

Chapter 11

The Significance of Project Leadership

Key Concepts in this Chapter:

- The Concept of Project Leadership**
- Situational Leadership Concepts**
- The Basic Communication Process**
- Roadblocks to Effective Listening**
- Discussion Questions**
- Application Vignette**
- Homework, Exercises and Core Case**

Now that your project teams are in implementation you begin to realize that as difficult as planning is, implementation of the project plan is much more difficult. Without good planning the road to successful implementation is loaded with pot holes, detours and orange barrels.

Many of the problems you have either been a part of or witnessed have been in the leadership of the project teams. Why have people been so tired working on the projects? It seems that turnover of project team personnel is unacceptably high as well. There also seems to be a lot of bickering outside of team meetings. Both of your projects seem to be on track with regard to the triple constraint but the human side of things is another matter. You would like people to be fully committed to your projects so that they feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as these projects develop.

You decide it is time to act to find out why people seem so disgruntled. Maybe now is the time for more proactive leadership, not on task related issues, but on the human resource side of the team equation. You call an emergency meeting for both teams and find it odd that both teams seem to be going through a malaise. Maybe the common denominator is that you are the culprit. You cannot help but feel that something you are doing may be causing team harmony to suffer. You also decide to interview each team member individually in a 360 degree feedback session. Maybe you can uncover some unknown fact that has slipped by you.

As you call these team and individual meetings you cannot help but realize that the best laid plans of men are weak in comparison to the problems of execution. You hope that your listening and negotiation skills are good enough to discover unknown problems and astute enough to lead you in the right direction to help satisfy people.

The Concept of Project Leadership

Leadership is one of the most discussed topics in business today (Muczyk & Adler, 2002). If you were to search the United States Library of Congress, you would find over 30,000 articles and books on the topic of leadership alone. You have probably been exposed to some of the theories, applications and models of leadership already in your professional and collegial studies. Some have probably made more sense than others but the key to understanding leadership is first understanding what your leadership paradigm is and is not.

We are going to present some of the basic definitions of leadership that pertain to project management. Then we will present a situational leadership perspective loosely based on the idea that you can adjust your leadership style based on the situation. We also discuss the communication process so that you can become more effective at leading and communicating with your project teams. If you can improve your leadership and communication skills, you will go a long way to becoming a professional and successful project manager.

Definition of Project Leadership

There have been many theories purported to capture the term leadership. Leadership has captivated audiences for as long as people have recorded history. Think about the most famous of historical cultures and dynasties where leadership stories abound. History is replete with colorful, memorable and successful people who led and continue to lead their countries and groups.

The study of leadership really became more engrained with early studies of famous people. Vignettes about what made these people great were written and theory had it that if you matched their traits or copied their behaviors, you would be a great leader also. Traits like height, race or voice were associated with great leaders of their time. In an attempt to codify what a great leader was, behaviors characterized by high energy, consensus-seeking, or directive nature were sometimes associated with individuals. Unfortunately, from a research perspective, these theories did not have very much validity over time and location as people with these traits and behaviors were many times absolute failures.

Shifting to more modern times, leadership has been thought of as a process during which a person leads another person, or group, through an organization to achieve specific objectives. Robert House (1996) refers to this as the "Path-Goal" theory where a leader establishes a goal with a follower and then shows the follower the best path(s) for achieving that goal. Other theories look at the transformative nature of leadership,

some look at the transactional approach to individuals, and others believe in the charismatic influence of people. Muczyk and Adler (2002) provide an excellent summary and model for understanding all the various unique and divergent leadership theories today.

In a nutshell, most scholars of leadership agree that leadership is the process of influencing an individual or group towards the achievement of agreed-upon goals. Because projects have SMART goals to achieve and these goals have organizational fit (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5 of this book), project leadership is the process of achieving project goals within an organizational context.

