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Working Together: Examining Forensic Leadership through LMX Theory

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Forensic teams function as organizations with a variety of leadership styles used. To better understand how we lead, we need to more closely study organizational communication theory. With the ever-present need to provide links from theory to forensic practice, this paper outlines leader member exchange (LMX) theory and how it can be applied to forensic leadership for positive organizational outcomes. Implementation strategies are offered along with suggestions for future directions of research. Ideally, this paper will act as a resource for those wishing to explore LMX theory in their forensic leadership.

It is no secret that in the activity of competitive collegiate forensic speaking, leadership and team culture play a large role in retaining students and keeping them happy (Worthen, 1995; Miller, 2005), as well as in increasing productivity (Croucher, Thorton, & Eckstein, 2006). While forensic teams act like many other organizations in this sense, they differ because of the change that occurs due to student-competitor turnover (Swanson, 1992). Successful teams are able to persevere in spite of this challenge due to exceptional leadership since coaches are the constant variable in team culture. The way a team is run ends up symbolizing the team identity that everyone shares because it provides something that all the members can relate to (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). In an activity that has constant membership turnover, forensic coaches must find a way to connect to their team to continue to motivate students to stay active and successful competitors.

With some exceptions (i.e.: Dreibelbis, 1989; Elton, 1989; Schnoor and Green, 1989), forensic research from the organizational standpoint has focused on what increases team unity and cohesion, examining what the coach can do to assist large-group impact and, to some extent, what a coach can do with individual interactions with students. The forensic leadership model varies from team to team, but forensic scholars approach team organization with the coach being seen as the leader and with the students being the subordinates. The idea of coaches as mentors or teachers (Hinck, 2003; White, 2005) is prevalent in forensics, attempting to capture the unique leadership dynamic of collegiate forensics. Drawing from the field of athletic coaching, within the roles of mentor and teacher, coaches stand to influence players considerably by filling a leadership position that encapsulates both support and instruction (Smith & Smoll, 1990; Turman, 2001; Turman & Schrodt, 2004; Zhang & Jenson, 1997).

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Bennetts (2002) defined traditional mentor relationships as "intimate learning alliances that happen naturally" (p. 155). This seems to fit with how many collegiate forensics coaches and student competitors build working relationships; the relationships develop out of circumstance, but the depth of the relationship is developed through a more organic process. As White (2005) pointed out, a coach gets to know students beyond crafting speeches and, through that relationship development, "seeks to guide the student to success in all aspects of life" (p. 89).

Friedley & Manchester (2005) noted that healthy team cultures need a mutual respect to succeed; close working relationships between coaches and student-competitors are no different. Competitors who are actively engaged in the activity are more likely to have close working relationships with their coaches. Often competitors expect a deep relationship with their coaches and vice-versa. As Walker (2011) argued, managing relationships with students can be difficult, and, thus, each relationship should be handled on an individual basis. Essentially, coaches need to approach leadership differently with each student.

The concept of personalized leadership is well studied. Mid-20th century leadership scholarship focused on which traits produced effective leaders, but scholars began to recognize the short-sightedness in only exploring effectiveness based upon leaders' behaviors. Graen and Uhl-Bein (1995), noted leadership scholars, began exploring three separate domains: the leader, the follower, and the relationships leaders and followers shared. During the explosion of literature that followed, a new concept was proposed: Leader-Member Exchange.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory was originally named Vertical Dyad Linkage (Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976; Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Essentially the researchers suggested leaders do not interact with each individual subordinate in exactly the same way (an assumption of prior leadership theory), but that each dyad shared a unique relationship. Studying the redubbed LMX theory (Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp, 1982), scholars began linking high quality relationships with a variety of positive organizational outcomes, such as commitment, innovation, empowerment, employee learning, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, productivity, and retention (Bezuijen, van Dam, and van den Berg, 2010; Fisk and Friesen, 2012; Jones, 2009; Truckenbrodt, 2000). Thus, as Jones observed, LMX theory became "one of the most widely researched theories in leadership" (p. 3).

