| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Online Leadership: Experiences of Student Body Organization Officers

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the online leadership experiences of fourth-year male and female student body organization officers at the University of Cebu-Main Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Informants were purposefully selected using a qualitative phenomenological research design. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted for data collection, employing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006). Key informants' responses identified seven emergent themes under three overarching themes that addressed subproblems. The participants' experiences as student leaders in the online setup revealed two emergent themes: distress and opportunity. Difficulties faced included poor communication, external issues, time management, and emotional distress, classified into four emergent themes. Coping mechanisms centered around purpose as a single emergent theme. The findings and recommendations from the study aim to address challenges encountered by student officers in the online setting.

1. Introduction

Student organizations play a pivotal role in fostering the overall development of students on a global scale. These entities offer avenues for students to enrich their leadership abilities, participate in community service initiatives, and establish connections with peers with similar interests and goals. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic arises, it poses many unexpected challenges worldwide, forcing people to design and implement flexible ways to deal with the new circumstances that have caused unprecedented changes in the world, particularly in the education sector. Schools and universities have closed their doors, and students had to adjust to a new normal of online learning. All the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic leadership of student organizations have been tested in different ways.

According to Gacutan (2006), the role of student leaders and student organizations will remain critical amid the changing situations that restrict or limit people's educational chances. As a result, to mitigate the problem, schools have created a virtual space for student leaders to pursue their leadership, where they can continue to organize, plan, implement, and facilitate their programs and relevant activities, thus allowing them to develop critical consciousness and collective action that can transform education and society for the better.

The pandemic's global impact has altered or influenced all parts of life, including education, which primarily encompasses the teaching and learning process and learners' relevant experiences, including campus leadership. Hence, the paradigm of campus organizations, student participation, interactions, and student leaders must be reassessed, retooled, and redesigned without losing its core and importance in the learners' educational process (Logue, 2005).

International studies, particularly in Malaysia, have shown the complexity of today's schools amidst the pandemic. To improve school performance and student learning results, school leaders are now accountable for managing change, establishing organizational capacity, and implementing technological innovations. This position was attained due to the most recent significant international paradigm shift in how school leadership was envisaged. Moreover, it was also shown that virtual world behaviors could enhance real-life leadership skills (Nuangjumnong et al., 2016) and that people can acquire leadership and professional skills in virtual environments (Lu et al., 2014).

Further, to mitigate the issues in online leadership, one of the universities in the Philippines, specifically in the Western Visayas, Sorsogon State University, School of Graduate Studies, implemented a 15-week online distance learning course on servant leadership to enhance their leadership brand. This resulted in the creating of an online distance course on their leadership style and innovation toward e-learning readiness for its design, development, implementation, and evaluation (Digo, 2021).

Additionally, in Cebu City, particularly at the University of Cebu Campus, the crisis severely impacted higher education at all levels, wherein student organizations and interest groups are being pushed to be creative and innovative to keep in touch with their members while sustaining their core program. Hence, the academe was forced to continue their service, meetings, and transactions online because of higher education institutions' complexity and multifaceted missions of teaching, conducting research, and contributing to society. Moreover, schools have created a virtual space for student leaders to pursue their leadership, conduct virtual meetings, organize and facilitate online activities, and keep in touch with each other.

With the given context presented above, the researchers decided to conduct this study during the pandemic to know how student officers dealt with the changes and challenges encountered in the organization, how student officers maintained their focus in the face of challenges as well as to understand the experiences being faced by student online officers and how student officers anchored their purpose amidst the problems being raised.

2. Theoretical Background

The main anchor theory of this study is Fred E. Fiedler's (1967) Contingency Theory of Leadership. Further, this study is supported by three other theories, which include the Transactional leadership by Max Weber (1947) and Transformational theory of leadership by James Macgregor Burns (1978), Connectivism Theory: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age by George Siemens (2004), and Digital Student Leadership Development by Josie Alquist (2017).

Fiedler's Contingency Theory, often called Fiedler's Contingency Model or Fiedler's Theory of Leadership, asserts that "there is no single optimum leadership style." Instead, the most effective leadership style for any situation is tailored to the situation. Fiedler (1967) added that the proper leader should be chosen based on their skill set and the demands of the situation. Also, to adapt effectively to events, leaders must shape their natural leadership style and shape whether their management strategy suits the situation. Moreover, the Contingency Model best depicts the impact of experience on organizational behavior and leadership. It focuses on how specific circumstances influence a leader's performance and how their ability to adapt can be their most valuable tool in the workplace. He also examined the personalities and traits of leaders. He concluded that since a person's leadership style is formed through their experiences in life, changing it is difficult, if not impossible. As a result, situational control has shifted from low to moderate (Asana, 2022).

Fiedler (1967), on the other hand, added that environmental situations are classified by their degree of favorableness. Two elements contribute to this: "natural leadership style" and "situational favorableness," later called "situational control." Fiedler (1967) found that a leader's chance of success is determined by their natural leadership style and the favorableness of their circumstances. Besides, there are three criteria used to determine whether a situation is favorable for the leader: (1) whether the leader perceives friendly relationships with subordinates (leader-member relations); (2) whether the task is highly structured with standardized procedures and measures of adequate performance; and (3) whether the leader's level of authority is punishing or rewarding group performance.

Furthermore, this is determined by the context, which Fiedler (1964) defines in terms of favorability for the leader of the situation. He stated that there are three criteria of impact on the favorableness of environmental conditions: (a) The leader-member connection, (b) task structure, and (c) position power.

The leader-member relation characteristic is the extent to which members of a leader's group trust and appreciate them, demonstrating a willingness to follow their guidance. This characteristic is typically measured using one of two methods: (a) a sociometric technique in which group members are asked to name the most influential member of their group or the man they would most like to have as a leader, or (b) a group-atmosphere scale in which eager feels accepted by a group. This impact on the favorableness of environmental conditions is the second most significant attribute apart from task structure. On the other hand, task structure is the degree to which a task is spelled out in-depth for a group and can be completed according to a precise plan and standard operating procedures. The rationale behind this trait is rooted in the notion that unstructured or ambiguous tasks create challenges for a leader to exert influence, as neither the leader nor their subordinates have clear guidance on what needs to be done or how to accomplish it.

Another theory used in the study is the Transactional leadership by Max Weber (1947) and the Transformational leadership theory by James Macgregor Burns (1978). Transformational leadership theory states that leaders use transformational leadership to define a long-term vision, empower their subordinates, teach and develop them to maximize and transform their potential, and effect cultural change. In this theory, the focal point of the relationship lies in the interaction between leaders and followers.

In addition, transformational leadership is a path that focuses on a leader's beliefs, values, and attitudes to illuminate their practices and abilities to lead change. This concept explores the charismatic and inspirational leader who motivates followers to change and improve at a task that creates a vision that guides change and embeds the change with the help of others' commitment. These leaders value their subordinates as persons and strive to improve their awareness, morality, and talents by providing meaningful and complex work of having a positive outlook on the future. They are "visionary leaders who strive to appeal to their followers' better nature to lead them toward higher and more universal goals and aims ."Besides, transformational leaders are often motivated by their ability to convey to their followers the importance of the task (Burns, 2003).

Transactional leaders, on the other hand, emphasize obtaining compliance through the provision of rewards and advantages. The differentiation between transactional and transformative leadership is highly significant. It is said that transactional leadership is a "telling" approach, whereas transformational leadership is a "selling" type. Transformational leadership stresses motivation and inspiration above transactional leadership which uses positive and negative reinforcement, transformative leaders on the other hand are proactive, whereas transactional leaders are reactive (Weber 1947).

Moreover, these leaders are concerned with the team's success and providing individual team members with the encouragement they need to reach their most significant potential. Thus, transformational leaders are said to "engage in relationships with followers based on shared values, beliefs, and goals," which impacts the performance that leads to the goal's achievement.

