

Leadership-In-Action Reflection Essay

For my Laidlaw Leadership in Action project, I joined Qatar Youth Power non-profit organisation whose mission is to inspire and empower the youth of Qatar to become changemakers and positive change in their community. We aimed to achieve those goals by hosting annual conferences as well as numerous educational workshops in collaboration with our sponsors. Thus, providing the attendees with the tools essential for their future careers and networking opportunities to meet like-minded people.

The main goal for my project was to provide help with the organisation and in-person moderation of the QYP Conference 2023. Having joined the team as an affiliate member, I worked across multiple departments (e.g., sponsorship, communications, and social media) to ensure that all emerging tasks were done strictly in accordance with our timeline. There were three main objectives that defined the general course of action and the subsequently assigned timings from the very start of the project. Particularly, we were focused on finding speakers for the conference by means of contacting people who previously participated in our events as well as attracting new guest speakers. Secondly, we had to ensure the funding for the venue and catering by either finding sponsors or companies willing to provide the following on a barter basis. Lastly, we aimed to contact local media to arrange a press release on our upcoming event for advertising purposes. Given that these were the most time-consuming and critical steps out of all, we started preparations 5 months before the planned conference date.



The first two months of the conference preparations coincided with the Easter break and exam season, which meant that my contribution to the project was quite limited in this period, so I was primarily tasked with reaching out to companies and progressing further with negotiations. Once I finished my studies in June, I volunteered to take on more responsibilities and provide additional help with conference organisation. In retrospect, this decision was made in part to challenge myself and see how many things I can do simultaneously as well as to identify the weaknesses in my organisational skills. Conceptually, my responsibilities from that point onward could be split into two parts: to organise and deliver 2 interactive Q&A sessions on the

conference day and to provide help in external communications with sponsors as well as other departments if needed.

To accomplish the first task, I prepared a detailed plan and organised the group meetings for both panel discussions, where I proposed the structure of the session and addressed the logistics issues. To my surprise, the hardest aspect of this task was ensuring clear and prompt communication between all speakers in both groups. Particularly, sometimes it took me 4-5 days to sort out some minor issues and progress further (e.g., getting the details from the speakers), which is why it was crucial to start the preparation as early as possible. Additionally, the change of communication channels in favour of WhatsApp group chats significantly sped up the whole process. The other problem I encountered was that around a third of the speakers for the panel discussions had to withdraw at the late stages due to unforeseen commitments. However, it wasn't a major issue since we only had 20 minutes per session and having fewer guest speakers meant that we could go more in-depth and tell a more comprehensive and coherent story that would be easier to grasp and remember. Through this experience, I greatly improved my communication skills both in formats of written professional correspondence and delivering presentations in front of a group of people.



Additionally, halfway through the preparation, we decided to expand the team and recruit more people to help with the upcoming conference. I was directly involved in the recruitment process in the marketing and social media department. Particularly, I conducted interviews with the shortlisted candidates and took part in final decision-making. Interestingly, we had more qualified and motivated candidates that we could recruit almost in every department. To make the most out of this situation, I proposed to create a talent pool where we would place shortlisted candidates and invite them to the team when the position becomes available in future to save us time during the next recruitment process. Another problem that we faced was internal miscommunication that led to one offer being retracted from the candidate as a result of it. This was an extremely valuable lesson on the importance of clearly defined and split responsibilities between the team members and the core team value system in almost any decision-making on behalf of the organisation and conflict resolution.

On the conference day, as usually happens with any big events, we had a lot of unforeseen issues that had to be solved on the spot. For example, there were last-minute changes to the conference agenda due to some guest speakers having emergencies as well as technical issues with the conference livestream and many other minor problems. However, the biggest difficulty was completing the registration, attendance check throughout the conference and certificate allocation at the end for more than 200 participants. We had to come up with several backup plans and quickly improvise to ensure the registration was completed thoroughly and in a timely manner. For example, we changed the attendance taking from the lunch break to the closing ceremony because the movement of people back and forth between the halls through multiple exits made it practically impossible to check in every participants.



It was a challenging yet rewarding experience, which taught me quite a few lessons both specific to this project and more general which would be applicable in almost any activity. The former includes being comfortable presenting in front of a big audience, moderating panel discussions and understanding how the processes should be set up to be functional on a large scale. In turn, the latter include managing emotions and channeling them to maximise performance, dealing with uncertainty and unforeseen problems, which are inevitable in any big project as well as prioritising tasks and efficiently working in a team. Overall, this project exposed me to a completely different environment and helped me to grow both as a professional and individual whilst also offering great networking opportunities.