LMX makes the relationship between leaders and followers the focal point of the leadership process (Northouse, 2004). These relationships fall under two basic categories: high quality and low quality. Dienesch and Liden (1986) described high quality relationships as characterized by high levels of "trust, interaction, support, and formal/informal rewards" (p. 621) while low quality relationships did not receive these benefits. House and Aditya (1997) emphasized in high quality LMX relationships there is a "high degree of mutual influence and obligation between superiors and subordinates" (p. 430). LMX theory does not dictate which behaviors or traits will be effective in every situation. Instead it offers suggestions regarding how leaders could approach situations with the end-goal being high-quality relationship development and maintenance with all subordinates.

As Darvish and Farzane-dokht (2011) argued, “managers can only perform all their duties well, when they possess the skill of interaction and creating proper relationship with employees,” (p. 1252), and the situational nature of each relationship requires a variety of approaches to be utilized. Forensic coaches can more effectively lead their organizations by employing LMX behaviors with student-competitors. This article will examine the benefits of high quality LMX relationships and offer steps to achieving those benefits in the context of forensic team leadership.

Benefits Tied to High-Quality LMX Relationships

Using an LMX leadership style can yield many benefits in a forensic context if coaches can develop what Fairhurst and Hamlett (2003) called high-quality LMX relationships with their students. Benefits include increased satisfaction and productivity, higher commitment levels, escalated organizational citizenship behaviors, and higher autonomy for the coach and the student.

Two of the major benefits of a high-quality LMX relationship are increased satisfaction and productivity. Much research has highlighted the subordinate benefit of increased work satisfaction as a result of high-quality LMX relationships (Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Gertsner and Day, 1997; Scandura and Graen, 1984). Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz, and Abele (2011) defined job satisfaction as feeling emotionally positive regarding social relationships in the workplace and having a positive attitude regarding the work the individual accomplishes and the environment in which that work takes place. Forensic students could feel satisfied with their work regardless of competitive success because of the high-quality LMX relationship they have with their coach. When individuals are more satisfied, they are more productive (Ostroff, 1992); additional research suggests employees in high-quality LMX relationships have been found to have improved productivity and a higher quality of performance (Bezuijen, van Dam, van den Berg, and Thierry, 2010; House and Aditya, 1997; Jones, 2009). Forensic students are more likely to work on their events, team tasks, or other academic work if they are satisfied with their role in the group, and they may be more committed to a higher level of performance. Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) found “LMX was positively related to performance [which results in] outcomes that directly benefit leaders” (p. 105). Thus, when a coach and student share a high-quality LMX relationship, the student will likely enjoy increased satisfaction, productivity, and performance, which benefits the student, the coach, and the team.

Organizational commitment also positively correlates to the quality of LMX relationships developed by the leader. Truckenbrodt (2000) defined commitment as company loyalty exhibited by employees based on perceived shared goals, objectives, and values. Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) noted the relative strength of commitment depends upon how much the individual identifies with and is involved in the organization. Ostroff (1992) found commitment level correlates with a lower turnover rate, something forensic coaches struggle to combat. Ferris (1985) and Gertsner and Day (1997) found positive relationships between LMX relationships and subordinate retention, intent to turnover, and overall commitment to the organization. As Truckenbrodt concluded, “improving the quality of LMX will increase subordinates’ sense of commitment [which] will benefit not only the supervisors and the subordinates,

but also the organization as a whole in the achievement of organizational growth and success” (p. 242). On a forensics team, organizational commitment and competitor retention must occur before the organization can achieve its goals, and one way coaches can elicit commitment and retention is through developing high-quality LMX relationships with each competitor.

