SWOT ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Nurturing undergraduate student leaders has become a priority in higher learning as it is beneficial for the students, institutions, employers, and society. Even though there are numerous initiatives for developing and educating student leaders, there is a need for fundamental studies on what student leaders perceive leadership to be, and the situations in which they would view it as crucial. The purpose of this article is to share the SWOT analysis report that was used to evaluate student leadership's internal strengths and weaknesses, together with the external opportunities and threats. Structured open-ended survey questions were given to 78 student leaders during a leadership camp from a public university in Perak, Malaysia. Qualitative content analysis concept was used for the SWOT analysis. The core premise of a SWOT analysis based on the result must be taken into account for the leaders to better formulate a successful strategy, and for the planning of direction after carefully assessing the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities.

Keywords: higher learning, leadership, students' leadership, SWOT analysis

Introduction

Early in the 1950s, the SWOT analysis concept was introduced. The phrase was first used in reference to organisational strategies related to the environment. In the 1990s, it rose to prominence as a framework for strategic management and was used in a wide range of contexts and areas, including general management, academic and education, marketing and social media, health and healthcare, and agriculture (Benzaghta et al., 2021). With various applications, SWOT analysis in student leadership in the university is also feasible. SWOT analysis is the process of analysing an organisation's internal and external factors that influence the objectives of a project (Balamuralikrishna & Dugger, 1995). The tools included in SWOT analysis are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internally intertwined. The internal analysis assists an organisation in determining which of its resources and capabilities are likely to provide a competitive

advantage, and which are less likely to do so. An organisation can identify the significant opportunities and threats in its competitive environment by doing an external analysis. Opportunities are the elements in the environment that could be exploited to its advantage, and the threats are the elements in the environment that could cause issues for the entity (Teoli et al., 2019). For leaders and individuals of any organisation, understanding how to strategise plans or decision making is essential. Organisations frequently employ the SWOT analysis method for strategic management. It is the conventional approach to how strategies should be formulated. This method of strategic analysis is based on "tried and tested". Organisational management can find any possibilities to gain benefits using the SWOT analysis. Threats can be controlled and removed by comprehending weaknesses. An organisation can become more productive by using strategic planning to accomplish its objectives. In actuality, an effective strategic management depends on strategic planning (Gurel & Tat, 2017)

A multitude of definitions, concepts, and meanings have been used to describe leadership, one of the topics that have received the greatest attention in research and discussion. These concepts and definitions serve as a foundation for nurturing effective leadership across a range of organisational entities. Even though a definite definition of leadership that applies to all situations is not yet present (Almaki et al., 2016), this study could offer a wealth of knowledge for subsequent investigations. Leadership is defined as the relationship existing between the individuals who offer guidance and those who have the obligations and choices to follow the kind of leadership provided. Leadership involves influencing others to carry out a specific duty – it confers the power to change and carries an impact on the organisation, and the people. For example, Shah (2019) defined leadership as "…the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task". Others may think that leadership means the actions that will lead an individual in the right direction and enable the implementation of a strategic target. Azhar et al., (2013) on the other hand, stated that leadership behaviour is an important aspect highlighted in leadership: "A set of behaviour that enforces the people to formulate the organisational goals and then motivates them to jointly contribute in order to achieve an organisation's goals". While the definitions may vary, the general sentiment remains the same: leaders are those who know how to achieve goals and inspire others along the way.

Student leadership is critical for strengthening and improving the quality of a university's management as the students reflect their institutions. Universities value leadership because they believe that student leaders are best positioned to translate what they have learned at their university into significant contributions to the world after graduation. The persona of demonstrable ability to lead has become one of the crucial elements for undergraduate students' skills to adopt in the Malaysian tertiary education system (MOE, 2013). Each public and private institution, polytechnic, community college, and foreign university is required to include the component of student leadership in their programme learning outcomes intended from each graduate because of their university's education system. It could be integrated directly into the academic curriculum or through the institution's leadership training activities. In order to give the students additional chances to develop their leadership qualities, many student societies and clubs are created on their campuses as a part of their extracurricular activities. Throughout their academic careers, the students should take the chance to be a part of the leadership roles to develop their interpersonal skills, sense of self, and ability to do work efficiently and effectively. It is quite common to hear that universities serve as a breeding ground for future leaders. They are all expected to become skilled both in cognitive knowledge and leadership expertise by the time they graduate from a programme.

