Case Notes

# Chapter 4: Understanding Philosophy and Styles

# Case 4.1: Many Managers, Different Styles

## Case Summary

Vanessa Mills is a personal banker at Lakeshore Bank and reports to three different managers at her site. Each of her managers has a different personality and style in their management practices, which causes them to have different approaches to leadership. Marion Woods is a numbers-driven leader and basis success on quantifiable gains, in this case, opening accounts and accepting new services with the bank. Bruce Dexter is also numbers-driven, and runs the weekly meetings where the current performance objectives are discussed. He is dismissive in his personality and does not interact with others regularly. Heather Atwood’s approach to leadership is much more humanistic, and focuses her leadership on developing her team through providing incentives and offering constructive feedback.

Vanessa has received negative feedback from both Bruce and Marion, due to her low sales record. This has caused her to be nervous with her future at Lakeshore Bank; thus, she has decided to seek advice from Heather, the manager whom she relates to best. Heather has assured Vanessa that her performance is fine and she shows promise, however she is worried about how her 3-month review will go. Vanessa is mostly concerned about how Bruce and Marion perceive her performance and is unsure of their perception of her as an employee.

Case Analysis

This case is a common case among larger firms, where multiple managers oversee personnel. In this case, three managers have three distinctly different **philosophies of leadership** and **leadership styles**. In assessing Marion Woods’s leadership style, one might see characteristics from both Douglas McGregor’s **Theory X** and also the **authoritarian leadership style**. Marion seems to have characteristics that would classify her as directive and controlling, and also very bottom-line and goal-driven. Production is her number one priority. Bruce Dexter also could be classified as bottom-line and goal-driven; however, his interaction with others appears to be more of a **laissez-faire leadership style**. Bruce does not appear to be controlling or directive and instead is more dismissive in his leadership, engaging in minimal influence over his subordinates. It would appear that Heather Atwood subscribes to more of the **Theory Y** and **democratic leadership style**. She is more hands-on with her subordinates, providing information, guidance, and suggestions to help them reach their fullest potential.

Because Vanessa has three different managers, each with a unique style of leadership, she must navigate their personalities in order for her to be successful in her position. While Vanessa may naturally link to the leader most similar to her preferred leadership style, it is still important that she have an understanding of the other leadership philosophies and styles displayed by the managers at the bank.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. Based on the assumptions of Theory X and Theory Y, how would you describe each manager’s philosophy and style of leadership? In what way do their attitudes about Vanessa affect their leadership?*

Marion Woods would definitely be classified as a Theory X leader. She is direct, goal-driven, and focused on results and not the humanistic style of leadership. Heather Atwood is more of a Theory Y leader, as she is focused on cultivating success with not only Vanessa, but all of her subordinates. Bruce Dexter may also be classified as a Theory X leader, as he is also goal-driven, but clearly not as direct as Marion.

Marion’s approach where she stresses scripts and procedure seemingly demonstrates that she believes that Vanessa needs coaching and direct instruction in order to be successful. Bruce’s approach of focusing on the numbers and his lack of interaction with others has left Vanessa confused about how her performance is perceived by him. Heather, on the other hand, appears supportive and coaching, which has had a positive effect on Vanessa. Vanessa feels comfortable and confident speaking to Heather about her concerns, which has helped her to develop in her role as a banker.

*2. In this type of customer service setting, which leadership style would be most effective for the bank to meet its goals? From the bank’s perspective, which (if any) manager exhibits the most appropriate leadership? Discuss.*

This could be answered in multiple ways. On one hand, a bottom line, no-nonsense approach with recruiting customers and increases services rendered may lend itself more to a direct approach similar to an authoritarian leadership style. On the other hand, employing democratic leadership while not overemphasizing results as the sole indicator of success may not help in the short-term, but could, in the long-term, increase employee retention and satisfaction. However, if long-term retention is not the goal of Lakeshore Bank, then this approach might not be in the bank’s best interest. The laissez-faire leadership style seemingly has no place in this industry. From the bank’s perspective, finding a manager that exhibits characteristics of both the authoritarian and the democratic approach to leadership, but at the appropriate times, would benefit the overall productivity of the bank the most.

*3. What advice would you give to each of the managers to enhance their leadership skills within the bank?*

It appears that Marion Woods could consider a more humanistic approach to leadership. Marion could learn that not all subordinates operate best with direct supervision and require different approaches to be successful. This would include taking the time to get to know her subordinates as people and offer targeted coaching and training relative to their skills.

Bruce Dexter could benefit from becoming more people-friendly and humanistic in his approach to leadership. It is probable that others see him in the same light that Vanessa does, and are unable to assess his opinions of them and their performance. Something as simple as visiting with co-workers once or twice a week could go a long way in helping him to build relationships.

It is not documented anywhere in the case that Heather Atwood has provided any feedback specifically on performance and appears to be in more of a mentorship role with her subordinates. Heather should not necessarily emphasize numbers-driven performance in her mentorship opportunities, but at least ensure that it is somewhat considered, as it is a priority of the other managers and of the banking industry as a whole.

*4. What do you think Vanessa can do to prepare herself for her 3-month review?*

Vanessa understands the philosophies and leadership styles of the three managers. She needs to be able to show how she is improving in her position and learning the necessary skills that she needs to be effective in reaching the performance-driven goals at Lakeshore Bank. Documenting her improvement over her first three months on the job could help, even if her numbers are not completely where they need to be yet, because she could show improvement.

It wouldn’t hurt Vanessa to directly ask Bruce for input on her performance. As he has not taken the time to get to know her, initiating conversation with him could be beneficial and help her to establish another mentor within Lakeshore Bank.

Another possible option for Vanessa would be to practice for the review with Heather, as she already has a solid relationship and strong bond with her. This may help her confidence as she prepares for the meeting.