Increased commitment is linked to increased organizational citizenship behaviors, which leads to more and better work completed by the individual (Tzy-Yuan, Jiang, Klein, and Chou, 2011; Walumbwa, Cropanzano, and Goldman, 2011). Organizational citizenship behaviors involve both meeting and going beyond expectations to benefit the organization, such as volunteering for additional unpaid work assignments. Forensic coaches could see higher student turnout for peer coaching, service projects, or speech camps. The more committed the student is to the team, the more likely he or she is to help the team reach its fullest potential. Truckenbrodt (2000) argued organizational citizenship behaviors improve “the effectiveness of the organization by the high degree of work group performance in terms of quantity and quality of work” (p. 235). Competitors engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors may voluntarily take on leadership roles to their primary responsibility of preparing speech performances. Competitors may also work harder and achieve higher levels of success because they feel they more closely identify with the coach and the team.

Forensics coaches often have teaching, advising, committee, and research tasks in addition to their team responsibilities, so coaches would especially benefit from the higher levels of autonomy resulting from high-quality LMX relationships with their students. Volmer, Spurk, and Niessen (2012) found job autonomy positively correlated to LMX relationship quality. The relationship may be influenced by Bezuijen, van Dam, van den Berg, and Thierry’s (2010) finding that leaders heavily influence “employee engagement in learning activities,” (p. 675) which they associated with a subordinate’s motivation to learn. Members seeking autonomy place the onus of responsibility upon themselves to learn the skills necessary for success. Students who perceive their coaches as supporting their development may seek both to learn more about how to complete their work independently, but also more creatively. Numerous studies have also positively linked LMX with creativity in the workplace, especially when members enjoyed high levels of job autonomy (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Darvish and Farzan-Dokht, 2011; Volmer Spurk, and Niessen, 2012). Forensic students can profit from increased freedom and learning opportunities, and coaches can empower students to seek success while decreasing their own long-term workload. In order to reap the benefits of a high-quality LMX relationship, coaches must utilize several behaviors, which will be described in the next section.

Developing High-Quality LMX Relationship Behaviors for Forensic Coaches

Working together in a high-quality LMX relationship would seem to be desired by both coach and student. However, determining what students and coaches want in a high-quality LMX relationship can be difficult. Building from the organizational communication literature, suggested behaviors for forensic coaches are proposed to help establish high-quality LMX relationships with their students.

Coach Introspection

Before engaging in relationship building, an individual must be aware of his or her own tendencies as a leader. Introspection is an important step in building awareness and consciously making leadership choices to benefit a coach's team and organization.

Coaches need to be aware of their own personal characteristics because it might influence a relationship with a student. In some instances, likeness between a coach and student can be beneficial. For example, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (1994) noted dyads of the same sex had a higher probability of high-quality exchange relationships. Also, Sears and Hackett (2011) identified some characteristics, such as positive affectivity and the need for power, to be positively correlated to LMX relationship quality. However, differences can also be helpful. McClane (1991) observed other characteristics, such as locus of control and need for achievement, to be characteristics where dissimilarity between leader and follower correlate to positive outcomes.

Beyond personal characteristics, coaches need to know what place forensics will take in their lives. Do they want to be available 24 hours/day for students? Do they want to be Facebook friends with students? Do they want to be the one the student calls to bail them out of jail? Recognizing the boundaries a coach has is important knowledge to have prior to building purposeful relationships with students.

Forensics coaches must also take care to monitor their emotional behavioral displays. Jones (2009) investigated the emotional behaviors utilized by various leaders to determine the overall impacts on LMX relationships. She identified three types of emotional displays: surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions. Surface acting occurs when an individual disingenuously displays emotional cues in an attempt to elicit specific behaviors. Deep acting occurs when an individual matches internal emotional reactions to match external expressions being expressed for a specific purpose. The difference between surface and deep acting is the authenticity with which they are felt and perceived by fellow communicators. A coach must attempt to appear excited (or another emotion), even when they may not be, to achieve deep acting. Genuine emotional displays occur naturally, without the individual attempting to alter his or her projected cues.

