

Local Champion's Role in Community-Based Tourism Development: A Character Strengths Approach

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Abstract: Within the rural tourism literature, successful community-based tourism is often attributed to a 'local champion'. The literature has evaluated such individuals and produced a list of attributes and traits which are deemed necessary. A gap remains in that thus far, the local champion has not been understood through theoretically grounded concepts. This study combines Values in Action-character strengths and Mintzberg's managerial roles to produce a new understanding of local champions' tenacity in community-based tourism. Using a qualitative research design, a group of twelve, homogenous, purposive sample of 'local champions' were recruited to attend semi-structured interview sessions. The study setting is Sabah, Malaysian Borneo where government support for rural tourism spans ten years aiming to be a world-class rural tourism destination by 2030. Through a deductive thematic analysis, the study found only twenty-three character strengths were evident in the data, as were the interpersonal, informational and decisional roles in the lived experience of local champions. Implications for capacity building and well-being are discussed as well as future work. As community-based tourism prospers, local champions will remain relevant for rural tourism and the need to train the next generation will need careful consideration. The character strengths approach proposed in this study is one way to do so.

Keywords: capacity building, character strengths, community-based tourism, local champions, youth

Introduction

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a model applied in rural tourism to ensure enterprises are owned and managed by local communities to revitalise and stimulate the rural economy (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009; Lo & Janta, 2020; Zitierung et al., 2020). The literature attributes both endogenous and exogenous factors to the success of CBT (Hamzah, 2020). Although the role of a local champion(s) (LC) in motivating and transforming CBT is well documented and acknowledged, as CBT matured, the focus shifted to the broader-based whole community contributions in the guise of committees over an individual (Hamzah, 2020). Nevertheless, successful CBT has been attributed to local leadership, or a 'local champion' as coined by Hamzah and Khalifah (2009). The LC is a person who initiates, develops, motivates, and guides the community toward building a sustainable CBT model. The key role of LC in CBT for rural development is widely documented (Abas et al., 2022; Abas & Abd Halim, 2019; Aziza et al., 2023; Ginanjar et al., 2024). LC may or may not originate from the community but contribute to CBT success for a few reasons: they have skills, knowledge, and connections; they are influential and respected by the community; they find opportunities for

CBT development; they build local community capacity (Hamzah, 2014; Hamzah, 2020). The importance of LC to sustainable CBT development has received scholarly attention. For example, Abas and Abd Halim (2019) explored the role of leadership and concept of LC in rural tourism in Malaysia; Abas et al. (2022) studied the role of LC in CBT in rural homestays in Malaysia; Aziza et al. (2023) discussed the role of LC by analysing phases of Ponggok village tourism development; Ginanjar et al. (2024) discussed the role of LC in CBT in Indonesia through a new leadership perspective. The literature supports the importance of the role played by LC within a successful CBT enterprise. Another strand of the literature discusses the need to nurture the next generation of LC (Hamzah, 2014), yet no specific suggestion has been made (Rungchavalnont, 2022). In rural tourism destinations, capacity building remains a significant challenge to the success of CBT efforts (Abas & Abd Halim, 2019). Only by developing local youth to become LC will rural communities upgrade their lives and economic resources; thus, evaluating youth potential is critical for the continuity of CBT (Hamzah, 2020; Malek et al., 2022). What attributes would youth need to succeed in CBT? Notably, Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) identified ten characteristics of LC which contribute to their ability to galvanise and transform the local community (elaborated later). However, these attributes were not expanded or theoretically grounded; we do not know what values or characteristics guide LC resilience. This raises the main research question: how do LCs in CBT fulfil their managerial roles?

This study attempts to fill the gap by proposing an understanding of what guides LC's tenacity for CBT. This knowledge could provide a model for capacity building for current leaders and rural youth. Therefore, this study proposes first the need to consider LC in terms of manager's roles according to Mintzberg (2009) and further to analyse LC character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), an established concept in well-being literature to produce an understanding of how this enables LC to carry out their roles. Findings would provide a valuable framework for CBT capacity building at all levels.

