A Case Study of Leadership at a Women's College:

Teamwork, Diversity, and Confidence Building

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on women college students' leadership, teamwork, diversity, and communication skills while planning and executing a leadership event in Japan over a period of seven months. Data were gathered from 11 students who completed two online questionnaires: Questionnaire A was administered while planning the event and Questionnaire B was administered after they executed the event. The questionnaires asked about the difficulties/joys of teamwork as both a leader and a follower as well as the lessons they learned through the process. An analysis of the questionnaire results indicated drastic changes in participants' views of leadership, teamwork, diversity, and communication skills. Students' learnings mostly occurred during teamwork planning efforts, but after the execution, the learnings become established as a sense of appreciation and self-confidence, thereby enhancing their potential as a leader and a follower.

KEYWORDS: Leadership Education, College Student, Teamwork, Diversity, Confidence Building

1   INTRODUCTION

This study reports on a case study of women college students' leadership education, including teamwork, diversity, and communication skills, in Japan. The University of Sacred Heart Tokyo in Japan is a women's college that offers its Program in Global Leadership and Development (PGLD) to students who wish to learn leadership and teamwork skills applicable to society and the globe. One of the curricula involves the students coordinating as a team to plan and execute a unique event as both a leader and a follower. Throughout the program, students have numerous opportunities to develop their leadership, teamwork, and communication skills as well as experience diversity through event planning and execution. This case study illustrates the types of hardships and joys the students found in the teamwork, and it attempts to reveal possible measures teachers can take to offer a better learning environment to future students to enable them to grow into great leaders.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 [1], Japan ranks 121 among 153 countries, indicating it has larger gender gaps due to women's limited economic and political participation in Japan. Okugiri (2019) [2] described Japan as still struggling to promote more women as leaders; thus, leader education is essential for female university students to encourage their careers and participation in society. Usui, Rose, and Kageyama (2003) [3] reported that even tertiary schools and universities focus on educating female students to become good wives and mothers. Many young women are expected to quit their jobs when they get married in order to stay home and raise their children while their husbands work outside the home. Once their children are old enough to go to school, many of these women attempt to get a job, but most end up not being able to go back to their previous professional jobs and instead work part time without any responsibilities or rewarding work. Unfortunately, this is still the truth among the majority of people in Japan.

Meanwhile, the Japanese government has failed to provide a welfare plan or childcare service to support women. As a result, many women still need to choose between marriage and a career. If they choose marriage, they are often expected to quit their jobs. In addition, it is practically impossible to keep a job once they have a baby because the Japanese government does not provide sufficient day-care services for those who need them, particularly in urban and residential areas due to the low capacity. Even the application requirements for child daycare services affect women. In order to apply for a placement, mothers are required to have a job, but mothers cannot get a job unless they have a daycare placement for their child. This no-win situation means that most give up on the application and, thus, their careers. At the same time, husbands are never expected to sacrifice their careers—not by society or by their wives.

Even when women do not wish to get married, they are constantly bombarded with questions about when they are getting married. Many Japanese people still hold on to the stereotype that a healthy woman gets married in her mid-20s and starts having children. This obsolete mindset remains prevalent in Japan because of a lack of understanding of diversity. Indeed, this stereotype harms human rights, including the rights of LGBTQs. Although every woman has her own philosophy on happiness, the distorted stereotype does not allow many women to pursue their unique philosophy.

Hence, considering women's careers in Japan, it is still tremendously difficult to simultaneously achieve both happy private lives and careers due to the lack of diversity, and we are still struggling with this fact. People in Japan, including women, need to acknowledge diversity and the numerous ways that people can choose to live. To give university students a chance to learn about diversity and develop a global mind, some universities in Japan are now eager to construct a leadership curriculum. Furthermore, women's universities need to offer a program like PGLD to give students various life choices and future careers while developing

their leadership, teamwork, and communication skills to promote women's futures and help them find a meaningful place in society.

