**LESSON 19: VERTICAL DYAD LINKAGE THEORY**

**Introduction**

This lesson consists of:

1. Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory

2. Case Study

3. Student Journal Entry

**Assignment**

1. **Read Course Guide,** pages 2 - 5.

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify* the Areas of Interest.**

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory.

A. ***Identify*** the followers in this situation with whom the leader has either In-Group or Out-Group relationships.

B. ***Identify*** the Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship for each member in this leader’s Out-Group.

III. ***Explain*** an Area of Interest in terms of how the leader’s Out-Group assignment of followers influences individual work group member’s performance, motivation, and satisfaction. Likewise, explain the impact of the leader’s groupings on group and organizational performance.

IV. ***Select***an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) to address Areas of Interest.

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

VI. ***Assess***, evaluate, and revise your leader plan.

3. **Complete a Student Journal** entry for Vertical Dyad Linkage.

From your professional life, describe a work group to which you belong(ed) where the leader had In- and Out-Group relationships with individual group members. Which category were you in? What Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship were present (or absent) in your relationship (depending on which category you were in)? With the other category (the one you were not part of), what Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship were present (or absent)? With the Out-Group, what was the impact on individual group member’s performance, motivation, and satisfaction? What was the impact of the Out-Group on group performance and the group’s ability to contribute to the organization’s goal? What could the leader have done to improve the In/Out-Group situation and thereby enhance individual, group, and organizational outcomes?

**VERTICAL DYAD LINKAGE THEORY**

Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory (VDL) is one of the simplest concepts covered in this course. This leadership approach focuses on a leader's tendency to treat individual followers differently. Some followers develop closer, more trusted relationships with the leader, while others are placed in more distant and less influential roles within the group. These two types of relationships are known as the In-Group and the Out-Group, respectively. Whether this differentiation is intentional or not, it results in certain privileged followers who can subsequently influence the outcomes for all followers, the group, and the organization as a whole.

**Indicators of an In-Group Relationship**

Intuitively, a district commander will not treat each of her lieutenants in the same way. Some lieutenants are quickly accepted as more trusted or reliable for various reasons and are afforded different privileges or powers by the leader. Conversely, other lieutenants may be treated more routinely and seen by the leader as simply part of the work group. According to Equity Theory, this differential treatment can lead to potentially dysfunctional behavior among Out-Group followers. Therefore, the leader needs to understand the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) phenomenon and strive to cultivate as many In-Group relationships as possible. The first step in mastering VDL and leveraging it to enhance individual, group, and organizational outcomes is to explore the six Common Indicators of an In-Group relationship.

The first indicator is a higher degree of communication with an In-Group follower. In our last lesson, we learned that a leader can use information to build a more substantial information base and possibly increase their expert power. According to VDL theory, leaders tend to communicate more or selectively share information with In-Group members while keeping Out-Group members relatively uninformed. A typical example might be providing an In-Group member with an early warning about an upcoming inspection, while an Out-Group follower only receives what is necessary through the formal authority relationship, such as changes to the training plan or already determined personnel actions.

The second indicator is influence in decisions. Both Hackman’s Job Redesign Model and the Normative Models of Decision Making recommend that leaders include group members in the decision-making process under certain conditions. However, VDL literature shows that leaders usually discuss key decisions with In-Group followers and seek their input, while Out-Group followers are rarely included in these discussions. For example, our district commander might ask her In-Group lieutenants whether they believe she should volunteer their officers for a detail to guard the vice president during his next visit, but she would not solicit input from an Out-Group follower.

The third indicator is the priority of task assignment. In-Group followers tend to be assigned valued, career-enhancing, and high-visibility tasks, while Out-Group followers often end up with less desirable assignments. For instance, an emergency communications center chief may prefer to give an In-Group shift leader the responsibility of escorting the city manager around the center if that task is deemed valuable.

