators) are locked within the internal issues. The possibility of pre-occupying and locking the RPCs with short term internal operations could be linked to the existing matrix structure.

Though matrix structure was generally good for ZOU's growth and survival, its strategic advantage was lost as other universities started copying ZOU and establish their own region-based campus formation, and offering block release, weekend school and other flexible learning programmes. All the 10 regional centres are now facing attack from various universities who are building their market shares and influence in the society. For example, we have ZOU Harare Campus being hit by MSU, Solusi, Africa University, NUST, GZU and RCZ who had launched their Block Releases and Weekend Schools programmes. Given that all ten regional centres are now having a competing state university and other private universities on its side, there is need to redefine the role of regional programme co-ordinators to that of forming external and internal value creating networks.

To achieve its social and economic missions in this economy and the world at large, ZOU is supposed to build and nurture sustainable networks with its internal and external stakeholders. Given that a university is considered relevant by its ability to carry out community service, publications, research work, consultancy, self income generation, developing intellectual property (IP), providing leadership and advice to society, the role effectiveness became more complex to define and measure under the existing dual command system. Regional Programme co-ordinators (lecturers in regions) being the link people between ZOU and the society, need to be well connected and networked with relevant institutions that provide resources and information for achieving the broader University community goals. The vision of ZOU of becoming a world class open and distance learning(ODL) university, and mission of empowering people through life long learning in a flexible manner will be achieved more effectively if the regional programme co-ordinators are moved out of the matrix cocoon. A new strategy-structure should give ZOU the highest level of operational excellence, creation of an innovative culture, and satisfy and delight all stakeholders. This is possible since implementation of the ZOU-ODL culture requires a good strategy-structure fit. Since the RPCs represent the faculties and the skill-face of the university, there is need to make them more visible in both internal and external networks beyond the dictates of the existing dual command formation. The marketing concept requires that ZOU start its plans from outside through making meaningful interactions with key external stakeholders, and then use internal co-ordination and networks to fulfil the promises. The results of that marketing effort will be the long term profits, meeting corporate objectives, survival of the firm, stakeholder satisfaction and positive reputation. The external networks need to be made through the community service, consultancy, research and development, and strategic partnerships driven by the regional programme co-ordinators. The regional programme co-ordinators also need to run internal networks by ensuring that all units and department in ZOU are aligned around meeting students and other stakeholder needs and expectations(Wolff and Kim, 2012). This co-ordinating function need to be structured around key external and internal networks. For this to happen, the ranking of external networks and internal networks in terms of their importance need to be established. In other words the regional programme co-ordinator becomes the front-line personnel and face of the university who links the external expectations to the internal service provision processes. Adoption of a networking culture will enable marketing of the ODL education programmes through various internal and external communication media that include word of mouth, face to face interactions, image building consultancy and other innovative interactions.

The research propose a networking structure where the regional programme coordinators (RPCs) are seen as core players that link effectively with other internal unit heads like module development unit, library, research and scholarship and IT unit, and external networks like ZIMCHE, other universities, city councils, external libraries and research centres. Regional programme co-ordinators need to develop and grow strong value creating marketing relationships with external stakeholders that will facilitate and cause smooth flow of internal operations and processes(Chen, Doherty and Vinnicombe, 2012). The thrust of this research is to analyse the view of RPCs on the relative importance of various internal and external networking partners to their work roles as drivers of the university quality service delivery.

## **II. Statement of The Problem**

The locking of RPCs into Regional and Faculty matrix silos had limited the university's power to open and reach out to society as required by the market. This study aim at establishing critical networks that are to be used by RPCs for effective performance of their roles.

## **III. Research Objectives**

1. To analyse the relative importance of external and internal networks to ZOU regional programme co-ordinators.
2. To propose a networking culture model for ZOU regional programme co-ordinators.

## **IV. Research Hypotheses**

- H<sub>1</sub>: The regional programme co-ordinators perceived external network partners as important.  
H<sub>2</sub>: The regional programme co-ordinators perceived internal network as important.

