

## **Teaching leadership from the perspective of those being led:**

### **A structured reflective exercise**

#### **Abstract**

Many have had experiences with a manager, leader, coach, teacher, or professor that greatly influenced their satisfaction, commitment, performance and whether they continued the activity. They often did not realize the significance these individuals played in achieving these outcomes. This exercise asks students to reflect on their inclusion in both an “in-group” and “out-group”, and what the leader provided. This exercise teaches in a personal way, the leader’s influence on an individual’s success and other important individual outcomes. This exercise is based on the work on Leader-Member Exchange Theory, the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Pygmalion Effect.

**Key Words:** Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, Pygmalion Effect

#### **Introduction, Objectives of the Exercise and Teaching Implications**

We have all had experiences with a previous manager, leader, coach, teacher, professor, parent, etc. that has either helped or hindered our efforts in pursuit of successful performance. These experiences have routinely left us with either fond memories and appreciation or a bitter taste in our mouth. This exercise asks students to reflect on their past and describe their membership in both an “in-group” and an “out-group”. This exercise is based upon two approaches to leadership. The first is George Graen’s Leader-Member Exchange and the second is based upon the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy advocated by sociologist Robert Merton and Robert Rosenthal’s related work with the Pygmalion Effect. Many theories of leadership assume that the leader essentially treats all subordinates in a similar manner. The basic assumption of Leader-Member Exchange Theory is that a leader creates two groups, an in-group and an out-group. The in-group receives greater rewards, attention, input, feedback and they have a higher expectation for their performance, etc. Subsequently they are usually more successful, assume great responsibility, and contribute more to the organization. They also tend to have higher satisfaction, motivation and commitment than the out-group and tend to be more likely to continue the activity in the future. The exact opposite is true for the out-group. This approach to leadership is also consistent with Merton and Rosenthal’s related-work with the Pygmalion Effect and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy. Their approach assumes that people behave in accordance with how they are treated.

The primary objective of this exercise is for students to understand leadership in a very personal and reflective experiential manner. Through this exercise, my students come to recognize how a leader contributed to their personal outcomes in these two previous situations. They subsequently consider how they personally contribute to another’s experiences and even to reevaluate how they are presently leading others. A second objective, often quite significant to some individuals, is that students reframe these earlier

experiences in light of their leader's contribution to their earlier outcomes. This is especially true for out-group experiences, where the student has blamed themselves when they were less successful than others. They reframe the experience of a perceived failure by showing them what was missing from their relationship to their leader, coach or professor. A third objective, is that students come to realize that often in these earlier situations they had little choice of who their employer, teacher or coach was or how they were treated. But now, they realize that they have alternatives, and have the opportunity to seek those individuals who will provide them with the input, feedback, higher goal expectations and a more positive climate that may be missing from some of the present situations. Through this exercise, my student's discussion of leadership becomes more concrete rather than abstract.

This has led some students to the identification of a different leader, mentor, coach, professor, etc. In this way the exercise is both reflective and prescriptive in identifying criteria of a leader or manager that would facilitate the subordinate's (individual's) success. Many of my students have used this awareness in their search for a mentor. It is important that students realize that earlier in their life they had little choice concerning the significant individuals in their life. As they become older they have a much greater choice in who will manage and guide their future performance and development.

### **Overview of the Presentation and Presentation Format**

As illustrated in the diagram in Appendix A, students are asked to highlight how the leader behaves toward them in terms of providing input, feedback, setting goals (higher or lower expectations) and providing a positive or negative climate. The students are then asked to link the leader's behavior to their personal performance, skill development, satisfaction and commitment to the activity. This is done for both an "in-group" and "out-group" from their past. In the exercise, the position of leader may be substituted with coach, teacher, professor, one's manager, parent etc. The student is then asked to summarize his/her thoughts and potential actions in a reflective paper.

The basic exercise will be described and its underlying rationale will be explained. Participants will complete the exercise themselves and will be given the opportunity to discuss this exercise. I will also present my experience with this exercise; student illustrations, comments and feedback, directions for students, as well as suggestions for faculty.

I have used this exercise in the classroom for seven years with both graduates and undergraduates, but I believe that it could be used in non-university setting. I believe that this exercise can be successfully discussed within 30 minutes.

Besides a laptop and projector, nothing else will be required. Handouts and other supplemental material will be provided by the author.