As a result, transformational leaders actively strive to "transform" individuals, enabling them to collaborate for mutual benefit and contribute to the overall betterment of themselves and the organization (Chen, 2011).

Furthermore, according to Weber (1947), leaders believe that rewarding and punishing employees will motivate them. If a subordinate does what is expected, he will be rewarded; if he does not follow the leader's wishes, he will be punished. The leader and the follower interact intending to achieve shared performance goals. These exchanges involve four dimensions: Contingent Rewards, Active Management by Exception, Passive Management by Exception, and Laissez-faire.

A contingent reward is a type of goal that sets mutually agreed-upon goals and provides various rewards for successful performance. They provide their employees with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, and timely) targets. Active Management by Exception is when leaders constantly monitor their subordinates' work, watching for departures from rules and standards and taking corrective action to avoid errors. Passive Management by Exception is the standard for leaders to monitor if the performance of their subordinates needs to meet the standard and others seem to have a shortage of expectations from them. They may even resort to punishment in response to poor performance. Lastly is Laissez-faire; these leaders create an environment where subordinates can make decisions. The group frequently needs more direction because the leader abdicates responsibilities and avoids making decisions. Therefore, the transactional leadership style is considered insufficient; it serves as a foundation for more mature interactions, but leaders must be careful not to use it solely; otherwise, an environment dominated by status, power, benefits, and politics may emerge (Weber, 1947).

Moreover, Biswas (2000) added that time management clarifies goals and objectives in a leadership context by prioritizing duties and responsibilities that makes a leader more effective and strategic. This indicates that managing time can also increase the leaders' performance because he believes the key to time management is working smarter and more effectively.

The second supporting theory used in the study is the Connectivism Theory by George Siemens (2004). This learning theory for the digital age connects old and new knowledge to produce new meanings and understandings. It is a learning model theory that helps and guides advising by integrating "principles examined as chaos, network, and complexity theories, as well as the knowledge that decisions are made on quickly changing foundations. Connectivism theory is supported by an international study, particularly in Malaysia, which states that school leaders are now accountable for managing change, establishing organizational capacity, and implementing technological innovations to improve school performance and student learning results. This position was attained due to the most recent significant international paradigm shift in how school leadership was envisaged. Moreover, it was also shown that virtual world behaviors can enhance real-life leadership skills (Nuangjumnong et al., 2016) and that people can acquire leadership and professional skills in virtual environments (Lu et al., 2014).

This concept shows how connectivism as a theory relates prior information to current information that includes technology in the realm of knowledge and encourages students to reach beyond their understanding to connect information, which might be effective for academic advising. Moreover, college administrators, particularly academic advisors, compete for students' time with these required or present experiences. Advisors are part of a "'zero-sum,' in which the time and energy spent on family, friends, work, and other extracurricular activities reduce the time and energy available for educational advancement" (Astin, 1999). The premise is that knowledge continually changes due to various factors such as peer pressure, technology, and media. Besides, technology has changed how people live, communicate, and study in the previous two decades. The learning needs, and theories that define learning principles and processes should mirror the social situations in which learning occurs. "Learning must be a way of being," "a continual collection of attitudes and deeds by individuals and society to battle to keep up with the astounding, novel, untidy, invasive, repeating experiences" (Vaill, 1996).

The last supporting theory is Digital Student Leadership Development by Jose Alquist (2017). This theory explains that the crisis had a severe and long-lasting impact on higher education at all levels. However, because COVID-19 has impacted the economy and education, 2020 has brought a new concept of the new normal. It is a fight in which people are driven to adjust to a situation where their education and financial security are at risk. The New Normal in Education is defined as a shift in learning space from public to private and a shift in delivery method (i.e., teaching). It is a shift in teaching and learning methods from one-size-fits-all to individualized and differentiated learning, a shift in learning evaluations, and a shift in responsibility in the teaching and learning process with the active participation of household members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership was needed, and it is called Leadership in the New Normal (Francisco, 2020)

In addition, because of the complexity of higher education institutions and their multifaceted missions of teaching, conducting research, and contributing to society, leaders faced a massive challenge in managing change in the academe under COVID-19. As a result, digital student leadership development was born (Lopez, 2021).

Furthermore, student leadership is a type of leadership found in colleges and schools where students are allowed to lead a group or an organization within the institution that is in a position to influence, motivate, and assist others toward achieving a goal. On the one hand, student leadership can be viewed as a burden that detracts from a student's ability to concentrate on his or her studies; on the other hand, this can also be considered as a proud accomplishment that is respected by employers who recruit students, who have experience getting involved in leadership and who can also express or exhibit talents that he or she possesses. As a result, educational system is responsible for inspiring and motivating students to become leaders who can potentially make positive changes in a world that are currently confronted with numerous issues (Ghamrawi et al., 2018).

Moreover, being a student leader teaches students how to manage and lead teams in an organization, comprehend how systems and processes function, deal with people and make successful and ethical decisions. Student participation and expressing thoughts and opinions are significant goals of student leadership. Student leadership aims to connect with educational concepts and give a platform for young students to learn about their rights and duties, express their opinions, and participate in decision-making. Thus, students who have leadership experiences are more devoted to civic engagement and develop skills such as conflict resolution and planning (Ghamrawi et al., 2018)

Merrill (2006) states that leadership refers to a person's ability to influence or lead their peers; it usually involves motivating its members to act in the group's best interests. To be a leader, one may possess the innate qualities of being one, but it also is a skill that can and must be learned, and therefore, something that can and must be taught and nurtured over time. In the face of uncertainty, being a leader can be tricky since there are no easy answers or clear pathways. These are particularly true for leaders trying to maneuver their organizations amidst the pandemic. Thus, leadership in an online context consequently creates misunderstandings and miscommunication, including the communication barrier. Moreover, groups handling conflict can affect group performance, satisfaction, and commitment. Therefore, if a group develops good communication norms early, they set themselves up to be more effective leaders and less conflicts (Pazos et al., 2012).

Further, the leader's motivation for work or relationships is evaluated using the Least Preferred Coworker scale (LPC). Using ratings on a list of eight bipolar descriptions, managers are asked to identify the employee (past or current) they get along with the least (e.g., distant– cold). High Low LPC values suggest less favorable opinions are expressed about the least preferred co-worker than those with higher LPC levels. A person with a high LPC score is motivated to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships, while a person with a low LPC score is motivated to focus on task completion. Task and relational incentives are persistent traits challenging to change. Therefore, persuading a high or low LPC leader to adapt to the times would be difficult, if not utterly ineffective. This model advises partnering with a high or low LPC leader in the proper situation to increase the likelihood of a successful group outcome claims (Fiedler, 1967).

In addition, there are three criteria used to determine whether a situation is favorable for the leader: (1) whether the leader perceives friendly relationships with subordinates (leader-member relations); (2) whether the task is highly structured with standardized procedures and measures of adequate performance; and (3) whether the leader's level of authority is punishing or rewarding group performance. The leader-member interactions, task structure, and position power produce eight different scenario types, referred to as octants 1–8, which have been more generally referred to as favorable scenarios, intermediate situations, and unpleasant situations. The most typical situation is whether a leader with a high or low LPC can manage effectively. While high LPC leaders are most effective in influencing group performance in intermediate circumstances, low LPC leaders are more effective in favorable or unfavorable circumstances (Fiedler, 1967).