- H<sub>3</sub>: There is an association between regional location of respondents and preference of external network partners  
 H<sub>4</sub>: There is an association between experience of respondents and preference of external network partners  
 H<sub>5</sub>: There is an association between regional location of respondents and preferences of internal network partners  
 H<sub>6</sub>: There is an association between experience of respondents and preference of internal network partners

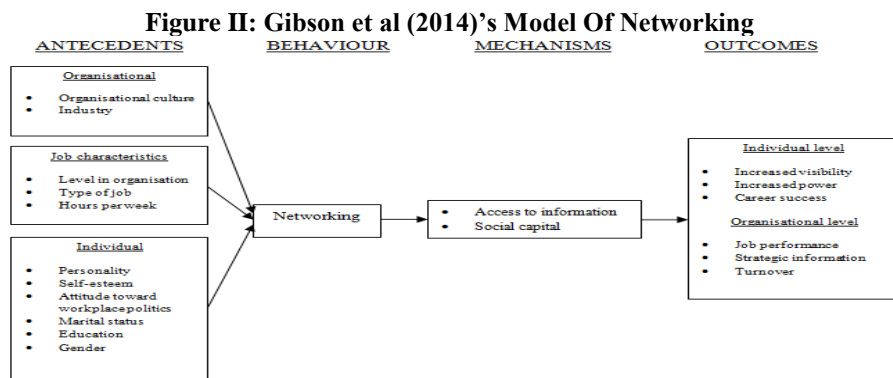
## V. Literature Review

### 5.1 The Features and Benefits of A Network Structure

Networking is defined by Gibson et al (2014) as a goal-directed behaviour which occurs both inside and outside of organisation, focussed on creating, cultivating, and utilising interpersonal relationships. An earlier definition by Willis (1994) viewed networking as an extension of the structure within larger organisations but also acknowledged the full network structure as a socio-entrepreneurial interactions of an organisation with its internal and external partners, and hence will assist regional programme co-ordinators to learn to be more effective. Gibson et al(2014) named mentoring, social networks, the political skill and impression management as pillars of a networking culture. The roles and responsibilities of a networking culture include being a sponsor, leader, co-ordinator and core member. Though networking culture are influenced by individual variables like personality, gender, education and marital status (Gibson et al, 2014; Forret and Dougherty, 2004), the organisation needs to empower and nurture its employees along the external and internal networks. From a leadership point of view the networks are used for building relationships and alliances with key stakeholders like customers, workmates, superiors, suppliers, consultants and even regulatory boards (Uzzi, and Danlap, 2005; Greyson and Baldwin, 2007). On the features of networks, deJong and Hulsink (2012) said innovation networking patterns for small firms should include suppliers, customers, informal groups, banks, technology and government departments. Swan, Newell, Scarbrough and Hislop (1999) emphasised that networking is not limited to formation of linkages through information technology platforms, but include face to face sharing of tacit knowledge. Swan et al (1999) recommended a community based networking model which will enable the programme co-ordinators to be aware of winds of change. Dulworth (2008) said the qualities of strong networks include quantity, reciprocal relationships, diversity and quality interactions. Yeung (2005) on rules of networking, recommend all organisations who want to succeed to form strong and relevant networks with their stakeholders. This means ZOU will succeed if its programme co-ordinators actively form networks with both internal and external partners. De Jong and Hulsink (2012) said that a networking culture is critical for regional programme co-ordinators (lecturers in regional centres), consultants and policy makers who respectively use it for teaching, advice and development of policy interventions. Since business culture is relatively permanent, a new networking culture should be recognised as a business model that gives businesses their strategic positions and ground for developing competitive advantage (De Klerk and Kroon, 2007). In the same respect, Grayson and Baldwin (2007) hailed networking for solving organisational problems through identifying opportunities, building alliances, providing resources to get work done, raising organisational image and reputation, and being a forum for sharing innovative ideas. Though many benefits of networking cultures were reviewed, Willis (1994) predicted that networks might fail if networkers are frustrated, if networks are over stretched, lack of finance, and when some members engage in secretive behaviours and excessive legalism. This makes it necessary to measure and prioritise areas where networks are needed by ZOU regional programme co-ordinators for them to be effective in open and distance learning service delivery.