Many studies focus on the roles of leaders in an organisation (Santos et al., 2020; Toker, 2022). As known so far, there is a lack of studies that evaluate the traditional SWOT analysis among student leaders in higher education as most of the reported studies only concentrated

on academic leaders within a particular institution, or the implementation of new technologies and programmes within the context of higher education (Balamuralikrishna & Dugger, 1995; Leiber et al., 2018; Shvardak, 2021; Nour Awni Albelbisi et al., 2022). It is unclear if the SWOT analysis could be applied to heighten student leadership skills and to evaluate the potential crises of their leadership in higher education. The discussion on how to encourage student leadership's achievement today so that it can inspire successful leadership, and the strategic planning in the future for any organisation also arises. In response to this, this study was focused on a group of students who were elected by their peers to fill a variety of leadership positions in clubs and societies at a public university. The goal of this study is to convey the viewpoints and reports made by the student leaders for their individual leadership managerial system that includes the evaluation of leadership skills and crises using the SWOT analysis framework. SWOT analysis highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of their leadership.

The Problem

The problem is what are the students' opinions of their individual leadership managerial system in the university? To find the answers to this problem, the following sub items were questioned:

1) Which leadership skills (perceive leadership to be) should they engage in to formulate the strategy and put it into practice?

We examined the strengths and opportunities to get the answers to this question.

2) What are the potential crises (the situations in which they would view as crucial) in leadership?

We looked at the weaknesses and threats to find answers to the second question.

Methodology

Study Design

The aim of this study is to determine the SWOT analysis and to provide interpretation of the internal and external factors that student leaders should participate in or prevent successfully implementing an effective strategy. To find the answers, this study used the descriptive method to determine the student leaders' opinions through a structured open-ended questionnaire. In this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen as it fitted the objectives. To understand which factors will put the strategy into practice, it is important to investigate perceptions and real-life experiences.

Participants

This paper explores the context of student leaders in a Malaysian public university. The population frame is the student leaders in a public university. The list of student leaders is obtained from the university's student affairs office. The participants in this study were student leaders (n=78) who held leadership positions for academic societies (n=17) and non-academic societies (n=42). From 78 participants, 33 were males and 26 were females. In terms of leadership positions held, 19 were presidents, 4 were vice presidents, 16 were secretaries, 4 were treasurers, and 16 were committee members.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Structured open-ended survey questions were used in the SWOT analysis. The questionnaire was distributed to 78 students who volunteered to take part in this study. Each participant completed the online questionnaire, and the questionnaire was administered by researchers during a leadership camp. In this research, the SWOT analysis results and the opinions about the skills of leadership, and the potential crises were determined by qualitative analysis. In the

qualitative data analysis work for SWOT analysis, the "Qualitative Content Analysis" concept was used. The data were analysed within three stages (Yelken et al., 2012):

    i.   Classification of SWOT matrix

    ii.   Presenting examples

    iii.   Predetermination of the coding rules

Findings

This section presents the findings from the SWOT analysis of student leaders about leadership. This was accomplished by eliciting information from the participants' strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats. The student leaders in this study shared their experiences about leadership in their personal and professional lives.

Table 1: First Sub-Problem. The opinions of the students' leadership skills (perceive leadership to be) that they should engage in, to formulate the strategy and put it into practice, related to strengths and opportunities.

SWOT matrix: Strengths	Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes	Frequency	Examples
	S1. Establish expectations and goals, a vision, and an objective.		
	S1.1. A sense of aim and the ability to see what needs to be done.	3	"Make sure my team members are doing their work". "I know go to my job properly". "I always contribute to any events so that i know the progress of each member and can see they are growing by doing their task"
	S2. Organise and plan.		
	S2.1.A sense of preparation.	10	"I facilitate a task to make it easier for my group members." "My strength as a leader is planning in all part of situation to make the things happened." "I'm able to lead my organization to have a better planning for any occasion."
	S3. Affective response.		
	S3.1. Demonstrate genuine concern for the well-being of others and the followers.	9	"Empathy- I will be lenient and not pressure them to do their work as long as they follow the due dates". "I care about others and always think out a way to make them feel better". "I can make others feel comfortable to bring out the best of themselves."
	S4. Intergroup relationship.		
	S4.1.A sense of collaboration.	12	"I can give and take the ideas and others' opinions. Always hear my member's opinion". "I can be considerate when my group of people is having a problem during giving task and I handle it by giving options for them to choose on handling task."
	S5. Firm performance.		
	S5.1. A sense of strong leader.	9	"Always stick with my moto, which is "being a leader and not a boss" because leader will lead their team to the successful way and boss will just give an order to get them to the way he wants."