The fourth indicator is job latitude. An Out-Group follower may be required to seek leader approval frequently for job-related tasks, whereas an In-Group follower enjoys much more freedom regarding assigned tasks. A leader providing job latitude to an In-Group follower may simply give the follower a final goal and allow them to achieve that goal in whatever way they choose. In contrast, an Out-Group follower might be given a final goal but will need to report to the leader often to update them on the progress of sub-goals associated with that final task. The leader may even provide detailed step-by-step instructions to an Out-Group follower.

Support is the fifth indicator, referring to the degree to which a leader advocates for the activities of others. A leader is much more likely to back up an In-Group member than an Out-Group member. For example, a captain might praise an In-Group lieutenant to the chief for organizing a creative training event or defend that lieutenant in cases of inappropriate behavior. This backing tends to make In-Group followers more willing to take on challenging missions because they know the leader will support them if difficulties arise.

The final indicator is attention, which encompasses the amount of mentoring activities (such as career advice and assistance in securing desirable jobs) that a leader provides to a follower. In-Group members typically have a mentor-protégé relationship with the leader, while Out-Group members' relationships revolve around the formal authority structure of the organization.

Take a moment to reflect on the groups or teams to which you have belonged. Can you identify the In-Group and Out-Group relationships with that particular leader?

**Vertical Dyads Formation**

Now that we have a better understanding of what these relationships look like, how are they formed? In a word, quickly. First impressions often determine whether followers are categorized as In-Group or Out-Group members. Research indicates that these relationships develop rapidly and tend to remain stable long after they have formed. Both the leader and the follower instinctively create or reject an emotional connection with each other. Unless a significant event occurs to change their perceptions, both parties typically remain in that established relationship for an extended period.

More formally, research has identified a three-stage process through which In-Group and Out-Group dyads are formed: the initial sampling phase, the bargaining phase, and the commitment phase. Understanding these phases offers valuable insights for students of leadership, as it provides knowledge about the process and creates opportunities to positively influence the formation of dyadic relationships. The more In-Group relationships there are, and the fewer Out-Group relationships, between a leader and their followers, the more effective the leader's performance will be.

**Problems with Out-Group Assignment**

Ideally, all group members should be treated as In-Group members. This idea is based on several premises. First, communication is often limited between Out-Group followers and the leader. As a result, the leader may not provide important information to Out-Group members, nor may they receive critical feedback from them. This lack of communication can decrease both group and organizational performance. Additionally, since Out-Group followers have less influence on leader decisions, leaders often assign individuals who are similar to themselves to the In-Group. Consequently, leaders may make decisions without considering alternative perspectives that could be offered by Out-Group members. This can stifle creativity and reduce the range of potential solutions to problems within the work group.

Another reason for minimizing Out-Group membership is that leaders typically assign important tasks to In-Group followers. If an Out-Group member possesses the skills necessary to complete a crucial task but is overlooked, their expertise is wasted. Furthermore, a less competent In-Group member may struggle, negatively affecting the group’s or organization’s performance. Similarly, if an In-Group member is the most qualified for a less desirable task, the leader might assign this task to an Out-Group follower instead.

Leaders can face two additional challenges when a significant number of Out-Group followers are present. First, by allocating valued tasks and decision-making influence to In-Group members, leaders may create a sense of inequity for Out-Group members. Research has consistently shown that Out-Group members tend to receive lower efficiency ratings than their In-Group counterparts. This perceived inequity can adversely affect the motivation of Out-Group members. The second challenge involves group cohesion. Disparities in how a leader treats In-Group and Out-Group followers can lead to animosity between the two groups, damaging overall group cohesion.

It is also important to recognize that there are downsides to In-Group relationships. In our fast-paced world, we tend to categorize people quickly, which makes it difficult to change those categorizations due to our bias toward information that confirms our initial judgments. Even if someone is placed in the In-Group, their contributions to the leader-follower relationship may not always be positive. Over time, if a leader fails to re-evaluate the contributions of an In-Group member, this relationship may become dysfunctional. The boundaries between In-Group and Out-Group should not be fixed; leaders should constantly reassess these relationships and adjust their behavior as needed, always striving to maximize the positive contributions from all followers. How can we implement this process?

