Malaysian student leaders’ perception of their leadership styles

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Abstract: Student leadership is a distinct area in research and practice. This study explored the leadership styles of student leaders in Malaysian secondary and postsecondary schools based on the Bolman and Deal’s leadership orientations survey (LOS–self). Analysis was carried out on the four leadership styles: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. Student leaders’ demographics such as gender, age and ethnicity were identified. Findings revealed there exist different leadership styles between genders, those still studying in secondary school with postsecondary school and between the three main ethnic groups of student leaders. The human resource frame is the predominant frame followed by the structural frame. The significance of the findings and suggestions for further developing multi-frame leadership styles are proposed, as the use of multiple frames is linked to leadership effectiveness. This will help to increase the student leaders’ knowledge of leadership frames and their personal capabilities as leaders in their organisation.

Keywords: student leadership; leadership styles; Bolman and Deal; Malaysia; secondary schools; post-secondary schools.


Biographical notes: Mabel H.J. Tan is passionate about education and loves seeing young people under her care reach their fullest potential. She obtained her PhD in Educational Leadership and was a recipient of the University of Malaya’s Excellence Award 2014. She is actively involved in the Seven-System Leadership Study (7SLS) research cluster at the Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Malaya. She is currently the President and CEO of UCSI College, which provides quality education including A-levels, foundation, diploma and degree programs to equip students for career success and continuous professional development.