		" I can bravely speak to deliver my opinion to the others." " I have the confidence in leading, my words always come with experiences".
S6. Ability to make decisions. S6.1. Has the knowledge and skills to advise and make decisions that will lead to success.	5	"I can make decision and I stop myself from getting anxious if something unexpected happen." "I will always try my best to handle it with calm." "My strengths as a leader are that I am able to make up a decision for the party"
S7. Specialized skills. S7.1. Has a significant skill.	10	"I have the knowledge in corporate". "Intelligent in managing financial channels". "Management skill"
S8. Emotional stability. S8.1. Able in dealing with oneself and others in difficult times.	4	"I know how to handle problems without mix it with my personal issue, this is giving more advantages to others so that they don't need to involve in my problem". "My strengths as a leader are my emotional intelligence skill. I do believe that I'm good in controlling my emotion and face reaction even though I'm under a lot of pressure and stress." "I will leave my works for a while and settle all the problems faced in the club. I also will take the lead if my President is too busy with his works."
S9. Integrity. S9.1. Having integrity, moral fortitude, and the guts to keep their words will build trust.	2	"A leader that everyone can trust and stand with him."
S10.Enthusiasm. S10.1. Personal dedication that inspires and persuades others to take an interest in what the leader is attempting to achieve.	5	"Competence with strong guidance on encourage group members to communicate while provide ideas and we could manage on make things achieved." "I always motivate myself and others." "Responsible- I will make sure I lead or direct my group members properly and help them if they have any problem."
S11. Endurance. S11.1. Possesses the motivation and perseverance to see challenging assignments through to completion.	2	"I'm a hard-working person, I'll not give up in doing my works." "I am a responsible person. If given a task, I will do my best so that the task can be completed successfully and as planned."
S12.Quality of communication. S.12.1. A good ability to convey.	11	"Communication. When communicated well, everything will go smoothly." "Any organization can be more successfully managed and directed when I possess excellent communication skills." "Always communicate when comes problem."

SWOT matrix: Opportunities	Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes	Frequency	Examples
	O.1 Possibility of self-development		
	O.1.1. Attaining more knowledge and talents.	14	"Get more knowledge and know how to improve yourself." "Improve my self-development." "Creative"
	O.1.2. Acquiring confidence.	2	"Able to polish our soft skills and make us become more confident." "Able to talk in front."
	O.1.3. Networking	13	"The link and network with another organization will expand." "Able to collaborate easily with others." "We can get to know many people and increase our networking besides improving our social skills and leadership skills."
	O.1.4. Leisure time.	2	"Get to join several university programs/activities." "I also have the opportunities to join many events and programs."
	O.1.5. The honor of being the leader	13	"You will gain certain benefit that no one else can get." "Chances to manage various high impact programs for students and carried out their voice to the management." "Get help on the program."
	O2. The chance of discovering future initiatives.		
	O.2.1. Supporting career.	5	"Can be used as a modal in interview one day." "I believe that greater offers await me in the future because not everyone is able to lead. Thus, having such advantage, would allow me to be easily recognizable in the future."
	O.2.2. To find a better job.	2	"We can apply in the future (when we start working?) " It will train us to hold an even better position in the future." "I'm easy to get a job or a position in an organization."
	O.3. Positive impacts to oneself and others.		
	O.3.1. Trust.	5	"I will be seen as a person that can be trusted by other people." "People will feel easier to come and share their problems with me without hesitate." "Having a member who share their problem and things that may affected them during event organizations."
	O.3.2. Mentoring.	4	"Everyone will be able to take an action the way I want by receiving clear message/information." "They ask and hear your advice, but they matured enough if they want to take it or nosecone." "Easy for me too to give some advice."