While ideally a coach would be able to convey genuine emotional displays at all times, it is not always possible to naturally feel with conviction the desired emotion. At times a coach may feel anger or frustration when a student does not show up to a coaching appointment, but must project calm and positive feelings instead. This can be extremely difficult to manage. Therefore leaders seeking high-quality LMX relationships should attempt to engage in deep acting emotional displays to capitalize on the more genuine message it conveys to subordinates. Failing to monitor emotional behaviors can lead subordinates to distrust the leaders' messages, thereby decreasing the overall quality of the LMX relationship.

A coach must know his or her personal characteristics and communication tendencies in order to monitor and potentially change them for the betterment of the student/coach relationship. For example, if specific boundaries from work to private life are desired, make sure students cannot see personal social media accounts, and designate times for availability during the day. Knowing personal characteristics and tendencies can help a coach adapt to each student by seeing potential connections and conflicts that may arise in each relationship. Once a coach has examined himself or herself through

introspection and modified any potential relationship hurdles, he or she can start getting to know the students.

Establish Clear Roles

A forensic coach's relationship with a student starts when they first meet each other. The early stages of a relationship are vital to its success; developing the relationship between the leader and the subordinate is the most important step in the LMX process. It is often tempting for coaches to only meet students through a large scale meeting, but each individual leader-subordinate relationship should be unique and each situation may call for different leadership behaviors (Darvish & Farzane-dokht, 2011). Forensic coaches need to establish roles within each dyad to have potential for a high-quality LMX relationship with a student. Sears and Hackett (2011) observed that especially in the formative stages of a relationship, the clarity of roles for each dyad member heavily impacted LMX quality as role clarity was tied to the ability to complete tasks. The ability to complete tasks was connected to leaders' perceptions about followers' overall performance, which then impacted relationship quality. On small forensic teams, getting to know each student may not be difficult, but for larger teams, coaches may want to have a plan for how to meet all their students. Of course, this is just the start to the relationship. Dyads will change and grow over time.

Bauer and Green (1995) found that LMX dyads are dynamic and their relationships were "developed or negotiated over time through a series of exchanges" (p. 1538). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) found in a review of LMX literature that the basic time characterizations in an LMX lifecycle progressed through three stages: Stranger, Acquaintance, and Maturity. Dyads progress from a loosely connected set of leader-subordinate goals with primarily a top-down leadership emphasis in the Stranger stage through role negotiation and familiarization in the Acquaintance stage to the Maturity stage where both individuals mutually influence one another and work toward common goals. Relationships characterized as low-quality remain in the Stranger stage, while relationships characterized as high-quality progressed to the Maturity stage. Those relationships who lingered in the Acquaintance stage would eventually slip back into the Stranger stage and would fall into the low-quality relationship category.

Coaches seeking Maturity stage relationships should begin the Stranger stage (when the student first joins the team) with explicit establishment of roles for both the coach and student. Clear boundaries must be established between expected, acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior. By communicating explicit procedural guidelines for what is expected of students during coaching sessions, team meetings, and at tournaments, coaches establish the leader and follower roles. Initial interactions with students set the tone for the relationship the coach desires, so coaches should consciously formulate their intended communicational behaviors in the Stranger stage. Whether the coach establishes a more formal or informal relationship, coaches still need to establish themselves as the leaders of the team. For example, a coach might prefer all coaching sessions to be held in the office with a designated notebook for each student, while another coach might hold an appointment while eating lunch in a restaurant. One coach might find swearing acceptable in dialogue with the student. Another coach might require the students to address them by the professional title (Dr. or Professor). The clear articulation of boundaries and expectations for how the coach will act and respond lets

the student know where the coach stands regarding the role as boss. Likewise, student roles as the followers, or “subordinates,” need to be made definite. The expectations should be clear because ambiguity or inconsistency can lead to subordinates feeling intimidated by the leader (Troutwine, 2006). After students understand the expectations in general for coaching sessions, meetings, and tournaments, the coach-student relationship can begin to progress to the Adaptation and Maturation stages of the LMX relationship.