Character strengths (CS) categorise an individual's positive characteristics into three levels: virtues (core values), CS (expressions of virtues) and situational themes (context-dependent habits encouraged for specific situations) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The six positive virtues include wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence, located in twenty-four CS (elaborated in the next section). CS are an individual's virtues expressed through thoughts, feelings, and actions (Park & Peterson, 2009). It is helpful to understand how one can apply one's own CS to benefit oneself, others and society (Ruch & Proyer, 2015). Significantly, CS can be utilised, cultivated or activated, and such practices are prevalent in other life settings (work, serious leisure, health) to foster well-being (Zhang et al., 2019). Recent studies have begun to evaluate the role of CS and its application in tourism and leisure settings (Zhang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Zhang, 2023). Tourism offers a unique way to cultivate individual CS, facilitating strength activation and application (Zhang et al., 2019). Knowledge of CS has been proven as an effective strengths-based intervention that builds on an individual's low CS (Ruch et al., 2020). However, the tourism literature focuses on how particular strengths foster a positive visitor experience (Warren & Coghlan, 2016; Kirillova et al., 2017; Laing & Frost, 2017). This study's novelty is that it considers CS in the managerial role of LC in CBT. Exploring the CS of LC in CBT will provide applicable insights that could be used for capacity building. This character strengths approach (CSA) for CBT could also activate the potential of local youth or those in leadership roles. Therefore, this study aimed to understand how LCs performed their managerial roles in CBT. For this, a suitable context was necessary. Thus, the field setting chosen was CBT, located in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. The rationale for this context is delineated in the methods section.

To understand how LC in CBT fulfils their managerial roles, this paper first presents an overview of the literature on the role of LC in CBT, followed by an overview of CS, leading to the CSA, which introduces Mintzberg's management roles as proposed for LC in CBT. Next, the methods section delineates the research design, including study setting, data collection, analysis and trustworthiness. Findings are presented in the form of narrative excerpts as linked to LC CS in managerial roles. A discussion evaluates the findings, and the study concludes with a look at limitations and future work.

Literature Review

The role of local champions in community-based tourism

A local champion is someone willing and committed to the development of CBT (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009). A LC may or may not have originated from the community but must possess specific abilities to inspire and transform the community (Hamzah, 2020). Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) identified ten inherent qualities in a LC (Figure 1). These attributes are supported by Abas and Abd Halim (2019) in a study of LCs' role in developing rural tourism destinations in Malaysia.



Fig 1. Attributes of local champion (Source: Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009)

Some scholars categorised the role of LC into mediator, facilitator, and mobiliser (Andari et al., 2023; Aziza et al., 2023; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Xu et al., 2017). Others categorised the role based on personal traits, suggesting these individuals must be innovative, inspiring, and transformative (Tranggono et al., 2021); good listeners, problem-solver, positive attitude (Abas et al., 2022); sensitive to local culture, innovative, experienced, team player, and have networking skills (Ginanjari et al., 2024). Prakoso (2024) divided the role based on a six-stage village tourism development in Wanurejo, Indonesia: initiation (activate tourism activities, organise tour packages); association (join tourism management institution, establish tourism cooperative); diversification (develop tourism activities, encourage the development of groups and facilities); intervention (participate in tourism-related groups); expansion (create new attractions, organise events); and acquisition (media government facilitation, arrange tours and events). The literature suggests that LCs are influential in the decision-making process and are crucial in ensuring a fair distribution of tourism profit among community members. They also affect a community's willingness to support and involve. Therefore, support and training of current and future LCs are vital to promoting sustainable rural tourism development and encouraging community involvement (Abas & Abd Halim, 2019). Despite the differences in the categorisation of LC's role, a standard view is that they demonstrate extraordinary character traits. We propose these traits should be viewed through a character strengths approach (CSA) as classified by positive psychology. The link between LC and CS has not yet been explored in the literature, which continues to focus on roles but not what enables those roles.