### 5.2 The Networking Model By Gibson Et Al (2014)

Gibson, Hardy III and Buckley (2014) proposed a networking model that provides antecedents, behaviours, mechanisms and outcomes. The model is shown in Figure II below.



**Source:** Gibson C., Hardy III J. H., and Buckley M. R. , (2014),"Understanding the role of networking in organizations", Career Development International, Vol. 19 Iss 2 pp. 146 – 161

The antecedents provide the influences and factors that moderate the extent of networking in organisations. The nature of the organisation, job characteristics of programme co-ordinators and their individual profiles are considered. The behaviour dimension points to the activities that regional programme co-ordinators need to display when interacting with each network partner. They will do it well if trained and empowered by the top management. The mechanisms variable are the facilitating structures that include access to information and social capital (goodwill and reputation). This means the existing image of ZOU will facilitate the operationalisation of any networking efforts by the region based lecturers. The last facet is the ‘outcomes’ which are the results and benefits of an effective networking culture. The individual outcomes involve solving problems, accessing opportunities, increased visibility, increased power and career success (Wolf, Moser and Grau, 2009). On the organisational outcomes, networking provides employees with resources and power to implement more ambitious corporate projects. Regional programme co-ordinators will be able to do more consultancy and fundraising projects that will improve the image and effectiveness of the whole university. Though this study will not take an evaluation of this model by Gibson et al (2014), it will touch on the assessment of the relevancy of group of internal and external network partners. Which networks do programme co-ordinators value most and their ranking is the focus of this study so that ZOU will assist to build and nurture such networks.

## **VI. Research Methodology**

The research method used was highly influenced by a positivist paradigm which applied quantitative research strategies. The specific design was a cross sectional descriptive survey that used quota sampling that achieved at least 3 respondents from each ZOU regional campus. A sample of 17 female and 43 male regional programme co-ordinators were interviewed. Those with Masters Degree and below were 56 and those with Doctoral qualifications were 4. Those around Harare were 29 and those far from Harare were 31. Those with experience of 3years and above were 76.7% while those below 3 years were 23.3%. A Likert scaled questionnaire that covered issues on external networking and internal networking was used in the study. The 60 questionnaires were administered through drop and pick, and face to face methods, some during workshops and conferences, and others at their regional offices. At analysis stage it was confirmed that the sample size was adequate for factor analysis since the data produced a KMO sampling adequacy measure of 0.663. The questionnaire items were found to be reliable at a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.884. This showed a higher level of internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The data analysis was done using the SPSS software Version 19 which analysed the data using Chi Square, factor analysis, t- tests, mean values and basic percentages. This enabled measuring the network partner preferences.

The benchmark mean value was 2.50, where anything above 2.50 showed some disagreement on the intensity of the network partner needed. In this type of tests any p-values which were greater than 0.05 led to the rejection of the null hypotheses. One sample t-test analyses were also used to measure the overall acceptability of the two constructs; external networks and internal networks, that were useful for proposing a new networking model. Chi square tests involved measuring whether there was any association between selected demographic variables and external networks, and internal networks. A diagram representing a network model for ZOU programme co-ordinators was proposed at the end of the discussion.

## **VII. Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion**

The major discussion of findings provides the emphasis on major matrix structure problems, the most preferred external network partners and internal network partners. The concept of factor ranking, overall mean values, chi-square tests and one sample mean tests were covered. The proposed networking model is also presented at the end.

### **7.1 Discussion of Mean Values and Variable Ranking**

The analyses is based on the research results presented on Table I, TableII and below.