Consequently, Bass (1990) expanded the notion of "Transformational Leadership Theory." He introduced metrics to quantify and rate transformational leadership achievement and the concept of leaders showing actual and focused energy to encourage others to emulate them. Bass (1990) also added that leadership "attempts to motivate followers to rearrange their needs by transcending self-interests and reaching for higher-order requirements," which aligns with Maslow's 1954 higher-order needs hypothesis. He believes that assessing the impact fosters a more genuine sense of community that a leader's supporters should feel not only trust and admiration but also loyalty and respect. These sentiments build an environment where followers are willing to work harder than they previously thought possible. This is because transformational leaders provide followers with more than personal gain—an inspiring goal and a sense of self. Even though it was developed in the 1970s, Bass's paradigm now resembles transformational leadership. The transformative leadership style's foundation never changes; only the environment in which it must be implemented does.

Moreover, transformational leadership is characterized by four crucial traits: idealized influence, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Each of these four factors contributes to the efficacy of the leadership style by supporting followers to become better and more productive individuals. Transformational leaders can radically change the direction of their followers when these attributes are united. The primary trait of transformational leadership, idealized influence, pertains to the degree to which a leader attends to the individual needs of each follower, maintains open lines of communication, and provides empathy and support. The leader recognizes and respects the contributions that each of his followers may offer to the team. The second is inspiring motivation. This is where leaders are motivated to work harder because they believe in their potential.

Furthermore, they are inspired by the leader's vision for the future. Third is intellectual stimulation, the extent to which the leader encourages his people to be creative by questioning assumptions, generating new ideas, and taking chances. In this trait, followers are encouraged to ask questions, think critically, and develop new ways to do tasks. There might be a repetition in your statement. If you are referring to the fourth trait of transformational leadership it is individual consideration, which indeed involves the extent to which a leader pays attention to each follower's needs, maintains open lines of communication, and provides empathy and support. The leader recognizes and respects the contributions that each of his followers may offer to the team (Bass, 1990).

The advantage of transformational leadership is working together towards a common goal. Transformational leaders are known for their ability to quickly assess a company's current situation and design a viable plan for its improvement and expansion. The leader communicates her vision with passion and conviction to her team, ensuring everyone is on board. At the same time, employees are encouraged to complete tasks since the entire work experience is viewed as a meaningful and thrilling journey. On the contrary, the disadvantage of transformational leadership is that it can cause burnout. While some people find transformational leaders inspiring, others perceive them as a constant source of stress.

Moreover, transformational leaders value authenticity. They must live and breathe the organizational culture and principles. Consequently, constant pressure to achieve a great goal and take pride in the company's accomplishments give the employees a feeling of demotivation and burnout. It sends the idea that much more is required than simply showing up, performing an excellent job, and then leaving (Burns, 1978).

In addition, according to Ghamrawi et al. (2018), students with leadership experiences are more devoted to civic engagement and develop skills such as conflict resolution and planning. They teach students how to manage and lead teams or organizations, comprehend how systems and processes function, deal with people and make successful and ethical decisions. The organization should notice greater productivity when a transformational leader joins the team because it is much easier to enhance performance when everyone pulls in the same direction. Everyone can see the big picture and feels united by a common purpose. Wherein student participation and expression of thoughts and opinions are significant goals of student leadership, student leadership aims to connect with educational concepts, invest time and effort, and give young students a platform to learn about their rights and duties, express their opinions, and participate in decision-making. Student leadership is a vital part of higher education, and it is crucial to know what it includes to promote and develop the phenomenon, "*look at it through the eyes of students"* (Sullivan, 2004).

Furthermore, student organizations play a crucial role in the holistic development of students worldwide. These groups offer students the chance to develop and refine their leadership skills, participate in community service activities, and establish connections with peers with similar interests and values. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic arises, it poses many unexpected challenges worldwide, forcing people to design and implement flexible ways to deal with the new circumstances that have caused unprecedented changes in the world, particularly in the education sector. Schools and universities have closed their doors, and students had to adjust to a new normal of online learning. With all the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, leadership of student organizations has been tested in different ways. Leaders are under tremendous psychological strain, with members of numerous groups expecting regular reassurance and assistance. Furthermore, time constraints, uncertainty, a lack of information, and a high degree of stress make the decision-making process more complex. In this scenario, good leadership can assist the organization in becoming antifragile and resilient, allowing it to develop during a crisis through creative thinking and rapid learning from experience (Taleb, 2012).

Consequently, a study on Digital Student Leadership Development by Ahlquist (2017) states that educators invest time, resources, and even pride in student leaders. These students take on positions of power and influence, from student government president to resident assistant, delivering student services to their peers and ideally making an impact on the entire university community. Because student leaders have grown up with social media communication tools and have had daily interactions with technology, they bring a wealth of existing experience and perspective to their positions.

Moreover, according to Marcketti et al. (2011), schools and colleges are vital in shaping societal leadership quality. This indicates that students can have the chance to showcase and develop their talents, speak their views and opinions on particular issues, and hone their leadership skills. Similarly, Hodgson and White further stated that "effective leadership is about striking the right balance between needs, context, and behavior." The best leaders have the right traits and the ability to assess the needs of their followers, analyze the situation at hand, and act accordingly.

In addition, Marcketti et al. (2011) suggest that leaders were born and not made. This contrasts sharply with more recent approaches to leadership development, which regard leadership as a relational process and not as exercising hierarchical power. Modern perspectives assert that leadership is not an innate trait but a skill that can and must be learned. Therefore, leadership is viewed as something that can and must be taught and nurtured over time (Peterson & Peterson, 2012).

According to the modern post-industrial leadership paradigm, leadership is not only needed when commanding a group of followers but also in diverse and everyday scenarios such as "setting a good example for others, looking ahead to the future, taking the initiative to change the status quo, building teamwork and trust, and encouraging others to succeed" (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). This indicates that leaders are typically driven by their capacity to demonstrate to their followers the importance of the work and the greater good that is involved in doing it. These leaders are concerned with the team's success and providing individual team members with the necessary encouragement to attain their full potential. These leadership theories will assist in honing their abilities.

Fincham (2013), in the context of online learning in higher education, states that learning and teaching have generally been considered direct interpersonal classroom activities in educational environments. With the evolution of information technology in general, and the Internet and online technologies in particular, a rising emphasis has been placed on developing distant learning methodologies that expand space and time boundaries. How groups handle conflict can affect group performance, satisfaction, and commitment (Martinez et al., 2012).

Roussin and Weber (2012) highlighted the importance of leadership effectiveness, trust, and consistency in communication to enhance job completion success. By being governed by these three points, they found that employees communicate effectively

and honestly with one another and are responsible for their actions. This indicates that effective leadership results from a combination of talents that may be learned or acquired. Thus, everyone can learn to lead effectively (Chen et al., 2011).

3. Objective of the Study
The study aimed to investigate the experiences of student leaders in the online setup during the 2021-2022 academic year at the University of Cebu-Main Campus. It specifically focused on understanding online leaders' unique challenges, exploring the difficulties encountered, and examining the coping mechanisms employed in this distinctive environment.

4. Methodology
This section presents the research design, research environment, research informants, research instruments, research procedures, data collection, data analysis, data analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness of the study.

4.1 Research Design
This study is a qualitative study that employs a phenomenological research design. A phenomenological study is the appropriate research design to address the interest in the phenomenon's essence (Lin, 2013). This research design relies on the in-depth experiences of the informants about a specific phenomenon that enables them to comprehend the significance of people's lives.