Character Strengths

CS refer to positive traits that promote well-being expressed through how people think, feel, and behave (Park & Peterson, 2009). Viewed from the perspective of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004) devised the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths, categorising 24

character strengths into six general virtues, as shown in Table 1. In subsequent iterations, ‘vitality’ was replaced with ‘zest’, ‘intimacy’ with ‘love’, and ‘citizenship’ with ‘teamwork’.

Table 1. VIA Classification of Strengths

Virtues	Type of strength	Character strengths
Wisdom and knowledge	Cognitive (acquisition and use of knowledge)	<i>Creativity</i> <i>Curiosity</i> <i>Judgment and critical thinking</i> <i>Love of learning</i> <i>Perspective</i>
Courage	Emotional (use of will to accomplish goals in adversity)	<i>Bravery</i> <i>Persistence</i> <i>Authenticity/Honesty</i> <i>Vitality</i>
Love	Interpersonal (caring)	<i>Intimacy</i> <i>Kindness</i> <i>Social intelligence</i>
Justice	Civic (underlie healthy community life)	<i>Citizenship</i> <i>Fairness</i> <i>Leadership</i>
Temperance	General (protect against excess)	<i>Forgiveness</i> <i>Humility/Modesty</i> <i>Prudence</i> <i>Self-regulation</i>
Transcendence	General (forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning)	<i>Appreciation of beauty and excellence</i> <i>Gratitude</i> <i>Hope</i> <i>Humor</i> <i>Spirituality</i>

Source: Peterson and Seligman (2004)

The VIA-CS is widely applied in psychological studies. For instance, Park and Peterson (2010) studied the psychological features of cities by dividing the CS of residents into the strengths of the head (intellectual and self-focused strengths that characterised people based on their capacity and accomplishment) and the strengths of the heart (emotional and other-focused strengths that characterised people based on their kindness and gentleness). The VIA-CS is mainly used in tourism studies to study tourists' well-being. Warren and Coghlan (2016), for example, used character strengths-based activities to design pro-environmental behaviours into the tourist experience, suggesting that tourists who are curious, judgemental, socially intelligent, self-regulated, hopeful, and with good citizenship tend to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. Coghlan and Filo (2016) explored how CS produced leisure experiences in the context of charity sports events, demonstrating leisure experience activates tourists' kindness/generosity, citizenship, loyalty and teamwork, hope and optimism, and passion and enthusiasm. Li et al. (2020) explored how digital-free tourism contributes to the development of CS that are conducive to tourists' well-being and found nine strengths categorised into three layers: core layer (self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, social intelligence, open-mindedness); secondary layer (vitality, love, perspective); peripheral layer (spirituality, creativity). Wan et al. (2023) used CS to examine memorable and meaningful tourism

experiences. They found appreciation of beauty and excellence is the prominent strength, while curiosity and gratitude are moderate strengths that enrich tourism experiences. Notably, existing studies on CS focused on linking positive psychology to tourist behaviour, leaving the host community unexplored, specifically the CS of LC in CBT. The model has much to contribute to understanding LC and its resilience for the benefit of rural tourism youth and the future of CBT.

A character strengths approach

For CBT development, a LC has been deemed essential at the onset and throughout to ensure success. Even though, ultimately, the enterprise is community-owned and led, this study approaches CBT from the angle of an individual leader who should demonstrate extraordinary traits to remain an aspiration to the community. Indeed, there is a need to ensure the next generation of LC is moulded from now on, especially amongst the youth in rural areas. For Indigenous youth to become successful entrepreneurs, characteristics (i.e., proactive thinking, innovation, bravery) and transferable skills (i.e., management, entrepreneurial, leadership, and communication) are essential factors (Amiruddin et al., 2020). CBT continuity depends on ensuring the torch is passed on. Notably, the literature focuses on the importance of a LC as presented earlier, as well as developing the new generation (Amiruddin et al., 2020). Since, essentially, they are assuming the role of managers within CBT, what does that entail in terms of responsibilities? According to Mintzberg (2009), there are ten management roles: interpersonal, informational and decisional. We interpreted Mintzberg's roles for a LC as CBT manager and produced an interpretation of managerial roles as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Local Champion's Roles in CBT based on Mintzberg (2009) Management Roles

