



OBTC 2015 at University of La Verne  
June 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

## Submission Template

### SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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**Submission Template for the  
2015 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators**

**1) Title of Proposal:**

WHY SHOULD ANYONE BE LED BY YOU?

**2) Abstract:**

There are virtually truckloads of leadership literature. Yet indeed few people understand why humans follow their leaders. This high immersion experiential activity is going to drill through many forms and faces of this phenomenon right into its very essence, the core that must always be there for leadership to occur. This ready-to-use in-class exercise involves a strong eye-opening "aha!-effect" that helps participants to better grasp what must happen if anyone is to be followed by others. It is based on phenomenological concept of eidetic variations, a method designed to unearth the universals, those parts of phenomena that are always present.

### **3) Keywords:**

*Leadership, experiential exercise*

### **4) Format**

- Activity or exercise
- Discussion roundtable (60 minute only)
- General discussion session

### **5) Time Requested:**

- 30 Minutes
- 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- 90 Minutes

### **6) Planning Details:**

*4 flipcharts or one whiteboard*  
*Colored markers*

### **7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:**

*Discovery why people choose to follow leaders and why they stop*  
*The very "core", "true essence of leadership"*

## **8) Management or Teaching Topics:**

*The method is based on phenomenological roots as developed by Edmund Husserl (Husserl, 1931/1962). As proposed by McKnight (1977) this approach is probably the only one that is capable to discern the very essence of the leadership phenomenon. If, and only if, this essence is present then the phenomenon exists, if not, then the phenomenon does not exist. The approach presented first "strips" the essence of its attributes that surround it, of the many forms in which it exists and obscure it. In case of leadership this "something" that must always be present every time when people choose to follow someone is the act of giving and receiving. The method identifies and helps to understand the operation of thus essential condition, a mechanism, if you will, that is always present whenever the phenomenon occurs.*

*The tricky part is of the process is that we try to uncover the universal, something that is always present. Primary analytical methods in conventional human sciences are stochastic in nature and typically use statistical methods that follow the law of large numbers. Since we deal with universals here, it follows that the sample size necessary for 100 percent confidence level is one. Traditional scientific thinking has problems with discovering universals. McKnight therefore suggests that we take advice from the German gestalt psychologists (Kohler, 1947) and research these phenomena not in themselves, but in variations, as opposites. We can see them as "figures" against a "background" which is anything else but the phenomenon we try to separate. The best way for fish to "learn" that it lives in water is to take it out. Otherwise the universals that we seek tend to be beyond perception because they are omnipresent.*

*Phenomenology is probably the only scientific approach that can handle this dilemma, since it is a science of the universal one. We use Husserl's notion of eidetic variations that projects a phenomenon against its non-phenomenon background. It is not unlike what our two eyes do, when they look at the same object from two slightly different perspectives and thus enable us to see a three-dimensional world. McKnight's unique contribution lies in the fact that he moved in his research the attention from the realm of facticity to the one of values. People follow their leaders not because for what they are per se but because they bring something valuable to them.*

*This classroom experience that helps students discover the universals of leadership consists of two basic steps. First is the creation of as rich as possible eidetic variations for study, i.e., developing as many perspectives of the phenomena as we can. The second step is the most critical one and it involves the intuition of the essence that is only implicitly present, concealed in its many forms. It is this second step that produces a strong *aha!*-effect crowns the experience.*

## 9) Session Description and Plan:

*At the beginning of the session I usually set the stage by briefly discussing the importance of leadership in organizations. Why not only organizations but also nations with inspirational leaders tend to fare better than those without them? We then name a few examples which is usually not difficult for the students to do. I then ask them what they think about Warren Bennis' statement who once said that American "companies are overmanaged and underled." They usually agree. Many of them would like to be such leaders. The crucial question is: Why should anyone be led by you? The answers I solicit differ and they admittedly are not very convincing. Then we come to ask: Why people follow? Why indeed people do things they perhaps would not otherwise do just because of a leader?*

*I distribute a worksheet where commonly used attributes of managers and leaders are listed. Below, in the lines provided, I ask them to write down a few names of people who are or were undisputable leaders. Approximately half of them should be public figures that other in the class may know and half their "private" leaders such as their teachers, sports coaches or bosses who played a leadership role in their lives. I stress that they can also list vicious and evil ones, since we aim to uncover the principle why leaders are followed, not where they ultimately lead. Then they do the same thing with managers. Half of them widely known names, another half just their "personal" managers. When they are done, they get into groups and discuss the names and why they put them into each category including what is expected from leaders and what from managers. Sometimes they find that some had put the same person into a leadership group, while others see this person rather as a manager. Oftentimes they conclude that the person used to be a leadership personality in his or her early career and now is more of a manager.*

*After the discussion, they remain in their groups and are asked to develop their own short descriptions of managers and leaders. It is crucial that this is done in dichotomies. Each description of a manager is matched by one of a leader.*

*An example may look like this:*

<b>Managers</b>	<b>Leaders</b>
administer	innovate
many of a kind	original
accept reality	change reality
comply with boundaries	move boundaries
have a plan	have vision
provide tools	give meaning
know how	know why
address the head	address the heart
etc.	

