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### ME & MINE, INC.: AN EXERCISE IN MANAGEMENT THEORY

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#### ABSTRACT

Me & Mine, Inc. is an exercise that enables participants to analyze and share their own assumptions about organizing and managing people, and to then connect these assumptions with well-known “textbook” perspectives.

#### INTRODUCTION

Organization and management theory is reviewed near the beginning of almost every management textbook. Typically, classical, behavioral, quantitative, “integrating” (e.g., systems theory and contingency theory), and contemporary management perspectives are used to establish a foundation for the study of management. Yet the relevance of theory to applied management situations is sometimes a difficult connection for students of management to make. Me & Mine, Inc. was designed to allow participants to examine their own assumptions about managing people in relation to various textbook theories, and to decide which of the perspectives are most meaningful to them. The format for the exercise follows Pfeiffer and Jones’ (1985) experiential’ learning cycle. Instructor guidelines relevant to each stage of this cycle have been incorporated into the exercise description provided below.

#### THE EXERCISE

##### Learning Objective

By the end of the Me & Mine, Inc. exercise, participants should have a clearer understanding of the major management perspectives as well as where their personal approach to management converges with these perspectives. The exercise assumes that participants have read basic information about the management theories to be addressed in the activity. The exercise is intended

for 15 to 30 participants, and requires  $V_2$  to 2 hours to complete.

#### Stage 1: Experiencing

In order to bring participants’ personally held assumptions about management into focus, the instructor should ask each participant to imagine that he or she is completely in charge his/her own successful organization. As owner and CEO of Me & Mine, Inc.. everything about the organization is as each participant wants it to be, and of course, Me & Mine, Inc. is an “excellent” organization. Ask participants to write out a descriptive outline of Me & Mine, Inc. (10 minutes). Then ask participants to form discussion groups of three to five members. What kind of organization is it? What is its mission? How are employees of Me & Mine, Inc. managed? Group members should briefly describe each of their organizations to the other group members, and should ask questions of each other so they understand the similarities and differences between each person’s vision of Me & Mine. Inc. (15 minutes). The instructor should then display an outline of the major management perspectives and organization theories. Ask each group to classify the descriptions according to the outlined management perspectives. Which theories best describe life in each of the organizations they heard about? It is important to remind participants that their objective is to classify each description of Me & Mine, Inc., not to reach consensus about how an organization should be run.

#### Stage 2: Publishing

Once participants have had the opportunity to apply the outlined perspectives and theories to the descriptions of Me & Mine, Inc.. ask them to report

what happened during the activity. Record all reports; be careful not to allow interpretations or conclusions about the exercise until participants are satisfied with the raw data presented.

### **Stage 3: Processing**

Ask participants to examine the flipchart information and interpret the data generated in the publishing stage. Participants should be encouraged to look for patterns in the information recorded. How can their observations about the activity be categorized? All responses should be recorded on a flipchart.

### **Stage 4: Generalizing**

After participants have interpreted their experience, they should take a moment to consider the management perspectives outline in light of their interpretations. The focus at this stage of the exercise should be on what participants have learned about organization and management theory.

Very often, in the course of drawing conclusions about the theories, different individuals may assert their opinions about how an organization should be run. For example, participants may divide themselves into Theory X, Theory Y, and Contingency theory "camps." New small groups of participants should be formed, preferably around similar sets of assumptions or management perspectives. Each of these groups should record, in "bullets," the key points of their theory, and can post these points on the wall(s) of the room. The instructor should be prepared to make necessary corrections and to add details about each theory.

### **Stage 5: Applications**

Ask, participants to consider how they might use this learning. How might they apply this learning to improving their work experiences?

## **EMERGENT CONCEPTS**

### **There are several definitions of "excellent."**

During Stage I of the exercise, participants generally have a great deal to say about how things would be in an organization if only they had the power to create and change things. Yet when they come together in-groups, they soon recognize different definitions of "excellent." Sometimes participants will add others' ideas to their own descriptions. However, participants sometimes reject ideas that conflict with their preferences and assumptions.

**I am NOT a Theory X Manager!** This may be the

first time some individual participants have examined their own philosophies of management. Participants are often surprised when their descriptions of Me & Mine, Inc. fail to depict what others would consider to be a "happy" place to work.

### **The theories are meaningful and useful.**

Participants generally find categorizing their personal descriptions fairly straightforward. Sometimes a description falls into two or more theories or perspectives, but rarely does it happen that a description cannot be classified. Participants leave the Me & Mine, Inc. experience with greater understanding of management theories, and they recognize how their own and others' assumptions fit in with these theories.

## **REFERENCES**

Pfeiffer, J. W., & Jones, J. E. (1985) The experiential learning cycle. In J. W. Pfeiffer (Ed.), Reference Guide to Handbooks and Annuals San Diego: University Associates pp. 5-8.