The Relationship between Diversity of Student Grouping & Leadership in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is an international campus that recruits diverse students from all the places around the world such as the majority of American locals, the new immigrants and the international students providing achieving the entrance requirement (Division of Management Information, 2017). Dewey (1915) has pointed out that the function of the system pattern of the college community is highly emphasized to its important role as an embryonic society, which offers students a mass of opportunity dealing with the different issues every day such as the social issues of conflicts about encounter mass values, global cross-cultural impacts as well as the way of cooperating with other ethnicity.

Besides, leadership skills tend to become one of the necessary factors for whole personal development, especially in multicultural environment (Chung, 2013). Since students are not only require to absorb the knowledge from the book, but also to gain their unique attainment outside the books and the classroom. They are mastering the leadership skills throughout the different practices within the college life.

The purpose of this study is to seek the relationship between UIUC students and their distinctive styles of leadership under the theme of cultural diversity. Furthermore, suggestions will be provided to UIUC students how to cultivate global leadership when facing cultural diversity not only within college life but also expanding to their future development.

METHODS

- Literature review: Peer-reviewed journal articles found in UIUC library databases.
- Opportunistic sampling: Researchers approached to participants who are conveniently available to participate in study. The broad impact, universality and convenient approachability of Registered Student Organizations are qualified as study population.
- Interview: Researchers face-to-face interviewed ten RSO student-leaders and audio record during the interview.
- Self-evaluation: Interviewees need to complete a self-evaluation form with open-ended questions after the interview.
- Transcription and Coding: Researchers transcribed the interview and coded the interview and self-evaluation form, then came up with the preliminary findings.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- The students leaders engaging to the organization results in the factor of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, while intrinsic motivation comes prior to the first consideration:
- Intrinsic Motivation: personal interest, willing to service
  - “I learned about them and I thought there would be very interesting.”
- Extrinsic Motivation: sense of belonging, self-esteem
  - “When I came to UIUC in 2015, I knew no one, so I decided to go out and make some new friends.”
- The main expectation to a leader are their distinctive collective role as to serve for the others. Despite this point, the self development as well as the attainment throughout the service process cannot be denied as one of the significant reasons for taking up the pose as a leader:
- Individual perspective: self-development, getting leadership experience
  - “I felt like my skills can be practiced better.”
- Collective perspective: giving back, contribution spirit, help other people develop
  - “My view is that I cannot just take from the people, and I have to give back to people.”
- “They have questions, we teach them about the specific topic we are talking about.”
- The diverse culture grouping requires the awareness of both self and social needs, resulting the acceptance of each other and the functioning as a whole entity, which the organizing should be also placed with the forefront of the global perspective.
- The diverse culture grouping emerge the students’ perspective on the necessary skills and characteristics of a leader should possess, especially in dealing with the context of diverse cultural values:
  - Communication & Interpersonal Skills
  - Conflict Management
  - Confidence
  - Faithfulness & Feeling Passionate to the organization
  - To be Open-minded to the new challenges
  - Responsibility
- Within the diverse cultural grouping, the focus should be placed on the common goals, which the group members and the leaders should adjust their perspectives on self and social awareness of considering both others’ needs, but not rather to develop the inherent difference such as the identical stereotypes and the language barriers.
  - Strengthening: “When everybody is very open, they can go up with anybody.”
  - Weakening: “Language Barriers, and we get very hard to understand.”

SUGGESTIONS

- Leaders in diverse student grouping give following suggestions to UIUC students:
  - Language is interrelated to the corresponding culture. In order to acquire better language skills, students should be attentive to the culture such as the related tradition, festivals, cuisine, which also results fostering the process of integrating to that community.
  - Do not retreat from the cultural shock, always be open-minded to the new things. While encountering the cultural shock, do not be encapsulated but rather to have deeper understanding about the difference of the nature. It is better to be positive within the overall process.
  - Always keeping the mind from bias and adulation, critical thinking should be implemented to balance the overall view within the context.

CONCLUSION

Through a series of interviews and self-evaluation, our research figures out that the diverse cultural grouping student leaders are influenced by the prior factor of intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation also comes up as the inferior factor.

Traditionally, leaders are expected on their distinctive collective role as serving for the others, while our research illustrated that the student leaders also hope gaining the attainment of self development, improving skills as well as the unique experience throughout the service. Thereby, with Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), the whole person development should be treated as one of the encouragement that attracts students in the process of cultivating the future leaders.

When it comes to the mission of diverse student grouping, the organization should cultivate of both self and social awareness for the group members (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005); emphasizing the global perspectives and the functioning as a whole entity, which results accepting the diverse cultural values. Markedly, it is inevitable for the weakening of bonding organization by the inherent factors such as language barriers and cultural differences. Thereby, student leaders should always be positive and understanding the needs from the group members, even doing the favor for the minority and the tiny adjustment, so that everyone is fair treated within the group.

Finally, our findings of the suggestion given by the diverse cultural grouping leaders are applicable for both the current college context as well as contributing to students’ self cultivation and the future development.