4.2 Research Environment
This study has been conducted at the University of Cebu- Main Campus, Sanciangko St. Cebu City, in 2021-2022. The University of Cebu, in its humble beginnings in 1964, also known as the Cebu College of Commerce (CCC), has come a long way. The University of Cebu (UC) is granted Deregulated Status by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). It is recognized by the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA) as a learning institution with the most accredited programs. UC is currently fostering the potential of over 42,000 young minds and generating board top-notchers through its four campuses around Metro Cebu: (a.) the main campus along Sanciangko Street, including the new UC – Pri Building for Senior High School students (located along Private Street, Brgy. Sambag I, across Elizabeth Mall – the sister company of UC); (b.) the Banilad campus along G. Cuenco Street, Brgy. Banilad; (c.) the UC – LM (Lapu-Lapu – Mandaue) campus along A.C. Cortes Avenue, Brgy. Lo-oc, Mandaue City; and (d.) the Mambaling campus, also known as the Maritime Educational Training Center (UC – METC) along Alumnus Street, Brgy. Mambaling. As of 2022, all campuses have more than 80,000 enrollees, and all four campuses offer services in preschool, grade school, Junior & Senior High School, and undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

4.3 Research Informants
The participants of the study were the student officers of the University of Cebu-Main Campus S.Y. 2021-2022 student body officers. The researchers identified participants through purposive sampling. Participants are student body officers enrolled in the University of Cebu – Main Campus for the school year 2021-2022.

4.4 Research Instrument
This research utilized semi-structured open-ended interview guide questions focused on the student's experience in online leadership. Afterward, the interview guide has been passed to the research adviser for approval. The researchers and adviser thoroughly checked the guide questions for the research study and the research participants.

4.5 Research Procedure
This section delineates the methodologies employed for both data collection and subsequent analysis. Data were gathered through semi-structured open-ended interviews, conducted face-to-face in-depth to ensure comprehensive insights. A total of sixteen informants, comprising eight female and eight male student officers, were purposefully selected to participate in the study. The qualitative data obtained underwent thematic analysis, utilizing the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). From the transcripts of the in-depth interviews, codes, categories, and common themes were identified. The emergent themes, a total of seven, were then classified under three overarching themes to provide comprehensive responses to the subproblems posed by the study.

4.5.1 Data Collection
The researcher gave the letter of consent addressed to the Head of the Organization, duly signed by the Dean of the Department, asking permission to conduct a study inside the University of Cebu – Main Campus campus. Upon the approval of consent, the researcher started finding participants and asked for their participation in the study. The researcher distributed a consent form a day before the interview to obtain an agreement to participate.

The researcher discussed what the study is about, provided background, and the possible questions to be asked. Questions asked will be open-ended questions. During the interview, the researcher used a voice phone recorder to record their answers. The

participants were assured that the data collected would be used for the sole purpose of research and no other than. Participants were interviewed and were asked to answer it with all truthfulness and honesty. All the questions are collected, and the participants' responses are kept confidential. Once the interview ended, the researcher expressed their appreciation for the participation.

4.5.2 Data Analysis

When the data was collected, the researchers transcribed the audio/video recording for transcription. The researcher utilized Thematic Analysis to analyze the data. Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method for identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It details the data and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations (Boyatzis, 1998). In the first phase, the researcher transcribed the participants' answers and wrote down the initial ideas and relevant information. Researchers summarized their answers and translated vernacular answers into the English language. In the second phase, the researchers carefully read and re-read their answers for coding and find relevant connections between the codes to categorize each code and what theme it will belong to. The researchers reviewed the given codes and identified the final themes. The researcher started discussing and writing the results of the said study.

5. Results and Discussion

This qualitative analysis and discussion are derived from semi-structured interviews on the experiences of the student body organization officers in an online leadership setup. The collected data from the participants' responses were extracted and analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006).

This qualitative study relied on a comprehensive understanding of the transcribed responses. The transcripts were comprehensively read for every main informant's transcribed response to identify the overall sense of its content coverage. The significant statement was obtained, recorded, and encoded using Microsoft Word from the questionnaires to the transcripts of the interviews. The significant statements were properly encoded with their designated number of responses and informant number for efficient tracing. A total of 112 significant statements represented the online leadership experiences of study body officers. The researchers formulated meanings for the 112 significant statements extracted from the transcripts. The coded formulated meanings clearly explained the informant's experiences.

The formulated core meanings that shared the same patterns of ideas and structure were grouped. These common groups of formulated meanings were categorized as cluster themes. There were 59 cluster themes developed. The cluster themes were then improved and re-grouped into sub-themes, merging two or more cluster themes. The merging of cluster themes resulted in 12 sub-themes. Finally, the seven sub-themes were clustered to form the major themes known as emergent themes.

A. **Experiences of Online Student Leaders**
 I. **Distresses**
 1. Pressured
 2. Misunderstanding
 3. Self-doubt
 II. **Opportunity**
 1. Met Great Leaders
 2. Lead and Serve Others
 3. Enhancement of Leadership Skills
B. **Difficulties Experienced by Online Student Leaders**
 I. **Poor Communication**
 1. Intermittent Internet Connection
 II. **External Issues**
 1. Limited Activities
 2. Incompetent Officers
 III. **Time Management**
 1. Conflict on Schedule
 IV. **Emotional Distresses**
 1. Draining
 2. Frustration
C. **Online Student Leaders Coping Mechanism**
 I. **Anchoring on purpose**

5.1 Experiences of Online Student Leaders

The data gathered by the researchers were found to have acquired important information that was later extracted and simplified into seven emergent themes. The following themes are (1) Distress, (2) Opportunity, (3) Poor Communication, (4) External Issues, (5) Time Management, (6) Emotional distress, and (7) Anchoring on purpose.

5.1.1 Distresses

Leaders in an online setup had difficulty managing themselves to project in a way that they were being understood despite the barriers on screen. The transition from face-to-face classes to an online set-up differs from adjusting and practicing the digital stage, wherein student leaders face distress. Stress has been identified as a critical factor in determining how thriving leaders perform. It can be described as any change that creates physical, emotional, or psychological pressure. The body's reaction to anything demands focus or action of stress. Leadership stress often results from a failure to concentrate on a particular demand. This is supported by Taleb's (2012) concept, which states that leadership has been put to the test in various ways due to the uncertainty of the pandemic. Leaders are under great psychological stress, and members of many groups expect regular assurance and support. The decision-making process is further complicated by limitations on time, uncertainty, a lack of information, and a high-stress level. In this situation, effective leadership can help the organization become antifragile and resilient, enabling it to grow through innovative thinking and rapid learning from experience during a crisis.

5.1.2 Pressured

This theme describes the experiences of student body organization officers in the online set-up, wherein they have experienced being pressured. The participants felt that students expected a lot from the platforms they had provided during the campaign period or that they had to do many duties or make many decisions quickly. Some of the participants mentioned that they have been experiencing frustration, discouragement in their eagerness to work, sleep deprivation, and doubting themselves for having the position. The following sentiments of the participants are the following:

Participant no. 3 answered that:

> Honestly, I am pressured, and it frustrates me. For someone who wants to deliver productive work of leadership, a series of unfortunate events is not welcomed. I could not lie that sometimes it discourages my avidness from working and dispirit my commitment to duties.

Also, participant 4 stated:

> *From the word itself online setup especially leading noh, it was indeed pressuring and difficult to balance academics and organizations because I am a grade-conscious person. I experienced sleep deprivation countless times and ended up with a fever.* (Online setup especially leading, was indeed pressuring and challenging to balance academics and organizations because I am a grade-conscious person. I experienced sleep deprivation countless times and ended up with a fever.)

In addition, participant 5 mentioned that:

> I think being a leader in an online setting is challenging and pressuring at the same time, especially when you cannot do the things you were planning to do.

Moreover, participants 6 and 10 added that:

> *Bitaw ahmm para nako, it was very alienating and pressured, given that the job description of my position was very specific. I was elected as our Society's auditor and we had no budget throughout the pandemic; no budget means there were no expenses and that was nothing for me to audit—hence, my auditorship was not properly exercised and it really frustrates me.* (..it was very alienating and pressured, given that the job description of my position was particular. I was elected as our Society's auditor, and we had no budget throughout the pandemic; no budget means there were no expenses, and there was nothing for me to audit—hence, my role was not adequately exercised, and it frustrates me.)