One way to help the move forward from the Stranger stage is to recognize and emphasize the similarities shared between the leader and the subordinate. A coach should use what they learned via introspection to help tailor their relationship with each student. Jones (2009) suggested “perceived similarity in attitudes, values, and experiences” (p. 7) directly correlates to the overall LMX relationship’s quality. Dissimilarity between parties that may lead to low-quality LMX relationships, Jones wrote, can occur based on a number of qualities such as dependability, decision-making styles, trust, communication frequency and style, demographics, sex, and education dissimilarity. Therefore if a female coach with her doctorate who is verbose and outgoing is speaking with a quiet male first-year student, she may want to attempt to tone down her usual outgoing nature to help the student begin feeling more comfortable with the relationship. Of course, the best way to assist in the future growth of the relationship is to keep channels of communication open between coach and student.

Encourage Two-way Communication

Beyond simply being similar or dissimilar to their subordinates (which often an uncontrollable factor), leaders can engage in high quality communication with subordinates. The suggested behaviors focus on encouraging two-way communication, monitoring emotional behaviors, and noting subordinates with high levels of communication apprehension. Truckenbrodt (2000) suggested communication should be encouraged to flow both upwards and downwards in the LMX dyadic relationships. She suggested “supervisors should actively encourage subordinates to provide feedback and vice-versa [because] open communication is necessary to establish a sense of trust in the exchange relationship” (pp. 241-242). Creating this type of open communication flow can be aided through specific communication behaviors. Darvish and Farzane-dokht (2011) believed leaders should develop a tolerance for both contradictions and tolerance for seemingly impossible solution suggestions. Building an environment where subordinates feel free communicate their opinions or ideas is necessary to subordinates feeling as though they are valued members of the organization. Dienesch and Liden (1986) pointed out when subordinates do not feel they are trusted by their leaders, the subordinates may respond by not accepting the feedback or goals put forward by the leader.

Leaders must also be aware of the communication apprehension experienced by their subordinates. McCroskey (1977) defined communication apprehension as “the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). Madlock, Martin, Bogdan, and Ervin (2007) found subordinates who experience high levels of communication apprehension tend to experience lower quality LMX relationships, which could be explained by a multitude of reasons. Those who experience high communication apprehension tend to avoid communication encounters,

or when they engage in communication encounters, they exhibit more nervous tendencies which could come off as disingenuous. Leaders who are aware of the communication apprehension felt by subordinates can work to make the individuals feel more at ease or can help them practice behaviors that will help overcome communication apprehension. Doing so may be the key to developing those higher quality LMX relationships.

In the forensic context, a coach must keep lines of communication readily available. If a student feels as if he or she cannot approach their coach to discuss a concern or suggestion, the certain lack of trust can develop which may hinder the relationship. LMX theory suggests that leaders must be open to discussing ideas with their subordinates and listening to dissenting ideas. A forensic coach can actively seek out this communication by inviting questions and feedback during team meetings and during one-on-one interactions and coaching. Listening to student ideas and concerns on anything from team logistic issues to personal problems can go a long way to help the relationship grow in the desired direction. Seeking out those opportunities through more non-traditional means of communication for forensic teams (such as evaluation forms or suggestion boxes) can help a coach create a sense of open communication, even with students who may feel intimidated by a coach through no fault of the coach.

Monitoring emotional behaviors of students also can enhance the relationship. Beyond accepting feedback, coaches should do emotional check-ups with students on a regular basis. General observation of student behaviors can be a good start to determining if something is wrong or if the student is unhappy, but having direct methods of asking students about their emotional well-being gives the students an opportunity to express themselves with less ambiguity. Instead of operating under guess work, coaches can remind the students of their desire to help and ask if they are feeling happy with the relationship or other situations. Directly approaching students may help with some forms of communication apprehension.

Staying accessible is also an important action to keep communication open between coach and student. If a coach has an office or workspace, he or she should be seen in that area frequently by students. This helps the student know the coach is available to talk and work with the student. Office doors should remain open whenever possible to encourage discussion. Coaches should encourage students to email them with questions or call them on their cell phones. Accessibility is an important way to show young undergraduate students that communication is a priority and the communicative door is always wide open—literally and figuratively.