2   THE STUDY

The University of Sacred Heart Tokyo started offering PGLD in 2018. The program is not compulsory, but is open to those students who want to develop their leadership skills and apply these insights to their future careers. Applicants can enroll in PGLD, a two-year program, starting in their second year and are required to complete it in their third year. The curriculum includes introducing a leadership mindset, engaging in teamwork, attending a seminar, and participating in two activities: completing a three-month internship at a company or non-governmental organization and planning and executing a leadership event. In 2020, 13 third-year students involved in PGLD at the University of the Sacred Heart Tokyo were required to plan, coordinate, and host an event with group members to develop interpersonal, communicative, and problem-solving skills. They were given approximately seven months (over two semesters) to complete the event. They also had monthly meetings with two mentors to receive feedback on their planning (one of the mentors was the researcher). The students were also asked to hold five team meetings to discuss and plan the event. Students were free to choose any topic that involves global issues for the event. In 2020, the students executed the event online due to COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control requirements. They were told to form a group, with two to four members in each group, and they chose food sustainability, COVID-19, gender, and education as the event's topic.

2.1   Method

The researcher asked the 13 students to complete two questionnaires. Questionnaire A was administered three months after the students started planning the event but before executing it. Questionnaire B was administered after they held the event and asked about the difficulty/joy of teamwork as a leader and a follower as well as the lessons they learned through the process. The researcher explained that the questionnaires were not requirements for class credit and would not affect their grade at all; they were free to decline to answer if they wanted to. In the end, 11 students volunteered to complete both questionnaires. An analysis of the questionnaire results indicated drastic changes in their views of leadership, teamwork, diversity, and communication skills.

2.2   Questionnaires

Questionnaires A and B used the same format and questions. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires using Google Form. The questions were as follows:

Q1. Was planning (and executing) the event easier than you expected? Why do you think so?
Q2. What was the fun part or pleasure of teamwork? Describe your experience.
Q3. What did you learn from the experience?

The participants were asked to provide comments in response to each question. They were allowed to write as many words as they wanted to write.

3   RESULTS

The questionnaire results included keywords that indicated participants' thoughts and ideas about teamwork; thus, their responses revealed particular inclinations about their views of teamwork. The keywords are summarized in Table 1, followed by an explanation of the details of each comment. For Questions 2 and 3, the total number is more than the number of participants (n=11) as some participants wrote multiple keywords.

Table 1 Keywords in Participants' Responses (n=11)

	Keywords	Questionnaire A	Questionnaire B
	Q1: Was planning (and executing) the event easier than you expected? Why do you think so?		
responses	Difficulty understanding diversity	5	4
	Difficulty fixing team meetings	5	3
	Communication among teammates	0	4
	No difficulty	1	0
	Q2: What was the fun part or pleasure of teamwork? Describe your experience.		
responses	Diversity among teammates	9	0
	Similarity among teammates	1	0
	A sense of accomplishment	1	10
	Face-to-face meeting and chatting with teammates	0	1
	Appreciation of participants	0	1
	Q3: What did you learn from the experience?		
responses	Diversity	5	1
	Importance of communication	4	2
	Importance of planning	2	0
	Importance of ideas/opinions	2	0
	Pros and cons of online event	1	0
	Appreciation of others	0	4
	Good sense of team spirit	0	2
	Sense of responsibility	0	1
	Ability and possibility	0	2

In terms of difficulty in teamwork while planning (i.e., Q1), as asked on Questionnaire A, half of the students (n=5) found difficulty planning with their teammates particularly in terms of understanding diversity, such as different opinions on the team; the other half (n=5) experienced problems scheduling team meetings and adjusting to teammates' schedules. Excerpts from their responses are as follows. Words in parentheses are the keywords of difficulty they experienced.