Participant 10 added:

> *Ahmm, pressured kayko since it is an online setting, and it's difficult to conduct events online due to unstable internet connections (sometimes). Also, we have to keep up with the CAS, especially new students who*

> *weren't aware of the existence of SBO*. (Pressured, since it is an online setting and it is sometimes challenging to conduct events online due to unstable internet connections. Also, we have to keep up with the CAS, especially new students who needed to be made aware of the existence of SBO.)

Lastly, participant 10 mentioned that:

> Diba online setup naman jud, during those times is that it makes me feel pressured and stressed at some point that sometimes makes me doubt if I truly made the right decision to join the SBO. (Since it was an online setup *during those times, it made me feel pressured and stressed at some point, sometimes making me doubt if I genuinely decided to join the SBO.)*

All the statements mentioned above reflected the transformational leadership theory of Burns (1978), which states its disadvantages that includes burnout and a constant source of stress. The theory also states that constant pressure to achieve a great goal causes employees to feel demotivated and burned out.

5.1.3 Misunderstanding
This theme describes that during the pandemic, social media and online platforms enable the majority of our interactions. As well as in online leadership, student leaders communicate through the different social media platforms. That, it is clear that misunderstanding occurs through poor communication, resulting in inaccurate interpretations of ideas and beliefs as well as other personal concerns.

As what participant no. 4 answered:

> *In addition, some conflicting issues exist within the organizations dili gud ma wala ang mga misunderstandings sa grupo kay since it was online meeting niya the connection interruption pa gud it was indeed hard.* (In addition, some conflicting issues exist within the organizations, which as misunderstandings among groupmates since it was an online meeting plus the connection interruption, it was indeed challenging.)

Also, participant no. 4 added that:

> ...*contradicting opinions with co-officer's kay as human as we are we have different views and opinions and beliefs and whatsoever ahmm naa gud time na dili magkasinabot in terms of deciding kay lagi kita tanan nagkalain-lain na perspective.* (...contradicting opinions with co-officer's human as we are, we have different views and opinions and beliefs and whatsoever in terms of deciding because we have different perspectives.)

The same is valid with Participant No. Three who answered that:

> The many instances that our bond as student leaders went on a bad trip is rooted in only one reason, as for how I have pondered on those adverse incidents. It is always about communication and the miscommunications that result in falsely interpreting ideas and opinions through meeting conversations. Several times occurred when Leaders inside the organization misunderstood each other, and personal rifts transpired.

Furthermore, participant 14 agreed and answered:

> There are some misunderstandings with co-officers and difficulty in committing specific tasks...

The statements above show that misunderstanding happens because of poor communication. In addition, leadership in online setup consequently creates misunderstanding that includes the barrier on communication. Thus, because of the different opinions and ideas of the members of the organization, it resulted them to needing clarification on what they really meant to intent. How groups handle conflict can affect group performance, satisfaction, and commitment. Therefore, if student leaders develop good communication, they become more effective leaders and have less conflict within the organization (Martinez et al., 2012).

5.1.4 Self-doubt

This theme describes that leadership online is significantly difficult that it caused the participants to doubt themselves, primarily if tasks are distributed unfairly and with prioritizing other responsibilities. At some point, some of the participants began to doubt their capacity of accomplishment in the online platforms because they thought they were failing, which put pressure on them.

According to participant no. 9:

> *Ahmm, sometimes miss it it makes me feel self-doubt and low self-esteem because it feels like sometimes, I am a failure as a student and a leader and it doesn't enable me to manage and lift up together with the other leaders.* (Sometimes, there is self-doubt and low self-esteem because it feels like I failed as a student and a leader, and it does not enable me to manage and lift up together with the other leaders.)

Furthermore, participant no. 10, also answered that:

> *Diba online setup naman jud, during those times is that it makes me feel pressured and stressed at some point that sometimes makes me doubt if I truly made the right decision to join the SBO*. (...during those times it makes me feel pressured and stressed at some point that sometimes makes me doubt if I truly made the right decision to join the SBO.)

Moreover, Participant No. 14 also mentioned that:

> The negative experiences was there was a misunderstanding with co-officers, and I was also having doubts about my positions because of the online setup.

The statements above mean that the participants experienced self-doubt and low self-esteem, making them question their ability to perform online. This contradicts the statement of Bass (1990), which states that leadership "attempts to motivate followers to rearrange their needs by transcending self-interests" and "provide followers with more than just personal gain—an inspiring goal and sense of self". This implies that during an online setting, student body organization officers gained a loss of interest and experienced self-doubt.

5.1.5 Opportunity

Online leadership allows student leaders to explore new learning environments that demonstrate their ingenuity and creativity. This allows them to be creative in resolving issues and develop their skills. The following opportunities are as follows:

5.1.5.1 Met Great Leaders

This theme describes that despite conducting their leadership in an online setting, student leaders were still given the opportunity to meet great leaders. Even though a barrier were unavoidable, these never stops them meeting and greeting other fellow officers as well as building rapport and trust to have a harmonious online organization set-up.

Based from the experienced of participant no. 1, she answered that:

> *...nice siya na experience miss kay, kanang naka meet gani ko ug other fellow officers na mas taas nako ug year level niya na strong ang among bond miss ba niya kanang... kanang naka influence mi ug naka build mi ug friendship ana.* (It is a pleasant experience since I have met fellow officers that turned into friends)

Furthermore, participant no. 8 also mentioned that:

> *hmm, despite of.. ,any even though we have an online set-up, it does not stop us from engaging new people, man pud. For me the positive experience as a leader in an online set-up is I met new people even though we haven't met yet face to face...* (Online set-up does not stop us from engaging new people. For me, the positive experience as a leader in an online set-up is I met new people even though we have not met face to face yet.)

Also, participant no. 16 added that:

> *Ahmm, Kuan ka nang, I get to meet great leaders amidst the online context, and I get to build great relationships with them and Kuan sad, I also realized that conducting activities online can be as exciting*

and as fun just like in face to face setup. (I get to meet great leaders amidst the online context, build great relationships with them, and realize that conducting activities online can be as exciting and fun as in a face-to-face setup.)

The sentiments mentioned above is depicted in Ghamrawi et al. (2018) which states that, student leader teaches students not just how to manage and lead teams or organizations, but also how to comprehend the systems and processes of function work, how to deal with people, and how to make successful and ethical decisions. In this sense, student leaders not only learned how to comprehend leadership in an online setup, but they also got to meet great leaders, enabling them to build friendships united by a common purpose: to serve and lead others.

5.1.5.2 Lead and Serve Others
This theme describes the outside service of student leaders, the main goal of which is to extend help to others. Serving others gives the participants a memorable and fulfilling experience that desires them to assist the growth, prosperity, and well-being of others.

As what participant no. Three stated:

> The most unforgettable positive experience there is applying all that cognitive learning to simple actions of volunteerism, you know, extending service outside the school. I have recalled how our student body organization arranged a feeding program for the fire victims from a barangay in Mandaue City before, and it was fulfilling to realize that the services we could give as student leaders are not just limited within the walls of our university, that we could do things for the community.

In addition, participant no. 10 also stated that:

> *Ahmm daghan man nga positive experiences, one of them is that i was able to serve the CAS even in an online setting. I got to know more people in the CAS community, and I was able to learn from other people to enhance my skills in technicalities since everything was done online.* (One of my many positive experiences is that I could serve the CAS even in an online setting. I got to know more people in the CAS community, and I could learn from other people to enhance my technical skills since everything was done online.)

And participant no. 10 added that:

> - ...*On the brighter side, ahmm, being a member makes me feel that I am able to serve and help my co-students.* (...On the brighter side, being a member makes me feel that I am able to serve and help my co-students.)