Of course, this does not mean that a coach must always be available to talk. Setting boundaries early for open communication highlights to students that a coach is willing to have discussions, but certain circumstances require delayed interaction. Establishing these expectations early will help coaches keep communication lines open but also will enable them to have personalized involvement. Utilization of said behaviors may position leaders, followers, and organizations to achieve the benefits associated with high-quality LMX relationships previously discussed.

Coaches can also encourage communication by helping students deal with communication apprehension. Having set times to meet on a regular basis may help many students, as well as trying to be generally welcoming. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) identified three characteristics as the predominant considerations for leaders attempting to

build high-quality LMX relationships: “respect, trust, and obligation” (p. 237). Agreeableness and likability of an individual also seems to impact the overall quality of dyadic LMX relationship development. Sears and Hackett (2011) characterized agreeableness through behaviors such as “warmth, friendliness, tact, and sensitivity” (p. 547). Their research found leaders and subordinates who utilized agreeableness behaviors tended to show higher levels of regard for one another, which increased the quality of their dyadic LMX relationships. Being understanding and accommodating of communication apprehension by adapting behaviors to each student can help a coach earn the trust need to reach a high-quality relationship.

Include Students in Goal Setting

Forensic coaches can make sure students are more than goal achievers, but also are defining what goals they should chase. Truckenbrodt (2000) outlined the importance of clearly tying an organization’s goals to the role each subordinate plays in achieving those goals. She suggested, “an organizational culture that provides such awareness instills a sense of belonging and a positive feeling of identification with the organization, thus enhancing the subordinate’s commitment to the organization” (p. 235). To more effectively encourage members to recognize the shared individual and organizational goals, the leader should invite the members to play a role in goal making.

It is often convenient for a leader to personally set organizational and individual member goals, but this is not the best method for high-quality LMX relationships. Leaders should utilize alternative methods, such as participative decision making. Utilization of subordinate-input in decision making processes can positively project a leader’s trust of and value for subordinates’ role in the organization (Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986). Leaders can improve overall motivation to adopt organizational goals as individual goals by engaging in participative decision-making processes.

Because of the time spent working with students, setting program and individual goals may be something that forensic coaches wish to do on their own. However, coaches should allow students to set their own goals. This creates a sense of ownership in one’s work, but also shows to the student that a coach is not mandating what they must define as success. Goal setting should be done early in the relationship and each season so coaches can work better with students to help achieve the student’s personal goals. The coach and student should discuss potential goals for a variety of categories, such as social, academic, and competition. After the student has had time to think about what he or she would like to achieve, a one-on-one meeting with a coach should be held. In the meeting, the coach and student should discuss what the student’s goals are, what they mean, and how to go about achieving the goals. Articulating personal desires and having a coach make plans to see those benchmarks reached can enhance the student’s perception of the coach’s trust and respect for the student. Building a trusting and respectful relationship makes the benefits of the high-quality LMX relationship much more likely.

Particularly important to developing high-quality individual relationships is making sure goals are accomplished and offering members praise when that happens. Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) described perceived organizational support, or the subordinate’s perception of how the organization invests in and provides positive reinforcement for the subordinate’s work. One way leaders can do this is by recognizing

the quality of work performance being completed by the subordinates in ways appropriate to the subordinates. Some individuals desire public recognition when they have accomplished a difficult or time-consuming task. Others want individual recognition and would prefer not to publicly receive praise for accomplishments. Coaches seeking high-quality LMX relationships will take the time to learn the preferences of their students regarding preferred recognition methods (public/private, enhanced privileges, etc), and will recognize goals that have been achieved. Darvish and Farzane-dokht (2011) viewed behaviors such as these to be important ways to improve both subordinate support of organizational goals and performance, learning, creativity and cooperation.