Category	Roles	Proposed Local champion's roles in CBT
Interpersonal	Figurehead	An aspiration that local community look up to
	Leader	Responsible for CBT management and performance
	Liaison	Communicates with internal and external stakeholders and is able to network effectively
Informational	Monitor	Monitors industrial trends and changes and community members' well-being
	Disseminator	Communicates useful information to community members
	Spokesperson	Represents and speaks for community members
Decisional	Entrepreneur	Creates and controls changes within the community; solves issues; generates and implements new ideas
	Disturbance handler	Takes charge and mediates disputes among community members
	Resource allocator	Determines how and where to apply resources; allocates resources fairly among community members
	Negotiator	Takes part and directs negotiations within the community

Source: Adapted from Mintzberg (2009)

Be that as it may, merely interpreting these roles does not provide enough insight for capacity building or priming youth to take such positions. Therefore, we propose a CSA to enhance further Mintzberg's propositions of interpersonal, informational and decisional roles to consider what strengths an individual would need to excel in each role. Mintzberg (2013) also proposed that management occurs through information and with people, and for action, management is at an intersection of all three and getting the balance right is essential. Notably, CS remain unaddressed even by Mintzberg.

This study proposes a CSA to delineate LC's role, knowledge of which would benefit the development of CBT in rural tourism destinations. The CSA *in situ* and capacity building would allow high strengths to be utilised, low strengths to be trained, and hidden strengths to be activated (Zhang, 2023). How is this possible? The literature provides valuable insights that remain understudied in the context of CBT. Li et al. (2020) applied a CSA to explore whether digital-free tourism produces well-being and found tourists, providers, and academics perceived 23 out of the 24-character strengths (except leadership) enhanced in an offline setting. Zhang et al. (2019) used the CSA to show how a strength-based travel design could optimise well-being. Zhang (2023) identified tourism as a unique strengths incubator that allows the cultivation of weak strengths for rare users. However, one must not underuse or overuse one's strengths but look for optimal use or balance between the strongest and weakest character strengths (Niemic, 2023).

Method

This study utilised a deductive qualitative research design (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to understand how LCs carried out their managerial roles in CBT following the CSA approach. A qualitative approach was used as it allows an in-depth understanding of lived experiences (Saunders, et al., 2009). The conceptual framework of combining Mintzberg's managerial roles and CSA was presented earlier. The research question "How do LCs in CBT fulfil their managerial roles?" attempts to decipher if CS guides LCs in how they manage 'through information, with people and for action' (Mintzberg, 2009). The literature denotes that individuals with strong CS will experience more positive benefits (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), but CBT has not explored this notion. Therefore, the following proposition is produced, namely:

- *An individual involved in galvanising and transforming the local community for CBT will likely apply CS to fulfil managerial roles.*

This theoretical proposition serves as a departure point in data collection and is used to interrogate the literature to see if it explains the findings (Pearse, 2019). The following section introduces the setting to contextualise the study before describing data collection, analysis and trustworthiness.

Setting

Located in Northern Malaysian Borneo, Sabah comprises 28 districts and ten sub-districts in five divisions (West Coast, Kudat, Sandakan, Tawau, and Interior). Tourism is essential to Sabah's economy, with attractions that span nature, adventure, and culture (Wong et al., 2017). Ten years ago, CBT was introduced to rural communities as a tool for poverty alleviation in line with rural tourism development. Farming communities have embraced the government-led model to earn supplementary income. Village communities have organised cooperatives to develop, manage and operate tourism products in their vicinity. These include experiential packages related to community conserved areas (tagal), farming, jungle trekking, wildlife viewing, and indigenous culture offered as part of the homestay experience (staying with a village host family). Presently, 31 rural tourism associations oversee CBT at the district level. Some enterprises earn up to RM20,000 a month. CBT development has introduced the concept of sustainable tourism to rural areas, an enhanced understanding of the need to conserve the local environment and culture as visitor attractions (New Straits Times, 2023). The varied nature of products and attractions has found success and brought income to these