**Table I: External Network Preference of Regional Programme Co-ordinators**

	Means	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
Networking with publishers	<b>2.22</b>	31.7	31.7	21.7	13.3	1.7
Networking with lecturers of other universities	<b>2.37</b>	20.0	43.3	18.3	16.6	1.7
Networking with embassies of various nations	<b>2.43</b>	21.7	36.7	20.0	20.0	1.7
Networking with city or town councils	<b>2.45</b>	26.7	28.3	23.3	16.7	5.0
Networking with high schools and diploma offering colleges	<b>2.45</b>	26.7	26.7	25.0	18.3	3.3
Networking with research centres in Zimbabwe	<b>2.47</b>	23.3	30.0	28.3	13.3	5.0
Networking with students of other universities	<b>2.53</b>	21.7	26.7	31.7	16.7	3.3

Networking with government departments	<b>2.55</b>	11.7	43.3	28.3	11.7	5.0
Networking with alumni of various universities	<b>2.57</b>	21.7	28.3	23.3	25.0	1.7
Networking with industry and representative boards	<b>2.63</b>	16.7	38.3	15.0	25.0	5.0
Networking with external Libraries and Resource centres	<b>2.63</b>	18.3	30.0	26.7	20.0	5.0

**Table II: Internal Network Preference of Regional Programme Co-ordinators**

	Means	SA	A	N S	DA	S DA
RPC with Library and Information people	<b>1.67</b>	56.7	25.0	13.3	5.0	0.0
RPC with Higher Degree Office	<b>1.72</b>	56.7	23.3	13.3	5.0	1.7
RPC with computer and ICT people	<b>1.72</b>	41.7	46.7	10.0	1.7	0.0
RPC with Research and Scholarship	<b>1.80</b>	55.0	23.3	11.7	6.7	3.3
RPC with Quality Assurance people	<b>1.83</b>	46.7	28.3	21.7	1.7	1.7
RPC with other RPCs in other regions	<b>1.97</b>	40.0	38.3	8.3	11.7	1.7
RPC with HR people	<b>1.98</b>	31.7	40.0	26.7	1.7	0.0
RPC with Module Development Unit	<b>2.07</b>	31.7	35.0	28.3	5.0	0.0
RPC with regional Research Committee	<b>2.20</b>	35.0	25.0	30.0	5.0	5.0
RPC with Student Affairs people	<b>2.27</b>	20.0	41.7	31.7	5.0	1.7
RPC with Marketing Officers	<b>2.30</b>	23.3	41.7	18.3	15.0	1.7
RPC with ZOUASA representatives	<b>2.37</b>	13.3	51.7	21.7	11.7	1.7
RPC with works and corporate services people	<b>2.38</b>	23.3	30.0	35.0	8.3	3.3
RPC with regional welfare members	<b>2.47</b>	13.3	36.7	41.7	6.7	1.7
RPC with Chaplin	<b>2.53</b>	18.3	26.7	40.0	13.3	1.7
RPC with SRC representatives	<b>2.62</b>	10.0	40.0	33.3	11.7	5.0

On the external networking discussion, Table I was considered. The top 8 preferred external networking partners were found to be publishers (m=2.22), lecturers of other universities (m=2.37), embassies of various nations (m=2.43), city or town councils (m=2.45), high schools and diploma offering colleges (m=2.45), research centres in Zimbabwe (m=2.47), students of other universities (m=2.53) and government departments (m=2.55). Other networks mentioned include alumni of various universities, external libraries and resource centres, and industry representative boards. Publishers were rated high since these region based lecturers could have wanted to publish their articles and research papers, and also contribute to the journal houses as peer reviewers. Lecturers of other universities enable ZOU RPCs to learn new concepts that make them academically relevant. This enables the RPCs to review their modules in line with new trends and standards. Embassies of various nations provide opportunities for RPCs to network with foreign universities and also cross-culturally sell their ODL programmes. The opportunities for contact leave and sabbatical leave can be achieved through such contacts. City and town councils provide resources and support to programme co-ordinators. Some provide consultancy jobs to the RPCs and hence help spruce the image of the university and also meet the main goals of the university. Research centres in Zimbabwe provide some grant based research opportunities. Some of these institutions include SIRDC, Research Council of Zimbabwe and RIO-SET.