**VDL Leader Strategies**

Time constraints placed on leaders can hinder their ability to cultivate In-Group relationships with all followers. However, since the number of In-Group relationships is linked to leader effectiveness, a leader who aims to enhance group performance should consider how the six Common Indicators apply to a specific Out-Group member. The leader can then develop a plan to increase job latitude, provide personal attention, and improve other indicators for that Out-Group member.

The most direct way to transition followers from an Out-Group status to an In-Group status is by consciously applying the six Common Indicators of an In-Group relationship to an Out-Group follower. Unfortunately, while this method is straightforward, it may overlook other options that could address and resolve broader or systemic issues within the workgroup.

As you reflect on this discussion, you may recognize connections to other theories we studied previously. Concepts like unfairness, rewards and punishments, and job autonomy were discussed in Area I, The Individual System. In exploring Equity, Motivation through Consequences, and Job Redesign Theory, we identified similar relationships. Each of these theories suggests leader actions that are highly relevant in this context. Additionally, Socialization Theory from Area II may provide a framework for analyzing and resolving dysfunctional In-Group/Out-Group dynamics through periodic training. Finally, you might have noticed that Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) Theory offers a practical application of the Bases of Social Power from our last lesson. Applying what you learned in that context can be beneficial here. VDL Theory is an intuitive and straightforward concept, yet it serves as a powerful tool for analyzing work group dynamics and performance while motivating followers to achieve their best.

Case Study

Upon promotion to lieutenant, you are put in charge of day watch in Southwest Area. You spend your first few weeks observing and getting to know your personnel, especially your five sergeants. You already know Sergeant Yuri Yorg, who lives in the same housing tract as you. He runs a part-time construction business, specializing in additions and renovations. He put a deck on your house last year for almost $600 less than the next lowest quote you received. You wonder if he would be interested in carpooling to work. You know that Yorg is a recovering alcoholic who came close to getting fired after showing up drunk at a show-up almost ten years ago. He entered a rehabilitation program and has stayed sober ever since. You consider him to be a good cop and a hard worker.

Sergeant Rico Ortiz is recently divorced; he works a fair amount of overtime and off-duty jobs. His watch performs well; yet Ortiz often appears to be preoccupied. Some time ago you learned that his wife abandoned him and their two small children last summer. Things have not been easy for Ortiz, but he remains strongly committed to both his kids and the job. You are impressed by his character and dedication and therefore, felt comfortable a few days ago when he asked you to “stick your neck out for him” over a personnel complaint he had investigated. Because of his apparent competence and his loyalty, you often find yourself bouncing ideas off Rico Ortiz and seeking his advice.

Sergeant Gail Harris is a young, somewhat inexperienced, by-the-book supervisor. She often says, “That’s the only way to be on this job” and suggests that the other sergeants would be wise to follow her lead. Harris is distant and aloof. Most of the division refers to her as “Robo Cop.” You find it easier to keep your conversations with her to a minimum.

Sergeant Gary Babb is older than the other sergeants. He’s never taken the Lieutenant’s Exam and says he’s happy just being a street sergeant. Babb’s greatest talent appears to be telling jokes and stories. He’s a likable guy, but you wonder how he ever got promoted to Sergeant. It certainly wasn’t for his leadership skills. When you give out administrative projects, you have already discovered that you have to provide much more guidance to Sergeant Babb than you do with the other sergeants. Your instructions to Babb typically need to be simple and direct. Recently, your commander questioned you about Babb’s failure to check the minimum staffing before giving out discretionary days off. You just shrugged your shoulders and said, “That’s Babb!” You were finished sticking up for Babb.

Sergeant Mary Munro has been a member of the department’s championship pistol team for the last four years. As an avid shooter yourself, you are impressed by her shooting skills. You enjoy discussing weapons and firing techniques with Munro; you often spend free moments just chatting with her about guns. Mary Munro is widely respected by her peers.