communities, alleviating poverty for some and providing employment opportunities for the local youth. The state government allocated RM106.14 million for community-based tourism in the 2024 budget (New Straits Times, 2023). Currently, Sabah has 459 homestays in 37 homestay clusters across 17 districts (New Straits Times, 2024). The state government has set a goal for Sabah to be a world-class rural tourism destination by 2030. One of the earliest “local champions”, as noted by Hamzah & Khalifa (2009), came from the successful Miso Walai Homestay along the Kinabatangan River, deemed a success story in responsible rural tourism as an outcome of efforts started in 1997 (see Hamzah, 2020).

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews as the data is subjective and ‘owned’ by the participant (Jennings, 2010), the aim being to generate narratives depicting experiences. The study is value-laden, and to respect the “researcher as instrument”, we used open-ended interview questions. Our position as researchers was grounded in an emic perspective as we attempted to consider participants’ experiences of being a LC for CBT. This study is also part of a more extensive investigation into the lived experiences of LC. The interview protocol used open-ended questions grounded in the literature on the lived experiences of LC in CBT based on Hamzah (2020). The main questions included:

- i. How would you describe your experience of CBT?
- ii. Please describe the challenges you experienced in CBT;
- iii. Please describe the success you experienced in CBT.

Participants were probed to elicit more depth in their answers, leading to reflective moments of emotions as they shared their trials, tribulations, and happiness. Interviews were conducted in English and Bahasa Malaysia, depending on the participant’s preferred language.

Participant recruitment was based on homogenous, purposive sample criteria to ensure participants were information-rich about the topic (Jennings, 2010) to gain insights into different experiences of CBT. Purposive sampling is a common technique in qualitative research used to recruit people who have had the experience put forward in the research question (Saunders et al., 2009). The inclusion criteria for eligible participants are 1) a minimum of five years of involvement in CBT, 2) a track record of developing CBT products, 3) maintaining active membership in a rural tourism association, and 4) agreeing to participate in the study. For this, reference was made to the list of 31 rural tourism associations in Sabah as a database for initial invitations. The study began with the Kadamaian Association, whose members have won the ASEAN Community-Based Tourism award. Every participant was also asked to recommend a potential LC according to the inclusion criteria. A total of 12 participants were recruited and interviewed between November 2023 to May 2024. Appointments were made in advance, and interviews were conducted by the first author, lasting between 1 to 2 hours, at various locations, including offices, residences and cafes. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. For the three interviews conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, transcripts were subjected to back-to-back translation into English (Saunders et al., 2009). Data saturation determined sample size, and interviews ended when no additional data was forthcoming from participants (Guest et al., 2006).

Table 3 depicts the profile of the participants, who consisted of nine male and three female participants. On average, all participants had been involved in CBT for 7 to 16 years. For confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms.

Table 3. Profile of participants

Name	Age	Gender	Years in CBT	Rural Tourism Association	Occupation
Simon	44	Male	7	Kadamaian	Teacher
Karim	58	Male	13	Kota Belud	Farmer
Daniel	47	Male	6	Inanam	Entrepreneur
Tina	50	Female	7	Tambunan	Entrepreneur
Shani	33	Female	7	Ranau	Entrepreneur
Tom	36	Male	6	Tenom	Entrepreneur
Alex	62	Male	11	Tenom	Entrepreneur
Gary	58	Male	7	Kadamaian	Entrepreneur
Calvin	44	Male	14	Kiulu	Entrepreneur
Yasmin	50	Female	16	Ranau	Farmer
Pablo	60	Male	13	Penampang	Entrepreneur
Ben	52	Male	10	Tambunan	Accountant

Data Analysis

All recordings were carefully transcribed verbatim based on the audio to ensure accuracy for analysis. The deductive qualitative approach applied thematic analysis, which “is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). This study proceeded with a deductive thematic analysis approach, which relies on a conceptual framework to conduct direct data analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). As is the norm, deductive thematic analysis relies on a conceptual framework for pattern matching, where patterns in data are identified and compared against the patterns in the proposition (Pearse, 2019). ATLAS.ti version 24 was used to manage data before conducting a deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the analysis, verbatim excerpts were identified, then coded for a combined analysis of instances and experiences of managerial roles (interpersonal, informational, decisional) and CS referring to the definitions depicted in Tables 1 and 2 to explore the proposition.