O.4. Improve success.			
O.4.1. By having a clear vision.	6		"Have a clear mindset." "You can drive the team to offer more valuable information to the public." "I can give instructions on what I think is better for the association." "Create a team to work on an idea I have."
O.4.2. By having a shared vision.	5		"Propose working groups." "I can be a good leader based on my experience as a Deputy Vice president in my high school."
O.5. There are no opportunities.	7		-

Table 2: Second Sub-Problem. The opinions of the students' potential crises (the situations in which they would view as crucial) in leadership related to weaknesses and threats.

SWOT matrix: Weaknesses	Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes	Frequency	Examples
	W.1. Poor organisational management.	7	"Last minutes person." "Delay in evaluating task due to poor time barely can manage my schedule management." "My weakness as a leader is only that i have difficulties in managing my own time."
	W.2. The insufficiency of communication.	15	"Communication. Lack of communication skill which leads to miscommunication or misconduct any event." "Can't communicate well." "Less communicate with others."
	W.3. The difficulty in making decisions.	11	"Can't decide big decision." "Slow in making decision." "Weak Decision making."
	W.4. Individual behaviours.	20	"I cannot do work late." "I want everything to be perfect." "Being overly critical."
	W.5. Insufficient team spirit.	9	"You'll be hated for no reason." "You will face misunderstanding with your secretariat." "Lack of order.
	W.6. Insufficient speed and responsiveness.	2	"I am not a quick person." "Slow to act."
	W.7. Passive behaviours.	18	"Having a big circle." "i don't know most of my members." "Procrastinate."

SWOT matrix: Threats	Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes	Frequency	Examples
	T.1. Environment (family, friends or faculties).	6	"Having to many haters." "Toxic people."
	T.2. Time pressure.	3	"Time." "It sometimes distracts me from my studies." "Busy with event and assignments at the same time."
	T.3. Ignorance about strategy.	26	"People who don't want to work as a group." "Unclear/false information spreads in the organization may lead to destruction." "No teamwork and backstabber attitude in organization."

T.4. Inexperience.	18	"Not having much experience in handling the events." "I just follow them to learn something from them." "Subordinates do not execute your instruction as well as expected."
T.5. Lack of communication.	17	"Loss communication." "Lack of communication Each member does not discuss well and is not responsible in solving a problem." " Lack of communication from other group members could slows down the work rate as we need fast responses."
T.6. There are no threats.	6	None

Discussion

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis framework was applied to outline and highlight the strong points and issues in leadership among students in higher learning. The first step in a SWOT analysis evaluation is to identify strengths that are beneficial to enhance the quality of the leadership. Based on the questionnaires and the feedback, the top four strengths ranked the highest were: (i) intergroup relationship (a sense of collaboration), (ii) quality of communication (a good ability to convey), (iii) organise and plan (a sense of preparation), and (iv) specialized skills (has a significant skill). Student leaders with good intergroup relationships can practice managing people and develop a team of students-lecturers-staff that ensure the vision and mission of the institutions being at the highest priority. Leaders are continually in contact with different groups including the heads of departments, front-line workers such as the police and medical staff, or even external to the higher learning institutions such as the industries, suppliers, or communities, with all of them residing various traits of characters to build a beneficial relationship, and to initiate a connection. Engaging with various people can be said as a two-way connection between a mentor and mentee. In this context, a mentor refers to any person who acts as the advisor to the student leaders and the student leaders as the mentee. Typically, mentoring relationships have an impact on socially responsible leadership. It might be accomplished by encouraging student leaders to be receptive to new experiences, to value variations, to serve as role models, or to reach their full potential (Campbell et al., 2012). An effective communicator will stand by their statements, gain the respect and allegiance of their followers and members, thus demonstrating the strengths of the leader's character. Those leaders who have the quality of communication will inspire and motivate the surroundings – but without this ability, a leader would never win the trust of their followers who voted for them. According to a review, effective leaders are not only inspiring people, but they are those who can recognise the emotions of their followers through communication, and this trait has a direct impact on organisational efficiency (Wangchuk, 2021). Leaders with sturdy organising and planning skills are another key of successful leaders as they can create a realistic plan that helps others to accomplish the short-term goals or the long-term goals within a specific time. Certain initiatives' objectives would be met successfully due to the effective planning and organized work since the leaders usually coordinate the information in applicable ways as they can locate any information quickly and easily. However, effective management must deal with team complexity, whereas effective leadership deals with change. The real issue is to combine outstanding management and strong leadership and utilizing both to complement one another (Kotter, 2001). Some leaders were granted hidden strengths, for example they have some knowledge in corporate, financial, or even managerial skills. Those who have these latent skills generally inspire actions in others as they can set the appropriate people in the right places, create amazing results, and impress the viewers. A

finding showed that a leader with political ability is related to team performance as it considers as the political competence to be one of the main abilities required for an effective leadership (Liu et al., 2011).