The statements mentioned above are supported by the expanded notion of Bass (1990) which states that, there are four critical traits of transformational leadership (known as the "four I's") idealized influence, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Leading and serving others falls under the fourth trait of transformational leadership: individual consideration. It is the extent to which the leader pays attention to each follower's needs, keeping lines of communication open and offering empathy and support. This means that student leaders serve in ways that go beyond the boundaries of the institution; instead, they could also serve and take actions for the community.

5.1.6 Enhancement of Leadership Skills
This theme describes how student body officers enhance their leadership skills in the online platform that contributes positive factors toward themselves, including attending seminars that honed their leadership skills and sharpening their flexibility in given work tasks. The following sentiments are as follows:

According to participant no. 3:

> *Hmmm wait, I think the positive factors include attending seminars that hone my understanding about leadership, as well as online training that made me able to proffer effective service for my fellow students and our college.* (The positive factors include attending seminars that honed my understanding of

leadership and online training that allowed me to provide adequate service for my fellow students and our college.)

Furthermore, participant no. 4 also stated that:

It sharpens my leadership skills in terms of flexibility in tasking and schedules. Moreover, it helped me handle my responsibilities well.

And lastly, participant no. 8 answered that:

I also got the opportunity to attend some activities, thus helping me to gain knowledge about the University and the right things to do as an officer.

The statements mentioned above are supported by Taleb (2012), which states that these organizations provide opportunities for students to enhance their leadership skills, engage in community service, and connect with like-minded individuals. Amidst the pandemic, leading never stops, and by that, as student leaders involved in online leadership, they have the opportunity to enhance their skills and abilities.

5.2 Difficulties Experienced By Online Student Leaders
5.2.1 Poor Communication
Poor communication often creates a tense environment wherein people are unmotivated, unproductive, and not inspired to cooperate. Thus, poor communication can lead to many misunderstandings and arguments. Out of sixteen (16) participants, eight (8) officers encountered this difficulty which resulted to another issue, and that is intermittent internet connection.

5.2.2 Intermittent Internet Connection
The rise of the internet has caused people to communicate differently in areas never dreamed of before the internet came into existence. But, unfortunately as the online leadership platform takes into place, poor connection is one of the difficulties during an online leadership because some of the student officers lived in a rural area, they are bombarded in organizing, planning, implementing, and facilitating their programs and relevant activities is frequently ruined by the intermittent internet connection. The following difficulties are as follows:

According to participant no. 1:

My experience is that despite na mo participate man sila online no kada leader especially naay mga activities na kang online sad pero dili gud ma wala ang problema sa internet connection or kanang naay bagyo especially sa Odette. (My experience is that despite you participating online, every leader especially has activities online, but there is no problem with the internet connection or there is a typhoon, especially in Odette.)

Furthermore, Participant No. Three also states that:

...operating leadership in an online setting made communicating excessively difficult. Of course, we have to talk about our plans, countermeasures, and concerns; hence we have to communicate, but doing it on screen, through an application, is an entirely different feeling. Most of the time, it feels inadequate and unclear. In arranging events for the students, the online setup's uncertainties make it challenging to be a leader. We have to cancel events due to bad internet connection or proceed to an event with less student engagement because they are also experiencing poor connection.

Participant No. 5 also added that:

...since its online man and my co-officers struggles to have internet connection due and ang uban kay tagsa ra maka sulod sa meet kay mostly nag gamit lang ug data kanang magpa load ra bitaw unya dili siya guarantee na long lasting kay magkahurot magka hinay sad ang signal so very challenging gud sa connection pa lang daan.

Moreover, participant no. 6 specified that:
Too many to remember, but it all boils down to three words: slow internet connections.

Also, participant no. 8 mentioned that:

> *I think so far sa online set up akong problem ra gud is the connectivity usahay ma wala ko sa meet due to poor connection...* (I think my problem is the online setup due to the connectivity and poor connection...)

In addition, participants 11 and 14 also explained that:

> My experience as a leader, during the online setup has not been easy. Communication with my co-officers was affected due to the internet connection. Also, events held online were affected due to the poor connection so far, and the problem is the connectivity.

Participant no. 11 added that:

> During my term, I was able to experience many misunderstandings because communication in an online setup is not clear, unlike the face-to-face setup. As I have mentioned, the connection is one of my main problems during that time. At some point, there will be a loss of connection, and sometimes the sound of the speaker and even my hosting there are delays and buffering internet connection, which makes me quickly get irritable.

And lastly participant no.14 answered that:

> *Kuan miss ahmm, I have experience organizing virtual activities, meetings, celebrations and intermittent internet connection while holding or organizing activity.* (I have experienced organizing virtual activities, meetings, celebrations, and intermittent internet connection while organizing activities.)

The statements above depict that one of the biggest problems student leaders face is the intermittent internet connection that hinders them from completing their duties and responsibilities. Lack of internet connection can have a variety of effects on a student leader's performance within the organization. Furthermore, with the evolution of information technology in general, and the Internet and online technologies in particular, a rising emphasis has been placed on developing distant learning methodologies that expand space and time boundaries (Fincham, 2013).

5.2.3 External Issues
External issues impact an organization's progress; these issues cannot be controllable, but it can adapt to them. The following includes limited activities and incompetent officers.

5.2.4 Limited activities
This theme describes that during online setup, student officers were able to experience difficulties such as limited activities in executing their plans in a short period. The following statements were from the student officers who were experiencing errands in implementing their activities online.

Based from the participant no. 5 states that:

> *Sa amo ato na time very struggle mi ato ug unsaon pag execute...our plans knowing that we are only limited to the online setting niya lisod pud i implement ang mga activities in an online setting oy which is mag brainstorming pa mi unsay angay i activity in an online setup which is nabagohan sad mi sa sudden changes.* (Currently, we are having much trouble figuring out how to put our plans into action because we can only do so in an online environment. It is also challenging to carry out the activities—such as brainstorming activity ideas—in an online environment. We regret the sudden changes to the online setup that have occurred.)

Also, Participant No. Seven also shared that:

> *Kuan ahmm, activities were limited, meetings/communications were always interrupted by connectivity...* (activities were limited, meetings/communications were constantly interrupted by connectivity...)

And, participant no. 15 pinpointed that:

> There are many challenges. One is to organize virtual events or activities with limited time.

The statements mentioned above are supported by a local study in Cebu City, particularly at the University of Cebu Campus, the crisis severely impacted higher education at all levels wherein student organizations and interest groups are being pushed to be creative and innovative to keep in touch with their members while sustaining their core program. Hence, the academe was forced to continue their service, meetings, and transactions online because of higher education institutions' complexity and multifaceted missions of teaching, conducting research, and contributing to society. On the other hand, in an online context, constant pressure is felt by the student officers because of the limited activities that are supposed to be accomplished.

5.2.5 Incompetent Officers
This theme describes that incompetent officers make it more difficult for an organization to function; incompetence and derailment have consequences for both the individual and the organization. I also dealt with passive officers who needed more of the essence of responsibility and commitment.

According to participant no. 1 states that:

> *Ang experience nako sa akong pagka leader miss is nay difficulty na makaila ang mga students.. kay gamay ra ang nakaila kay lagi online raw ala pa mi ma Ilhan sa kaning mga lower years and then kanang especially when it comes to kanang closeness wala mi na Ilhan and then sa mere kay... ang nailhan... ang nakaila lang namo kay among mga classmates ang amoang mga ka year level and co-officers ra namo mao na siya ang kanang difficulties ay ang negative side as an online leader kay gamay ra kayo ang nakaila namo.* (My experience when I became a leader is that it is difficult to recognize the students.. We still know Ilhan from her younger years, but right after that, especially when it comes to proper proximity, we don't have any more Ilhan, and then sa mere kay... the recognized one the only one we know from our classmates are those who are our year level and co-officers so he is the right difficulties is the negative side as an online leader because there are only a few of you the one we know.)