Trustworthiness

The rigour of a qualitative study can be evaluated based on trustworthiness measures following the ‘Four Dimensions Criteria’ by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility can be assessed by the profile of participants and peer debriefing as team discussions took place where all three researchers checked the coding. This also covers confirmability, as all three researchers corroborated the results. Dependability is established through the audit trail, covering study methods and coding as findings are presented through short excerpts from the transcripts so that the participants' voices' or the ‘persuasiveness of text’ can be heard. Transferability is facilitated through descriptions of the study setting, purposive sampling inclusion criteria, interview procedures and data saturation.

Findings

Twenty-three short excerpts of descriptive accounts combining CS and managerial roles are offered in Table 4. Findings indicate that only twenty-three out of the twenty-four CS were evident in the data. Humour was not a CS found in the data. Managerial roles indicated interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles were prominent, but no instances of “monitoring” or “resource allocator” were linked to any CS. Table 4 shows that CS is applied when playing a specific managerial role.

Table 4. Evidence of LC CS application in Managerial Roles

Character Strengths	Definition (adopted from www.proofpositive.org)	Managerial Roles (Mintzberg, 2009)	Verbatim Interview Excerpts
Creativity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualise and do things	Entrepreneur Liason	<i>"In 2015, the District Officer approached me, saying how to develop tourism here [...]. So, I was thinking I am a marathoner [...] this place is filled with hills and very challenging, so I said we should focus on adventure, extreme sports. So I said I can bring runners. Then I said let's do a Fun Run here, so I did." (Tina)</i>
Curiosity	Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering	Figurehead	<i>"So I said, okay, I will try because for me this CBT is new. Last time we only focused on our own product, but when you actually engage with the community, your role becomes more interesting." (Tina)</i>
Judgment	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions being able to chance one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly	Disturbance handler Negotiator	<i>"As a business owner, we still face the challenge where the community still has envy and jealousy, they don't want to see us happy. [...] And we also found out that there are many stories and inciting... that are not true. [...] I received all kinds of complaints, but as a president, you have to judge wisely; you have to judge wisely." (Calvin)</i>
Love of Learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether one's own or formally; related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows	Entrepreneur	<i>"But I was exposed to consulting work, so I went to study how Bali does it, how Thailand does it, how other countries do it. I combined it with a book written by Prof. Amran of UTM. I took that, combined it and made it a framework. Then I tested it in a pilot project" (Ben)</i>
Perspective	Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that makes sense to oneself/others	Figurehead Leader	<i>"What guides and strengthens that venture into CBT is that they need to have an open mind, they need to start from themselves. After that, they need to have direction, and then they must have a local champion in that community." (Daniel)</i>