*When the groups are finished with their lists, I record their findings on flipchart or whiteboard, in columns next to each other, preferably in different color. Usually halfway through this process someone says that managers look in this comparison dull, boring,*

*grey, unexciting, and otherwise unattractive which does not do justice to this profession, and is not in many cases true. They all are participants in a management program, after all. I agree and assure them that we now talk about good managers who deserve respect and acknowledgment. I immediately start another column headed Bad managers, again in different color.*

*After we are through with all the dichotomies, we extend the lists to what describes bad managers. It usually involves attributes such as create chaos, don't know, how neither why, disrespect boundaries, take away tools, and the like.*

*These three lists provide the eidetic variations. I start another column on the right, headed Leadership and a big question mark. I ask them to look at these lists as a continuum, and try to intuit what it says about leadership. What have the items in the Leaders column have in common that is missing in the Managers and Bad managers columns? Is there an essence to the leadership? What does leadership behavior do to the people and why they make a decision to follow? Why are they willing to make sacrifices?*

*They tend to say:*

**Leadership**

*Meaning of life*

*sense of belonging to the elite*

*a possibility to make a difference*

*hope*

*freedom to grow*

*direction*

*answers to my inner questions*

*understanding*

*etc.*

*When it becomes clear that not much else is coming, I draw a circle around all the expressions listed. I ask them to look at them as if they were now in a bag or a barrel that we place in a press. What we get when we squeeze it is a drop of precious essence, something like excellent wine. Is there something that they can factor out, a common word that unifies them all?*

*After some effort, they usually arrive to word giving. People decide to follow their leaders because they receive something valuable, unique and precious, something they are not able to find anywhere else or from any other person.*

*The discussion that follows discovers that the important thing here is that the followers feel that they have gotten something first, and only then they pay back to the leader or to the cause that he or she represents. Since the "gift" they obtain is so unique, valuable and impossible to substitute, that what they "pay back" for it rarely matches its perceived value. The relationship is, mathematically speaking, "larger than." Sometimes the "price" is an exceptional deed, like putting their lives on the line, at other times something very mundane, like coming to work on Saturday.*

*With managers the relationship is one of equivalence, and the order of giving and taking*

*is reversed. Managers first take (your work) and then only pay later which works just fine for most people most of the time. With bad managers the relationship is "less than," negative. They take something away and subordinates lose, in the sense that they need to put in more effort or time to get the same reward as compared with a good or decent manager.*

*The deliverable for the participants is their discovery of the simple mechanism of giving and receiving that makes people to follow, and the fact that as leaders they must provide something valuable first. They can expect others to follow for only as long as they have something valuable for them to give.*

### **10) For Activities and Exercises:**

*No special materials are needed, just oral instructions.*

### **11) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:**

*This session that I have conducted more than fifty times in different settings with both MBA students and executives never fails to stun. It elucidates a very simple underlying principle of a very elusive phenomenon that so many talk or write about. It is an experience that participants of my classes or training sessions rarely forget.*

### **12) Application to Conference theme:**

Learning in Community

The charm and magic of this type of session, as I first experienced it nearly twenty years ago, is the miracle of discovering together, in a learning community this otherwise seemingly elusive phenomenon. Almost everyone has at least once in their lives experienced leadership. It is stored somewhere in our minds, implicit and invisible. By polarizing what the phenomenon is and what it is not, the methods of eidetic variations are capable of projecting our subconscious ideas and hidden experiences to a visible and objective plane, in the light of consciousness. Thus we can then see how the pivotal concepts and terms of organizational behavior actually work.

It engages different forms of leadership, stripping this phenomenon of its often heroic, larger-than-life grandeur. This method offers participants awareness of the fact that we all can be leaders in some situations and followers in others. It happens whenever we

offer to other people something they find valuable and unable to obtain anywhere else. It could be anything from how we best spend a rainy weekend afternoon to, say, how we save our company.

Because this activity is a reflection and guided analysis of the real-world experiences shared by the people in the room, it is usually very powerful for them. It is not lecturing on what leadership is but rather allowing them to discover its core by themselves in a very convincing and memorable way.

### **13) Unique Contribution to OBTC:**

*This proposal is for the OBTC only and it is not under current review anywhere else.*

### **14) References and/or Additional Materials:**

#### *REFERENCES*

*Husserl, Edmund. Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology: W.R. Bryce Gibson, Trans., Original Work Published 1931. New York: Collier Books, 1962.*

*Kohler, W. Gestalt Psychology. New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1947.*

*McKnight, Melvin. Organizational Behavior as a Phenomenological Free-Will Centered Science. Unpublished Paper distributed at OBTC 1997.*

*Schutz, Alfred, Phenomenology of the Social World, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1967.*

*Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones, Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?, Harvard Business Review, September 2000, 46-53.*