(1) It might be effortless to do a thing alone. Listening to teammates' opinions and reaching a conclusion/goal was very difficult. (diversity)
(2) Each member seemed to have so much to do other than the planning, like university classes, a part-time job, or chores at home. Thus, we were not able to have meetings so often. It seems this problem was also due to being online and not being able to meet face-to-face because of COVID-19. (schedule)

However, according to the responses on Questionnaire B, which was administered after executing their event, the same question (Q1) indicated that students found more concrete and critical problems regarding communication, including difficulties communicating effectively or reaching a conclusion with teammates (n=4), understanding diversity among teammates such as coming to a decision among various ideas in a team discussion, and understanding teammates' differences in their work paces, styles, and degrees of enthusiasm (n=4). Another

problem was adjusting to teammates' schedules to set team meetings (n=3). Excerpts from their responses are as follows:

(3) Online communication was demanding. (communication)
(4) We were not able to see each other's progress due to online communication. (communication)
(5) We took too much time to set the event's goal because each of us had different ideas. Our whole plan was delayed, and we were in chaos right before the event. (team discussion)
(6) We could see each of us worked differently in pace and had a difference in degrees of enthusiasm. (difference in work paces, styles, and degrees of enthusiasm)
(7) We could not have enough meeting time, which caused a difference in workload. But we tried to be connected on SNS, sharing each of our progress. (scheduling)

In summary, the responses while planning and after executing the event revealed that various learning took place. While planning the event, the students started to understand the psychological (i.e., diversity) and physical (meeting teammates' schedule) difficulties. After the event, they shifted their focus to communication/expression in requesting a task or sharing work. They realized the need to cope with the difference in work paces, styles, and degrees of enthusiasm among teammates and found them difficult and challenging. It is also notable that their comments referred to problems with online communication, which is probably due to the fact that this event planning was taking place at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, while people were still acclimating to exclusively online communication as part of the prevention and control requirements.

For Q2, on Questionnaire A, nine of the 11 respondents answered that they enjoyed diversity, including discussions with teammates. This is an interesting result because, as previously explained, half of the students found understanding diversity to be a significant difficulty for teamwork. Still, all of them answered that understanding and accepting different opinions during team discussions were a pleasure and beneficial for teamwork. One of them answered she enjoyed conversations in meetings because she found similarities in her team. Another student responded that she was happy when she felt a sense of accomplishment. Excerpts from their responses are as follows. Words in parentheses are the keywords.

(8) I was happy when our mentor said our idea was better after we had a discussion where each of us shared various thoughts. (diversity)
(9) I was able to find similar values we had on the team through discussions. (similarity)
(10) I enjoyed creating presentation slides because I could see our ideas starting to take shape. (a sense of accomplishment)

Meanwhile, as indicated by Q2 on Questionnaire B, 10 students were content when they felt a sense of accomplishment; interestingly, no one mentioned diversity. Only one student answered that she was pleased when she was able to meet her teammates face-to-face. A face-to-face meeting was not required in the program, but they decided to have one anyway. Another response mentioned her appreciation for the participants at the event. Excerpts from their answers are as follows:

(11) Since we needed to create many things, including movies and questionnaires for the participants from scratch, I felt a strong sense of accomplishment when we made each. (a sense of accomplishment)
(12) I was so happy when I was able to have a face-to-face meeting on the day before the event day because we were only allowed to meet online by then, and I found it not

stressful to have a discussion differently from an online conversation. In addition to that, we were able to chat, which was fun. (face-to-face meeting and chatting with teammates)
(13) I was happy because our mentors and people visited our online event even though they were not required to do so. (appreciation of participants)

The final question (Q3) asked what they learned throughout the process to plan and execute the plan. On Questionnaire A, the students showed a tendency to focus more on the team—namely, diversity (n=5), the importance of communication with teammates (n=4), the importance of planning (n=2), and the acceptance of different ideas (n=2). One highlighted the pros and cons of the online event. Excerpts from their responses are as follows. Words in parentheses are the keywords.