Bravery	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficult or pain; speaking up for what's right even if there's opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular	Leader	<i>"In this business, there are times when you will be stuck. ...there will be a time when you will face that, but I only have one concept: do it first, think later! [...] I dare to take the risk. I bet everything in my savings. I started it from... empty. If this does not happen. I will start again"</i> (Calvin)
Perseverance	Finishing what one starts; persevering in a course of action in spite of obstacles; taking pleasure in completing tasks	Leader	<i>"So whoever fails should not stop straight away. For me, if we fail, it tells me to try again with another method."</i> (Simon)
Honesty	Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions	Figurehead	<i>"If you want to live, if you want to eat good food, you work hard. You get your money. You don't cheat people. You don't do something that is like cheating. If you do it straight, you have no problem. No problem with life. If not, you will have a problem."</i> (Alex)
Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated	Figurehead	<i>"The pressure is there, but the most important thing is that when you do it, if you are involved in the tourism sector, are you happy? Happy, should be happy... Wake up in the morning; the first is to be positive. I woke up in the morning; I will think about today; [...] when you get up tomorrow, think about it tomorrow. That's it."</i> (Calvin)
Love	Valuing close relations with others, particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people	Leader	<i>"I'm hot-tempered, I'm really hot-tempered. The people in this village know I don't socialize. Usually, I just play football and then go home. I'm not like the others. I don't socialize, yet they chose me to lead them."</i> (Simon)
Kindness	Doing favours and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them	Leader	<i>"We must help others always; that's why every time I have a chance like a community program, I try to develop this community, so if the intention is to help others, God will also help us."</i> (Karim)
Social intelligence	Being aware of motives/feelings of others and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick	Negotiator	<i>"I will not exclude anyone. I mean, I will include everyone, so they won't feel left out, so they will feel involved."</i> (Daniel)

Team work	Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share	Negotiator	<i>"So I think that what we need is teamwork. Cannot be selfish... if we do it alone, we cannot distribute the benefit, why not together, we benefit from the tourists." (Shani)</i>
Fairness	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance	Disturbance Handler	<i>"you have to act wisely because if you act excessively, it will make the situation worse; had to be a little neutral but at the same time, there are things that you have to be firm about ... " (Calvin)</i>
Leadership	Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organising group activities and seeing that they happen	Figurehead Leader	<i>"Even though I don't have any tourism product, but because of the responsibility, because I'm not being paid, my desire to help motivates me to help them more... My motivation to lead them is when I bring their product [to be promoted], it becomes better, and many visitors come, when I see... wow! That lifts me to take them to the next level." (Daniel)</i>
Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others' shortcomings; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful	Disturbance Handler	<i>"[...]. Sometimes we don't have to listen too much; when we listen too much, we have emotions and so on. I know them; [...] no hard feelings. You don't let it into your heart." (Calvin)</i>
Humility	Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is	Entrepreneur	<i>"I don't claim but I would say we were the first ones to bring tourism into [...] and open the eyes of the local people to come into tourism." (Alex)</i>
Prudence	Being careful about one's choice; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted	Liaison Disseminator Spokesperson	<i>"To handle this, as a rural tourism operator or tourism operators, we have to work closely with our agents; we have to let them know, and one more thing, we need to improve the quality of the products and so on so that words spread by the community that are negative can be evaluated by our agents and business partners" (Calvin)</i>
Self-regulation	Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions	Figurehead	<i>"I take care of my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being by balancing it. You know it's very stressful; you need to have stress management, so what I do is normally, I will go visit CBT, especially the nature-based ones, you know, those that have rivers and Tagal [prohibited to fish]." (Tina)</i>

Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life	Figurehead	<i>"I feel connected to my traditional culture; you have to carry that; that is the most precious; that is our strength. We promote it, our traditional dance, and whatever practice, traditional food." (Tina)</i>
Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks	Figurehead	<i>"I am grateful because of the commitment of the community, friends, brothers, and sisters who posted here and there, and then we got attention." (Simon)</i> <i>"So thank goodness until now, any problem, I am very grateful to God, and there is no problem that is not solved." (Ben)</i>
Hope	Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about	Figurehead	<i>"I think yes...family members give me spirit, my husband and my father and then reading some positive quotes and then looking at successful people. Even people that have millions of debts can overcome, can get back up. So why not, right? Because in life, as long as you're healthy, as long as you are still alive, there is hope, right?" (Shani)</i>
Humour	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes	None	None
Spirituality	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort	Figurehead	<i>"Of course, my faith and culture guide my actions in CBT. My members are mostly Muslim and Christian. At the same time, there are also those who still practise cultural beliefs, so we need to respect that." (Daniel)</i>