Also, participant no. 10 mentioned that:

> *Ahmm some members do not function well on their assigned responsibilities, some left SBO without proper notice,...*(some members do not perform well on their assigned duties, some left SBO without appropriate notice,...)

Participant no. 7 added that:

> *Ahmm, mao to siya it is during the online setting that I get to experience working with passive officers who lack the essence of responsibility and commitment. Other challenges include connectivity issues and limited activities to implement for society.* (During the online setting, I get to experience working with passive officers who lack the essence of responsibility and commitment. Other challenges include connectivity issues and limited implementation activities for society.)

Based on the statements above, student officers in the online setting experienced limited activities and incompetent officers, which led them to experience external issues. The participants' sentiments are supported by Weber's (1947) concept of Passive Management by Exception, which states that if the performance does not meet the standard and is short of expectations for the outcomes, incompetent officers may even resort to punishment in response to poor performance.

5.2.6 Time Management
Time management clarifies goals and objectives in a leadership context by prioritizing duties and responsibilities that makes a leader more effective and strategic. Moreover, managing time can also increase the leaders' performance because the key to time management is to work smarter and more effectively (Biswas, 2000).

5.2.7 Conflict on schedule
This theme describes how student officers had conflicts in balancing their time as student and as an officer, wherein they are bombarded with virtual meetings that they cannot even prioritize their academics due to their hectic schedules which further lead them to have emotional distresses. The following statements are the following:

According to participant no. 1 supported by stating that:

…and then also miss sa schedule miss kay nay time na mura siyag… kana ganing …. And then kuan sad miss ang schedule sa subject kay nay time na mag meeting seven and then wala mi klase ana pero naa mi assignments na kailangan I pas ana that night and then ang pinakalisod gud ana na time kay ang pag school year 2021-2022 kay na cut-off man kanang mga signals ato ang connection so mao to na time na kanang nag lisod mi ug unsaon namo pag kanang…pag implement sa among activity nan aka plano ana na December na month so mao na siya ang difficulties.. (…the school year 2021-2022 presents the greatest challenge because those signals are also cut-off, so how are we going to do that? When we implement our activity, that's the plan for the month of December, so those are the challenges. And then when I miss the subject schedule because it's time to meet seven and we don't have class but have assignments that I need to pass that night.)

Furthermore, Participant No. 4 also shared that:

Ahh, to be sure, it struggles with the time and scheduling conflicts for the meeting.. bisan daghan kaayo ug kakulian sa online set up dasig ra gihapon bisan daghan pag suway ug one thing is for sure dili lalim mahimong leader sa online set up. (It struggles with the meeting's time constraints and schedule difficulties. Even if there are many flaws in the online setup, it is still simple despite numerous tries and the fact that it is undoubtedly impossible to be a leader in the online setup.)

Participant no. 4 then added that:

By far, kuan ang ako na experience during our time kay mostly super struggling with time management. (By far, my experience during our time was mostly super struggling with time management)

Based on their sentiments shared, participants 6 and 10 also stated that:

Ahmm…in more ways than one, for sure. Perhaps most worthy of mention is when it makes it difficult to attend meetings. (In more ways than one, for sure. Perhaps most worthy of mention is when it makes it difficult to attend meetings.

Participant No. 10 also shared that:

Ahmm sa akoa lang nga na experienced naa jud instances wherein i need to balance my academics and function as an officer, which i have to handle. Ahmm also, conflicts on schedule for there are events or programs that are also scheduled during my classes. (In my experience, there are times when I need to manage both my academic obligations and my role as an officer. However, there are also scheduling issues because other events or programs are scheduled during my classes).

As stated above, scheduling conflicts appear naturally in the online leadership setup, as well as unbalanced academic matters that contradict the obligations of a leader. Furthermore, effective time management means the right task is performed at the right time, work progresses at an organized and comfortable pace, there is plenty of time for leisure, and, most importantly, actual work matches the plans and desires of the person (Hall & Hirsch, 1982)

5.2.8 Emotional Distress
Emotional distress comes from within, and this is often the most common cause of stress. This often worries about uncontrollable things such as exhaustion, being drained, and being frustrated, which causes low self-esteem.

5.2.8.1 Draining
This theme describes how emotional distress affects the student officers in an online context wherein this drains them in a way that they have countless night disturbances.
According to participant no. 15:

This really affects me personally. It disturbs my time, including rest and sleep. It goes beyond the boundaries sometimes. It even bothers my psychological well-being because it somehow leads to stressful feelings and situations.

Participant no. Three also shared that:

> The organization's leaders frequently misunderstood one another, which led to interpersonal conflicts. When we as leaders cannot create a supportive environment and strong bonds with one another, it is hugely draining because how could we ever lead in harmony if our intentions aren't even in alignment in the first place?

Also, Participant No. 7 stated that:

> *These difficulties affect me mentally because dealing with passive officers is exhausting and draining me mentally. It also concerns me emotionally because it saddens me that some officers only want the position for fame but don't carry the responsibilities well.*

The above statements are supported by Taleb (2012), which states that leaders are under tremendous psychological strain in crises as severe as the COVID-19 pandemic, with members of numerous groups expecting regular reassurance and assistance. Furthermore, time constraints, uncertainty, a lack of information, and a high degree of stress make the decision-making process more complex that causes drained to an individual.

5.2.8.2 Frustration
This theme describes how online leadership found it difficult and challenging to lead in an organization and deal with passive behaviors, which leads to frustration towards student officers.

According to participant no. 7 mentioned that:

> *For me ahmm, in an online setting, being a student leader is challenging and frustrating. It was difficult to work online with people kay lage it feels like my fellow officers do not hear me. During the online setting, I also get to experience working with passive officers. So ang akong patience was tested jud during the online set up because most officers can quickly come up with excuses.* (..being a student leader is challenging and frustrating. It took work to work online with people. It felt like my fellow officers did not hear me. I also get to experience working with passive officers in an online setting. My patience was tested during the online setup because most officers can quickly come up with excuses).

Furthermore, stated by participant no. 8 states that:

> *Ahm, indeed, online itself was challenging and frustrating gud haha wait for me, it was a challenge because, as one of the executive committees in an online set-up. First, we have online meetings. After all, we cannot conduct face-to-face meetings because some officers are far from the city. Second, attending some activities in the online set-up was also challenging because of low internet connectivity; it frustrated me.* (..indeed online itself was difficult and frustrating for me; it was a challenge as one of the executive committee in an online setup. First, we have online meetings. After all, we cannot conduct face-to-face meetings because some officers are far from the city. Second, attending some activities in the online set-up was also challenging because of low internet connectivity; it frustrated me).

Moreover, participants 7 and 3 also shared that:

> These difficulties affect me mentally because dealing with passive officers is exhausting and draining me mentally, and ahmm it also affects me emotionally because it saddens me that some officers only want the position for fame but don't carry the responsibilities well.

And participant 3 mentioned that:

> *It honestly frustrates me, ahhh for someone who wants to deliver productive work of leadership...* (It honestly frustrates me, for someone who wants to deliver productive work of leadership...).

With the given context above, Rodriguez (2003) states that student leadership is found in colleges and schools where students can lead an organization within the institution that can influence, motivate, and assist others toward achieving a goal. However, student leadership can be viewed as a burden that detracts from a student's ability to concentrate on his or her studies and is frustrated with completing accomplishment as expected by students in expressing or exhibiting talents that he or she possesses.