The findings also analysed the top three opportunities with the highest ranking: (i) the possibility of self-development (attaining more knowledge and talents), (ii) networking, and (iii) the honour of being the leader. Opportunities for leaders to improve themselves as great leaders are essential because they can equip themselves to take on new positions and responsibilities, through half-year role rotation, or by doing action learning. Both examples help leaders to become more familiar with the various positions and duties within the team which in turn prepares them for progressive roles in the future. Continuous learning and training through various education programmes will improve the leader's effectiveness as they gain additional skills and knowledge that could be applied to their team. Student leadership development initiatives, for example, will transform leadership "inside-out" to foster ethical behaviour and decision-making in the future leaders (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). Getting any chances to set up a network can challenge the leaders' ideas as effective networking can exchange different ideas and actions, retrieve honest information, and connect different types of people who may not be on the same wavelength with themselves. In the process, the networking is broadened, and leaders can adapt to the ongoing uncertainty issues as they seek information and advice from others. It is proposed that schools and networks of schools are crucial locations for the exercise of leadership as the influencer through persuasion and negotiation that may challenge and alter current institutions (McGregor, 2007). Being a leader is an honour because they were chosen by the people who believed that they have certain abilities and talents to guide others. It is a privilege for the leaders to take on tasks while no one could lead them in incredible ways. Leaders must provide an example for others to follow to acquire the respect of others. Exemplary leaders understand that to gain support and uphold the highest standards, they must lead by example as it is the mechanism of "model the way". As a result, the followers can notice the leader's actions and align their own (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

Weaknesses are those that put a team or organisation at a disadvantage in comparison to others and delay the teams' ability to run successfully. Individual behaviours, passive behaviours, and the insufficiency of communication are the three highest-ranked weaknesses. Being overly critical for example, leaders who tend to be perfectionists, and continuously giving constant criticism on someone's work, ideas, products, performances, or any other aspects may lead to demotivation before achieving the goals. Using a position to reinforce one's own opinions and decisions, but having the unwillingness to take charge or risks, is one the examples of leaders' passive behaviours. Often, passive behaviours are related to the insufficiency of communication. Leaders who fail to communicate and struggle at encouraging others to carry out their assigned responsibilities show that they have a lack of confidence or are afraid of making mistakes. These flaws may cause their followers to be disrespectful towards their leaders, and the mission of the organization will likely opt the wrong pathway. Those weaknesses stated can be classified as behavioural flaws, and the idea that describes this sort of behaviour is known as destructive leadership behaviour (Aasland et al., 2009).

Ignorance about strategy, inexperience, and the lack of communication are the three threats ranked in this study. Threats are usually the barriers faced by the leaders that prevent them from making improvements. Ignorance of the team's strategies can lead to disappointments, missed opportunities, and the loss of valued team members due to the lack of understanding and collaboration. Leaders tend to disregard the opinions of others and stick to their decisions that prevent them from attaining their objectives. A lot of ignorant leaders are leaders who are inexperienced in managing their teams, and leaders who lack communication with their team members. All outlined threats can have a negative impact on the team members' motivation. This is in line with the findings of challenges faced by the student leaders who have inadequate

knowledge of their university's policies and statutes, having communication challenges between student leaders-student, and student leaders-management, and the lack of teamwork as well (Murage et al., 2019). Effective leaders should have the competence of vision, mission, and innovative approach to successfully achieve successful team transformation (Abbas & Asghar, 2010).

Conclusion

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis demonstrates that purposeful improvements are required to support institutional growth and development as well as aligning with the expectations of the management and the students. At the completion of this study, it appears that the current student leadership organisation has several issues. However, after considering both benefits and drawbacks, it is possible to conclude that the student leadership organisation has the foundation required to provide an individualised and distinctive experience, but focused improvements will be required for expansion and growth, as well as achieving institutional priorities.

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