(14) My working style is always quick and efficient in planning. But through teamwork, I understood that taking enough time to think carefully may lead to good results. (diversity)
(15) I learned it is crucial to have enough discussions to decide the theme for an event that all teammates agree on. (diversity)
(16) I learned that planning and the consideration of others are essential, in addition to teamwork. (planning and diversity)
(17) I learned the importance of *hōrensō*. We had trouble restarting the discussion as our team were not in contact for a while. (communication)
(18) I learned that, when we make a decision, it is still vital for a team to consider how the teammates who had different ideas would feel and think. (acceptance of different ideas)

In (17), *hōrensō* is Japanese slang for the ideal business attitude. "Hō" stands for "hōkoku (report)," "ren" for "renraku (communicate)," and "sō" for "sōdan (consult)," *Hōrensō* sounds identical to the Japanese word for "spinach," and the sound is familiar to people in Japan. The idea has been valued particularly in the business scene because it fits the Japanese leadership style, as Lewis (2018) pointed out [4]. Figure 1 illustrates a simplified version of the Japanese leadership style.
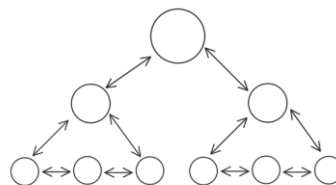

Figure 1: Japanese Leadership Style

As the Japanese leadership style values *hōrensō*, decision-making is generally slow, but each team member knows what is happening in the division. In Figure 1, teams on the bottom do not have the authority to make any decisions. They report their decisions in discussions to the head of the division. Only when the head agrees does the head report it and discuss it with their supervisor, and the head then informs the bottom team of the decision. If the decision is no, the team needs to start the discussion from zero again. Therefore, *hōrensō* is the basic idea of the Japanese leadership style. However, in this approach, no one needs to be assigned responsibility because the reports, communications, and consults are most valued in an organization. In the Japanese culture, sharing information among team members is appreciated most, regardless of the outcome.

For Q3 on Questionnaire B, after running the event, some still found frequent communication to be a decisive factor for a successful team (n=2). Still, the students were also more inclined to see an appreciation of others (n=4), the importance of good team spirit (n=2), a greater sense of responsibility (n=2), and more abilities and possibilities (n=3). One of the students noted that diversity is essential for being receptive to new ideas. Excerpts from their responses are as follows:

(19) Sharing information was crucial. We made several changes in the plan right before the event day, and I learned that sharing information among teammates would help fix the event much faster. (communication)
(20) I noticed I had many people who helped me. (appreciation of others)
(21) I know we had so many hardships, but I was happy to see that I had my teammates, and we felt a sense of achievement together. (appreciation of others)
(22) In teamwork, I learned good team spirit leads to event success. We were lucky to have a leader who facilitated our team meetings. We enjoyed every meeting because she never mentioned any negative words or opinions. (team spirit)
(23) I thought I needed to do my job for the team. (responsibility)
(24) Before, I believed my capacity was limited, but I realized that I could make ideas into reality after the event. From now, I think I will not be afraid of anything challenging. (ability and possibility)

Therefore, while planning the event, the students focused more on diversity, communication methods, and planning. But after the event, their comments were more introspective; they noticed their appreciation of teammates, participants, and people around them and their abilities/potentials. They also realized the responsibility and nature of the team, which indicated that the experience brought them successful learning about teamwork.

4   CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that students experienced drastic changes in their thoughts and values about teamwork. Students faced difficulties in diversity in the process and communication problems among the team after the event, but they enjoyed encountering diversities on the team and feeling a sense of accomplishment, which implies students can promote self-esteem by executing an event. Students' learnings occurred mostly during teamwork planning efforts, but after the execution of the event, the understandings become established as a sense of appreciation and self-confidence, enhancing their potentials as both leaders and followers.

This study showed that leadership education with event planning and execution had a positive psychological effect on students. Such education will positively impact students in universities in Japan, as it is highly beneficial for women to experience success, acknowledge diversity, and build self-confidence to promote women's leadership.

The limitation of this study is the limited number of participants. Future research should gather responses from more participants to draw definite conclusions.

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