Create Opportunities for Competitor Autonomy and Creativity

Forensics coaches have the responsibility to create an organizational culture where students can develop autonomy and creativity. As leaders of a competitive and primarily individual activity, coaches should engage in behaviors that will develop high quality LMX relationships to encourage autonomy and creativity. Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz, and Abele (2011) highlighted the importance of decreasing top-down control and giving subordinates increased levels of decision-latitude as being important for high-quality LMX relationships. While it is tempting to seek authoritarian control over a forensics team, the results of such leadership may negatively influence student and organizational outcomes. For instance, students may lose sight of the goals they and the team as an organization share.

Coaches must encourage competitor autonomy, which can be accomplished in a number of ways. Choosing the tournaments and events in which a student wishes to compete should be primarily driven by the student. Coaches can and should encourage expanding the limitations students place upon themselves (.ie. "I am an interper"), but always with the focus remaining on the autonomy of the competitor first instead of the overall team well-being. When preparing events, coaches should have the patience to allow the students to hone their instincts on cutting a poem or structuring a speech. Providing students with autonomy may result in a mixture of competitive success and failure, but the organizational citizenship behaviors it may elicit will ultimately benefit the organization at large. It may also promote competitor creativity in problem solving. However, Darvish and Farkane-dokht (2011) suggested leaders seeking high-quality LMX relationships must increase their acceptance of ambiguity; if subordinates feel there is too much emphasis on objectivity and certainty, there is little leeway for the subordinates to engage in creative activities. Subordinates who receive support for their use of creative solutions to problems or tasks may feel as though the organization trusts their judgment and may feel more committed to the work they do.

Autonomy should not be encouraged for students without them also taking on responsibilities for the well-being of the team. Darvish and Farkane-dokht (2011) suggested leaders should allow students to determine the methods and tempo for which they wish to complete tasks, but they should also be held responsible for their actions. Students should also be held responsible for how their individual contributions to the team as an organization. Autonomy doesn't mean living within a vacuum; autonomy means getting the perks of more individual freedom but also considering the organization's needs in conjunction with one's own. Bezuijen, van Dam, van den Berg, and Thierry (2010) concluded high-LXM relationships are benefited by specific learning

goals and specific feedback, which are easily incorporated into a coach-competitor relationship. For example, students should be given some control over tournament planning details. Coaches can discuss with students the framework of what must happen and what resources are available for traveling to a tournament, but then turn the reins over to the students to determine the details. Delegating tasks may be another beneficial way to increase levels of decision latitude (Truckenbrodt, 2000). Meetings and coaching sessions are also excellent places where students can make determinations for how the time will best be spent. At the very least, input on the meeting or tournament details processes allow students to be involved in the organizational decision making, increasing the potential for high-quality LMX relationships. Doing so suggests trust in and respect for their ability to make good decisions, as well as providing them a situation where they feel an obligation to rise to the situation.

CONCLUSION

Forensic coaches do many of the actions suggested here, but this article provides the link for the professionals in this field to connect theory to practice. With a better grasp of LMX theory, forensic professionals can use the theory to help increase the organizational positive outcomes of their team by having a high-quality relationship with one's subordinates. LMX theory offers a framework to examine forensic leadership; how a coach approaches leading students tends to be far more nebulous. While it is easy to view relationships in a dyad (high/low quality or stranger/maturity stage), forensic relationships function on a continuum and act as a process. Forensic professionals should keep in mind all relationships are subject to growth and regression, and should be treated as such.

Of course, this only examines forensic leadership on the theoretical level. Since research is sparse in this area, future research should explore how forensic coaches actually lead their teams to determine effective strategies which may or may not link theory with praxis. Different coaches may take a variety of approaches on a scale of LMX behaviors such as the ones suggested in this paper and come to some leadership gains not anticipated. Ideally, further discussion for leadership studies in forensics will explore related concepts such as the long term effects of a high/low-quality LMX relationship on retention and faster career progression as well as examining followership from the standpoint of students. The more perspectives we gather through an organizational lens in forensics, the better our teams and leadership strategies can be for the future of this activity.

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