High schools and diploma awarding colleges are important links since RPCs will be able to cross sell their programmes to prospective university customers. This will enable ZOU to grow the number of enrolled students and hence achieve its broad socio-economic goal. Students of other universities provide the benchmark comments on where ZOU stand in the community of other universities. They provide opportunities for RPCs to demonstrate their competency in the tertiary learning institutions. Government departments are important since most activities require approval and support from the authorities in question. Some government departments provide opportunities for consultancy work to RPCs. The need to link with industry was rated lower due to less perceived chances of getting consultancy work in a somehow depressed economy. That linkage, however, needs to be developed for external networks to be meaningful. It is critical for RPCs to be aligned around the 8 network partners so as to be useful in meeting the broader social goals of the university.

On Table II, the top 8 internal networking preferences were library and information (m=1.67), higher degree offices (m=1.72), computer and ICT people (m=1.72), research and scholarship (m=1.80), quality assurance people(m=1.83), RPCs in other regions (m=1.97), HR people (m=1.98) and module development unit (m=2.07). Other notable networks on Table III were the research committees, student affairs people, ZOUASA representatives and marketing officers. The study showed that RPCs preferred the library and information unit ahead of other internal network partners. Their core work of teaching and theoretical researches is mainly supported by this function. The higher degree office is now popular since most RPCs were enrolling with this department for their Doctor of Philosophy degrees. The research and scholarship is also a preferred internal unit due to its research orientation. Research and scholarship offers conference, symposia and publication opportunities to the RPCs. The unit also links them to the external research and publication communities. This supports the core work of the RPCs. The quality assurance people are also critical to the RPCs since they provide the best way of achieving results in the organisation. The linkage of RPCs from one region to another was also rated as critical in the study. The human resources unit was said to be critical for the RPCs since they organise for the promotions, sabbatical leave and contact leave. They provide critical welfare facilities to the

regional programme co-ordinators. The module development unit (MDU) was also rated as highly important since it facilitates the writing of learning materials through providing the modules layout, editorial skills and printing. Writing modules is one of the core activities of RPCs. It can be commended that achieving the internal work output requires the external linkages. When the regional programme co-ordinators are well aligned to the external environment, they will be able to improve the effectiveness of organisation and attract more customers.

**7.2 Hypotheses Testing of External and Internal Network Acceptability: T-Test of Mean Values**

*H<sub>1</sub>: The regional programme co-ordinators(RPCs) perceived external network partners as important.*

The hypothesis on the overall acceptability of the external networks was also tested using the one sample mean T- test. The study used a one sample mean T test at 0.05 level of significance and produced the results shown in Table III below.

**Table III: One-Sample Test For External Networking**

Test Value = 2.50						
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
ExternalNet	-.502	10	.627	-.01818	-.0990	.0626

Since the t-calculated value of -0.502 is less than 0.063 (the upper limit) at p-value of 0.627, we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that the external networks were generally accepted by the regional programme co-ordinators. This showed that the region based lecturers want support and authority to continuously link up with external providers of resources and information. It will make them more alert to the winds of change in the operating environment and assist to transform the university’s operations and image-hence increasing its customer base.

*H<sub>2</sub>: The regional programme co-ordinators(RPCs) perceived internal network as important.*

The overall acceptability of the internal network partners hypothesis was tested below. The study used a one sample mean T test at 0.05 level of significance and produced the following results in Table IV.