Discussion

Across CBT literature, the evidence is clear that the role of an LC cannot be underestimated for the success of a community-led enterprise. Two key findings were produced from this study. First, there is support for the proposition that the LC should be involved in galvanising and transforming the local community so that CBT can apply CS to fulfil managerial roles. Notably, although participants had background experiences that potentially exposed them to managerial roles, the element of CS application uncovered in this study is useful knowledge for CBT development. Only some studies in CBT explore the role of CS, an underutilised tool for improving the well-being of everyone involved in CBT. Findings propose that when a LC galvanises the community, those very CS lift and enable productivity and success. Of the CS, humour did not appear as a strength used in managerial roles: this could have been due to the individual's age and employment background or the serious nature of being an LC working hard to ensure everyone received their fair share of the pie. The findings propose that the six virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage, love, justice, temperance, and transcendence, guide LC in achieving their managerial roles.

Secondly, this study proposes that CS applied in managerial roles produces better interpersonal, informational, and decisional LC in CBT. However, findings indicate that LC mainly played the roles of 'figurehead' and 'leader' to a more substantial extent than the other ten managerial roles proposed by Mintzberg. This could be attributed to their age, experience and background, where the community already acknowledges their prowess as LC. It could also be a cultural aspect in which respect is given to recognise their involvement in the field. However, in a small way, findings have shown that LCs benefit from fulfilling their roles due to their own CS, which inevitably supports their well-being. Beyond knowledge of LC attributes and traits (Abas et al., 2022; Ginanjar et al., 2024; Hamzah & Khalifa, 2009; Tranggono et al., 2021), this study identified twenty-three CS used by LC in their managerial roles. This finding is useful as CS can be built or developed, often through strengths-based interventions. The CSA to understanding CBT development provides a new way to train youth to take over the helm as future LCs. Training modules could be developed, or youth could be encouraged to take the VIA-CS survey as a psychometric test to attract, recruit and retain the next generation of LC. Capacity building through CS interventions could encourage more youth to step up and contribute to CBT.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has reopened the discussion on the role of LC in CBT by proposing a CSA which combines CS and Mintzberg's managerial roles. The research question asked how LCs in CBT fulfil their managerial roles. The study setting was Sabah, Malaysian Borneo, where CBT has a decade-long history of CBT success. Applying a deductive qualitative approach, a purposive sample of LCs was interviewed, followed by a thematic analysis to consider the proposition that LCs apply CS to fulfil their managerial roles. All but one CS was evident, and findings indicate the need for future work on applying CS in managerial roles.

Limitations and Recommendations

The findings of this study are contextual, limited to the LC who participated, and no claim is made for generalisation. Future work could expand this study by measuring and testing CS applications. The possibility of cultivating signature CS is an opportunity that could be used for youth capacity building. CS vary across life domains; possessing and expressing CS is essential for well-being (Wagner et al., 2021). However, this study only looked at LC CS in managerial roles, which might differ or be the same in the 'life' domain, which is another avenue for future work. The proposed CSA will be useful in understanding the tenacity or resilience of LC if it is developed further and applied for capacity building.

Most importantly, the VIA-CS instrument is well-validated and can gauge an individual's signature and other strengths. In this way, LC, potential LC and youth in the community could be tested and trained to build up their low and hidden strengths and utilise their high strengths, which will be helpful in their managerial roles and daily lives. Ultimately, applying CS optimises everyone's well-being in society (Zhang et al., 2019). Finally, it is worth investigating further why 'humour' did not appear as a CS for LC. As community-based tourism prospers, LC will remain relevant for rural tourism, and the need to train the next generation will need careful consideration. This paper has proposed an understanding of what enables the LC to fulfil this role. Essentially, the CSA inadvertently benefits the local communities and the individual's well-being, providing LC with much resilience and tenacity to prosper CBT.

Co-Author Contribution

Norzaris bin Abdul carried out the fieldwork, transcribed all interviews, conducted data analysis and the literature review. Balvinder Kaur Kler conceptualised the study, verified data, content and wrote the research method. Siao Fui Wong contributed to the literature review and verified the manuscript content. Interpretation of results and discussion was a joint effort by all three authors.

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