5.3 Online Student Leaders Coping Mechanism
5.3.1 Anchoring on Purpose

This theme describes how student organization officers anchored their purpose as online leaders in an online platform. Despite the circumstances, they still managed to complete their duties and responsibilities well, with a positive outlook, and contribute to the efficacy of the leadership style by anchoring themselves on their fundamental purpose as student officers. The following statements are the following:

Participant no. 1, answered:

> *...pero ang experience ana miss kay nindot man gihapon kay at least kanang naka kuan ko naka feel ko ug unsa gud ka lisod mahimong officer sa online setting and naka challenged pud siya sa akoang mind miss ug unsaon nako pag pangita ug ways ug solutions na maka provide ug makatabang ug implement sa among projects as well as maka help sa among uban officers* (the experience was still positive because it at least made me aware of how challenging it is to serve as an officer in an online environment. He also stimulated my thinking about how I might be able to come up with ideas and solutions to help us implement our projects and assist our other officers.)

While Participant No. Three added to that by stating:

> Within these challenges are learning curves that send way too much awareness. It taught me to build relationships among people, think critically, be sensitive to my fellow student's needs, and always be alert. It created a Leader in me that now puts exhibiting humility on top of all.

Furthermore, Participant No. 4 also shared a realization that:

> I copped it up by going back to why I aspire to be a leader, and by then, it led me to the thought that "all these things happened; it's just part of molding me to be a better leader.

And then, participant no. 5 mentioned that:

> *As leaders noh and an officer we always try to stay on the positive side of things and that thing will be alright kay dili man malikayan ang problema na ato ma face ato lang gud i butang sa ato huna huna na if gi hatag na na problem naa gud nay solution it is up to you on how you solve it and learn from it. Officers may not be perfect, but we always consider what's best for the students to learn and enjoy. Being a leader is difficult, but this opportunity made me flexible and adaptable to challenging situations. It's a matter of loving your passion, and my passion is to serve.* (As officers and leaders, we always work to see the bright side of situations and to remind ourselves that everything will work out for the best. Nevertheless, we also know that problems might arise and that finding solutions is ultimately up to each individual. Even if we officers are not flawless, we always consider what is best for the student's learning and enjoyment. Being a leader is demanding, but this chance helped me become adaptable to difficult circumstances. It is a matter of loving your passion, and my passion is to serve.).

As well as participant no. 6 shared that:

> ...it was my first time assuming a position as a student leader, so it was life-changing for more reasons than one. Perhaps my biggest takeaway is that service and leadership do not stop—even during a pandemic.

According to participant no. Seven also added that:

> *Ahmm, these challenges shape me in a way wherein I know the things that need to be fixed, and ahmm, I get to learn from these challenges, which made me want to serve more. These challenges turned me into a better leader who operates with passion and commitment for the society and its members.* (these challenges shape me in a way, wherein I know the things that need to be fixed, and I get to learn from these challenges, which made me want to serve more. These challenges turned me into a better leader who operates with passion and commitment to society and its members.)

Based from participant no. 8 states that:

> *Hmm, it helps me build my resilience and motivates me to do better. As well as improve myself as an effective leader.* (It helps me build my resilience and motivates me to do better and improve myself as an effective leader).

Moreover, participant no. 9 also shared that:

> The most significant development in my leadership abilities has come from dealing with the chaos of a pandemic. This is clearly apparent not only in my experience, but also in my positions of responsibility and day-to-day leadership capabilities. For example, even though I can only interact with students through conference calls and online office working days, I still have a responsibility to the executive committee to provide high-quality assistance to students. This has helped me become a better communicator by removing the necessity to gain field experience before answering questions. These new abilities have helped me learn more about myself and given me more flexibility in responding to new challenges.

In addition, Participant No. 11, 15 and 16 explained that:

> *Bisan naay mg kakulian sa online naa pud positive na nahatag sa ako, and by that, I was able to organize many religious events online, which also made me feel fulfilled cause I was able to accomplish those events despite the fact that my internet is weak.* I was able to plan numerous religious activities online because of my ability to use a weak internet connection. This made me feel content because I could complete those events despite my weak internet.

Participant No. 15 shared that:

> My ability to lead others improved and broadened my outlook on life. I simultaneously developed my communication and listening skills as I became more aware of the greater possibilities and distinct views.

Furthermore, Participant no. 16 answered that:

> *Ahmm para nako, it positively affected me as I learned to enhance my skills and paved the way for learning a new skill set. It made me time conscious tungod sa kadaghan sa buhatonon. It also made me motivated to strive to become a better communicator.* It positively affected me since I learned how to develop my skills and allowed me to learn new ones. It made me more conscious of how quickly time passes. It also motivated me to put much effort into advancing my communication abilities.

Based on the statements above, for the organization to have a good leader, it must be led by a person with the heart to serve. A leader must be practical and can lead in any given situation. This also implied that being passionate makes them better leaders because they believe in and recognize their potential and are inspired by the leader's vision for the future. Student leaders are future-focused and envision themselves in their goals.

Additionally, this viewpoint implies that individuals can acquire leadership skills through education and cultivation, suggesting that effective leadership is a learned and developable capability (Peterson & Peterson, 2012).

Therefore, transformational leaders can convey to their followers the importance of the task and the larger good that will come from its completion. These leaders are concerned with the team's success and providing individual team members with the encouragement they need to reach their most significant potential. These leadership theories can help student leaders to improve their skills and is said to "engage in relationships with followers based on shared values, beliefs, and goals," which impacts the performance that leads to the goal's achievement (Bass, 1990).

6. Conclusion
The study aimed to investigate the experiences of student leaders in the online setup during the 2021-2022 academic year at the University of Cebu-Main Campus. It focused on understanding the specific experiences of online leaders, identifying the difficulties they encountered, and exploring their coping mechanisms.

Seven emergent themes were revealed from the online student leaders' responses, organized under three primary themes that provided insights into sub-problems. These emergent themes were distilled from the significant statements made by the primary informants. The experiences of student leaders in the online setting were captured by two emergent themes: distress and opportunity. The difficulties encountered by informants in their roles as student leaders in the online environment were delineated into four emergent themes: poor communication, external issues, time management, and emotional distress. The coping mechanisms employed by the informants to navigate these challenges were encapsulated in one emergent theme: Anchoring on purpose.

The findings of this study are constrained by their specificity to online student leaders within the College of Arts and Sciences and, as such, may not be universally applicable to different circumstances. It is crucial to recognize that variations in results may arise when extrapolating these findings to other contexts or student leaders in distinct academic disciplines.

The study's findings underscore online student leaders' importance in enhancing communication within their organization and with co-officers. Establishing a culture of active listening and mutual understanding can foster a healthy workplace environment, addressing the challenges of balancing work and study responsibilities. Student leaders must recognize the long-term benefits of maintaining robust communication channels within the organization. Despite the resilience and courage displayed by University of Cebu student leaders in navigating the challenges of an online setup, they need to prioritize self-care. Balancing academic commitments and organizational responsibilities can be overwhelming, and professors, mentors, and advisers should exhibit understanding and consideration for student leaders facing time constraints and connectivity issues, which can hinder productivity. Encouraging leadership growth among members by delegating responsibilities can contribute to a more collaborative and effective organization. Additionally, leaders must discern and address motives within the group, ensuring that positions are sought for the organization's benefit rather than personal fame. Ultimately, aspiring leaders should approach their roles with passion and commitment, recognizing the responsibility that comes with leadership to cultivate positive program outcomes and a conducive workplace environment.

The researcher proposes future study topics: the Impact of Educational Leadership on Student Excellence, examining leadership's direct influence on academic performance; the Impact of Education on the Growth and Development of Students in the Online Context, investigating how online learning shapes overall student development; Organizational Online Leaders Creativity Development, exploring how virtual leaders foster creativity in online organizational settings; and a Quantitative Study on Online Leadership: Experiences of Student Body Organization Officers, systematically measuring and analyzing student leaders' virtual experiences for comprehensive insights.

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