**Table IV: One-Sample Test For Internal Networking**

Test Value = 2.50						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
InternalNet	-3.635	15	.002	-.31875	-.5057	-.1318

Since the t- calculated value of -3.635 is less than -0.132(upper limit) at p-value of 0.002, we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that the internal networks were generally accepted as important by the regional programme co-ordinators This shows that the lecturers should be able to see the various internal units as important and not be limited to the matrix instructions. The RPCs should connect and network with internal units more effectively and improve the service delivery effectiveness and efficiency of the university. A networking model needs to also consider internal networks as critical for successfully delighting the stakeholders.

**7.3 Hypotheses Testing of External and Internal Networking Variables: Chi Square Tests With Demographic Variables**

**Table V: Regional Location of RPCs and External Network Preference**

		Accept H <sub>0</sub> if :	P-Value (Cal.)	Decision
(a)	Networking with publishers	p-< 0.05	0.538	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(b)	Networking with lectures of other universities	p-< 0.05	0.275	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(c)	Networking with embassies of various nations	p-< 0.05	0.357	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(d)	Networking with research centres I Zimbabwe	p-< 0.05	0.024*	Accept H <sub>0</sub> . Significant association

But overallly there are no association between location and the drive for external connections

**Table VI: Experience of RPCs and External Network Preference**

		Accept H <sub>0</sub> if :	P-Value (Cal.)	Decision
(a)	Networking with publishers	p-< 0.05	0.797	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(b)	Networking with lectures of other universities	p-< 0.05	0.669	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(c)	Networking with embassies of various nations	p-< 0.05	0.912	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(d)	Networking with research centres I Zimbabwe	p-< 0.05	0.415	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association

**Table VII: Regional Location of RPCs and Internal Network Preference**

		Accept H <sub>0</sub> if :	P-Value (Cal.)	Decision
(a)	RPC with Library and information people	p-< 0.05	0.054*	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . Slightly insignificant association
(b)	RPC with computer and ICT people	p-< 0.05	0.105	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(c)	RPC with Higher Degree Office	p-< 0.05	0.054*	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . Slightly insignificant association
(d)	RPC with Research and Scholarship	p-< 0.05	0.986	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(e)	RPC with Quality Assurance people	p-< 0.05	0.312	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(f)	RPC with other RPCs in other regions	p-< 0.05	0.089	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(g)	RPC with HR people	p-< 0.05	0.541	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(h)	RPC with Module Development Unit	p-< 0.05	0.013*	Accept H <sub>0</sub> . There is an association

**Table VIII Experience of RPCs and Internal Network Preference**

		Accept H <sub>0</sub> if :	P-Value (Cal.)	Decision
(a)	RPC with Library and information people	p-< 0.05	0.665	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(b)	RPC with computer and ICT people	p-< 0.05	0.456	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(c)	RPC with Higher Degree Office	p-< 0.05	0.292	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(d)	RPC with Research and Scholarship	p-< 0.05	0.652	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(e)	RPC with Quality Assurance people	p-< 0.05	0.715	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(f)	RPC with other RPCs in other regions	p-< 0.05	0.226	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(g)	RPC with HR people	p-< 0.05	0.210	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association
(h)	RPC with Module Development Unit	p-< 0.05	0.758	Reject H <sub>0</sub> . No association

**H<sub>3</sub>: There is an association between regional location of respondents and preference of external network partners**

The hypothesis was tested basing on the results presented on Table V. The null hypothesis was rejected and concluded there was no association of regional co-ordinators' location and preference of publishers, embassies of various nations and networking with lecturers of other universities. Only 'networking with research centres in Zimbabwe' was found to be associated with location of RPCs, with those far from Harare having more need to network with the research centres in Zimbabwe. Since more variables shows no association, we conclude that regional programme co-ordinators had similar perceptions of external network preferences.

**H<sub>4</sub>: There is an association between experience of respondents and preference of external network partners**

The test results of this hypothesis are presented in Table VI. The experience level of regional programme co-ordinators was found to have no association with preference of publishers, lecturers of other universities, embassies of various nations and research centres in Zimbabwe. All the p-values were above the 0.05 benchmark. It confirms the similarity and consistency in perception between new regional co-ordinators and the long serving staff.