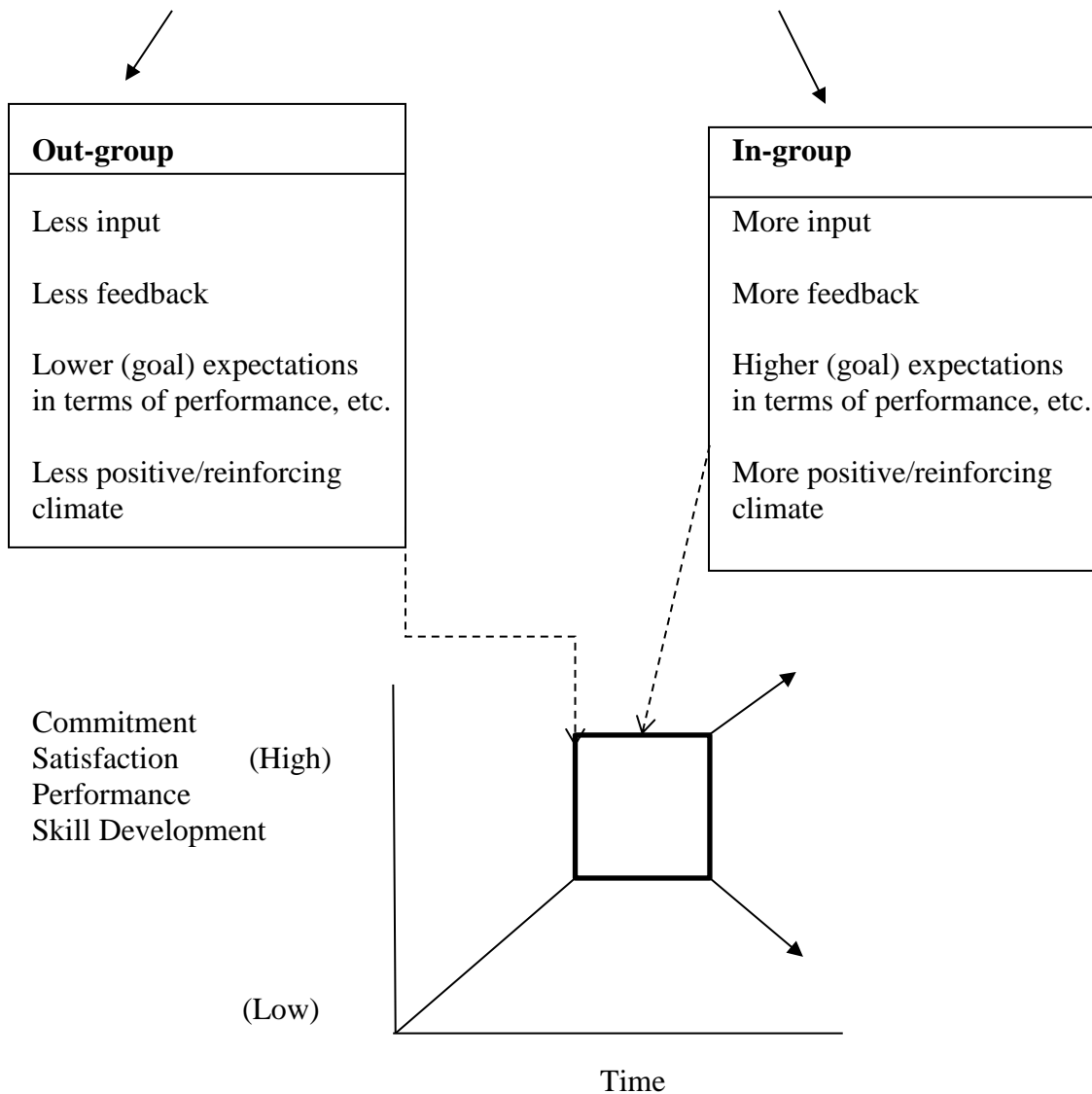
## **Application and Contribution to the Conference Theme**

Teaching leadership is an important part of our management and organizational classes, and it is important that students see the importance of leadership in achieving both organizational and employee-related outcomes. This exercise also helps to identify what they need from a leader in order to be personally and professionally successful and the importance of finding these. This proactive approach is especially important in our rapidly changing environment, which has less and less direct managerial contact.

I have not presented this presentation to an OBTC National Conference in the past and it is not presently under review for any other venue. I did present a preliminary conceptual discussion of this exercise at the MOBTC in Philadelphia this past March. Since that time, I have clarified the theoretical basis for the exercise, clarified the objectives of the exercise and acquired additional feedback from my students in its impact this past spring semester and have altered the exercise in line with their feedback.

## Supplemental Material

### Supervisor's Treatment of Out vs. In-Group Members



Describe having been in an “In group”. How were you treated (Discuss this in terms of: input, feedback, goals and climate)? What were the results (Discuss in terms of: your commitment, satisfaction, performance and skill development)?

Describe having been in an “Out group”. How were you treated (Discuss this in terms of: input, feedback, goals and climate)? What were the results (Discuss in terms of: your commitment, satisfaction, performance and skill development)?

Please summarize your thoughts and potential actions in a reflective paper.