

Best Practices for Starting a Student-Led Management Organization on Campus

Abstract

This roundtable session presents best practices for starting a *student-led* (versus faculty-led or staff-led) professional organization on a university campus which helps to build leadership and management skills through hands-on practical experiences, events, and activities outside of the classroom. As a jumping-off point of discussion, we will share a brief overview of our experiences overseeing the student-led management organization on our campus. Participants will share their own successes and challenges in starting and/or leading student-led organizations at their institutions, leading to best practices and recommendations.

Keywords:

student-led organization; student club; leadership development

Introduction

The purpose of this roundtable session at MOBTS Oceania would be to present best practices for starting a *student-led* professional organization on a university campus which helps to build leadership and management skills through hands-on practical experiences, events, and activities outside of the classroom.

As the faculty advisors for such a student-led organization on our campus, one intended outcome in this roundtable would be to share the design and parameters of the organization on our campus while soliciting ideas and input as to how this model might be successfully modified and implemented at other institutions. The key distinguishing factor in this conversation about such campus organizations that promote leadership skills in students is that such an organization must be *student-led* (versus faculty-led or staff-led). Our roundtable would make this emphasis clear and direct the discussion with this aim in mind.

Another intended outcome would be to solicit recommendations and discussion from session participants who currently are involved with (or previously were involved with) student-led organizations at their institutions that focus on the development of leadership and management skills. Both those interested in starting such organizations on their own campuses and those with current or previous experience leading such organizations would be the intended audience for this roundtable. These discussions would help identify the reasons behind the successes and the challenges faced in these student-led organizations.

Our Student-Led Organization

We will provide a brief overview of the student-led management organization on our campus to illustrate the information that we would present in this roundtable. The organization on our campus is more than a student club—it is one of 80 international chapters of a worldwide

educational nonprofit that promotes moral and ethical leadership. Our campus' organization (or *chapter*, as we call it) has been in existence for more than 10 years and is led by a 9-student executive board, all of whom are current students on our campus. The organization boasts a membership each semester of about 150 students on campus from a variety of majors.

Each year, the student-led organization hosts at least 35 events or workshops on campus for the community that promote ethical leadership in some capacity. Under the guidance of the faculty advisors, these events and workshops are planned and executed entirely by the students, with fellow students being the primary audience. The executive board also oversees 6 committees within the chapter that are composed of students interested in specific areas such as leadership development, recruitment and retention, global leadership, marketing, and women in leadership.

Some challenges that we experience as faculty advisors of the student-led organization (we are two of four advisors) include maintaining continuity in the chapter due to high student turnover each semester, constant training of new executive board members, remaining financially viable through constant fundraising, and providing strategic oversight to the chapter.

As mentioned previously, the intention of this roundtable would be to use the student-led organization on our campus as a jumping-off point for further discussion about how such student-led organizations can be successfully launched and maintained.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications.

The literature includes a few articles and studies regarding student-run or student-led organizations on college campuses. Student-led organizations and clubs are so prevalent that one in four college students report that they are involved in at least one student-led organization during their freshman year of university studies (Rosch & Collins, 2017). Such student-led

organizations serve as an “appropriate experimental laboratory for students as they develop a leader identity and practice their leadership skills and behaviors” (Rosch & Collins, 2017, p. 17).

Not all of the student-led organizations discussed in the literature relate specifically to leadership or management; however, some of the challenges of these student-led organizations are universal. Three universities in Japan, for example, house student-led environmental management systems on their campuses that provide MBA students with experiential learning as they collaborate with businesses on environmental issues. Challenges faced with these student-led organizations on these campuses include the burdens on the students and the differences in awareness of the issues of the students leading the initiatives (Okayama, 2019). Another article reports that student organizations are an important component of the educational experience on pharmacy satellite campuses and allow students to develop professionally and engage with communities. Such challenges for these student organizations include campus size, distance between campuses, and communication (Scott et al., 2016).

As stated by (Rosch & Collins, 2017), we see a student-led management organization as an “experimental laboratory” to develop leadership—a natural extension of the concepts taught in management and OB courses (p. 17). While instructors may teach principles of leadership, providing immediate avenues to apply the information can be difficult for students who do have logical opportunities in their employment or other settings. This concept would be emphasized in this MOBTS roundtable session.

Session Description

We envision organizing the 60-minute roundtable as follows:

10 minutes—Introductions. Brief overview would be provided of the student-led organization on our campus (how it’s structured, goals, opportunities, challenges, our role as advisors, global reach, etc.)

15 minutes—Session participants would self-select into 3 categories by their common interests and/or experience in any form of student-led organizations on their campuses: 1) have no involvement with a student-led organization but have interest in creating one; 2) previously involved with a student-led organization but it did not sustain momentum and is not currently active; 3) are currently involved a student-led organization that runs regularly and consistently. Members in each group would share their current opportunities, challenges and goals of starting or managing a student-led organization. A handout would be given to each group to help keep the discussions on track. This handout would include questions such as, “What has been your biggest success?” “What has been your biggest obstacle or challenge?” and “What is a significant goal you have for the organization?”

30 minutes—Each group would share the challenges and concerns discussed in the small-group session. Common challenges and concerns from all groups would be identified and discussed in a large-group setting. (For example, one common challenge might be lack of funding from administration to start an organization like this.) The intention of the large-group discussion is to identify best practices.

5 minutes—Conclusion and wrap up. Main takeaways and best practices from the session would be identified and highlighted.

References

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