**H<sub>5</sub>: There is an association between regional location of respondents and preferences of internal network partners**

The test results of this hypothesis are in Table VII. The eight (8) top variables were tested on the chi-square and seven of these were rejected since their p-values were greater than 0.05. Only the 'RPC with module development unit' variable was accepted. Those co-ordinators located far from Harare (national centre) had more need to network with the module development unit. The lack of association means that internal networks are all important for programme co-ordinators around Harare and those in regions located far from Harare. It supports that the internal network variables are important for achieving organisational effectiveness and attracting more customers and stakeholders.

**H<sub>6</sub>: There is an association between experience of respondents and preference of internal network partners**

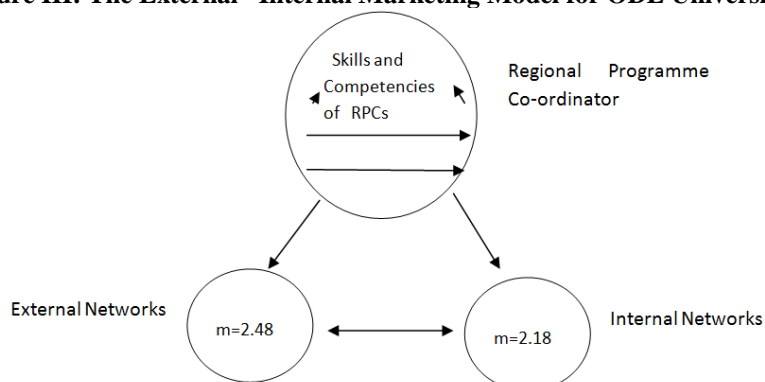
The test results for this hypothesis are presented on Table VIII. All the eight (8) variables were rejected for not having association with experience of respondents. Those regional programme co-ordinators who are new to ZOU and those long-serving had similar levels of preference to internal network partners. This supports the need for using internal linkages in developing a networking model.

**7.3 Proposing The Networking Marketing Model For ZOU and Its RPCs**

The external networks were also ranked and accepted for being important in improving programme co-ordinators' work. The mean was (m=2.48) for those external networks. The internal networks were also ranked and considered critical for improving programme co-ordinators' work. The internal network mean value was

(m=2.18). The diagram in Figure III presents the networking model to be adopted by ZOU regional programme co-ordinators and ZOU management.

**Figure III: The External –Internal Marketing Model for ODL Universities**



The organisation needs to remove the matrix structure problems from the organisation and co-ordinate the external networks and internal networks. The diagram indicate the external-internal network linkage should be driven by the marketing oriented engine that first turn the external network wheel, that in turn cause the internal network wheel to run basing on that external network leverage. A strong external network wheel drives the internal wheel that produces the value adding operations and service delivery processes. It should also be noted that both external networks and internal networks influence each other to solve operational issues of the university. The model also indicate that RPCs need to interact strongly with both external and internal networks so as to ensure both internal and external stakeholders are satisfied.

### VIII. Conclusions

The key external networks established by the study include publishers, lecturers of other universities, embassies of various nations, city or town councils, high schools and diploma awarding colleges. The major internal networks were found to be on library and information, higher degree offices, computer and ICT people, research and scholarship, and quality assurance people. The study established that programme co-ordinators accepted the need for stronger internal and external networks when carrying out their job tasks. The study also concluded that the regional location and experience of programme co-ordinators had no association with the internal and external network partner preferences. The study also conclude that RPCs need to be engaged in both internal and external marketing efforts of the university.

### IX. Recommendations

The researcher recommends ZOU to empower programme co-ordinators with resources that enable them to form strong marketing networks and relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. The regional programme co-ordinators are also encouraged to acquire more useful external information and resources that will boost the operational effectiveness of ZOU. An innovative network marketing culture will lead to the growth of student numbers and delighting both internal and external stakeholders. It is also recommend the application of the networking model by all units of ZOU at both regional and national centre levels.

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