The next Monday morning, after your first weekend off in a couple of months, Sergeant Ortiz is in your office with a troubled look on his face. He tells you of an incident that happened over the weekend at a detective’s retirement party. One of Rico’s own officers, SPO Steve Johnson, got drunk and began arguing with other Southwest officers. As things heated up, Johnson started pushing and shoving his co-workers and had to be subdued and taken home. Sergeant Ortiz says that Officer Johnson’s drinking is a problem and is affecting his performance. Ortiz also tells you that after this weekend’s incident, Johnson has submitted a request to change watch. Sergeant Ortiz admits that he doesn’t know how to handle a situation like this, and it’s really causing serious problems on the watch. He asks you to approve Johnson’s change of watch request. You tell him that you will decide the matter by end-of-watch tonight.

You seek out Sergeant Yuri Yorg to talk to him about Officer Johnson. Yorg is already aware of Saturday’s confrontation and Johnson’s alcohol problem. You mention Johnson’s request for a watch change. You tell Yorg that you are thinking of denying the request and instead putting Johnson with a new supervisor. Sergeant Yorg jumps up from his chair and says, “Please don’t give Johnson to me; I’ve got enough problems to deal with now! Give him to Robo Cop; let her deal with him. Besides, Officer Ted Waldron would really like to get off of her watch anyway, so you could swap Waldron for Johnson and kill two birds with one stone.”

You also discuss this matter with Sergeant Munro and ask for her input. Munro tells you that she has no problem with Sergeant Yorg’s suggestion but adds that she doesn’t want Officer Johnson on her watch either.

After Munro leaves, you call in Sergeant Gail “Robo Cop” Harris and notify her that you are taking Officer Waldron off her squad and replacing him with Officer Steve Johnson. You tell Harris that Officer Johnson probably has a drinking problem and a personnel complaint coming down. You give Sgt. Harris a personnel complaint exemplar and a detailed set of instructions on how to deal with substance abuse complaints. You order her to report back to you on this matter at least twice per week until the matter is resolved. Sergeant Harris protests your decision, saying that a more tenured supervisor like Yuri Yorg, who has some experience dealing with alcohol issues, should deal with Johnson’s alcohol problem. You tell her that your decision is final and that this is a good developmental opportunity for her. Harris hands you back your exemplar, saying she already has one in her I.A. file.

One month later, you check the recap and learn that observation arrests and officer-initiated activities have declined throughout Sgt. Harris’ entire watch. Also, Mary Munro tells you that Sergeant Harris has interviewed for a job with another police department.

I. ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

With whom does this leader have In-Group relationships?

With whom does this leader have Out-Group relationships?

For each Out-Group follower, list the missing Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship. (List the name, followed by the indicators he/she is missing/lacking.)

III. ***Explain*** an Area of Interest in terms of how the leader’s Out-Group assignment of followers influences individual work group member’s performance, motivation, and satisfaction. Likewise, explain the impact of the leader’s relationships on group and organizational performance.

How has the relegation of some employees to an Out-Group relationship damaged the motivation, satisfaction, and/or performance of individuals? Who has been affected and how?

Has the performance of the group been affected? How?

Has the performance of the organization been affected? How?

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) that would be effective in this situation.

Which theoretical leader strategies should the leader use to address the Area(s) of Interest in this situation?

V. ***Apply*** the theoretically correct leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest. The plan should be realistic and holistic, address all the Areas of Interest you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into real work action. What will you do and say to whom, when, where, and how?

VI. ***Assess*** the effectiveness of your leader plan and revise as needed. After your leader plan, list the measures you would use to evaluate your actions. In this step, leaders need to ask, “What information do I need to tell whether or not my leadership is having the desired effects? How will I obtain the information I need? How can it be generated? Who can help me get what I need? How often should I collect data and in what form?”

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Vertical Dyad Linkage.

From your professional life, describe a work group to which you belong(ed) where the leader had In- and Out-Group relationships with individual group members. Which category were you in? What Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship were present (or absent) in your relationship (depending on which category you were in)? With the other category (the one you were not part of), what Common Indicators of an In-Group Relationship were present (or absent)? With the Out-Group, what was the impact on individual group member’s performance, motivation, and satisfaction? What was the impact of the Out-Group on group performance and the group’s ability to contribute to the organization’s goal? What could the leader have done to improve the In/Out-Group situation and thereby enhance individual, group, and organizational outcomes?