Leadership and management are also different concepts. In accordance with Mintzberg (1987), managers have many roles to choose from in accomplishing work. Some of these roles are acting as a collaborator, negotiator, communicator, or leader. In other words, managers must choose when and how to be a leader on a project team. Thus, leadership is a role a manager assumes at the right time and place in the life of the project. The essence of project management is to get the project plan done and done well. Management tends to be contract-oriented, conservative and less risk-taking. Managers typically ask questions like "how do you want to build that bridge?" Leadership is less conservative, and requires risk-taking and thinking out of the box. Leaders typically ask questions like "why do you want to build that bridge?"

Obviously, managers cannot be leaders all the time because project management is just too complex. If managers were constantly leading, then they would burn-out way ahead of the project end time. Managers that constantly take risks, for example, will eventually lose the confidence of their team. As leaders depend on their team members to get work done, followers look for confidence in leaders that provide balance to get through the many ups and downs of project success and failure. Work is just too complex today for one individual to accomplish (see discussion in Chapter 7). Working in teams requires leadership; therefore, the better prepared you are to deal with team-based designs, the more successful you will most likely be. We will next discuss a situational leadership model that makes sense for today's project work environment.

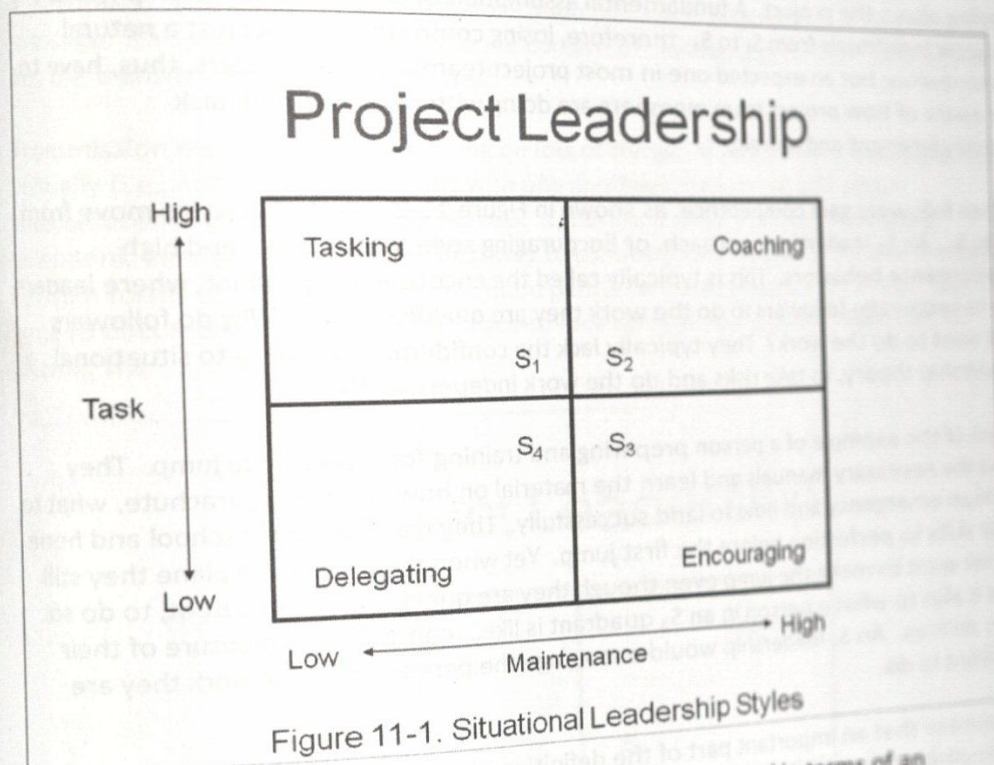
Situational Leadership Concepts

Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) model is an example of a situational leadership approach. The authors proposed four different leadership styles that a leader is supposed to adapt based on a follower's development level. Figure 11-1 displays the basic elements of the Hersey and Blanchard (1977) situational leadership model.

Each style, or quadrant, in Figure 11-1 is a mixture of two elements: the degrees of task-oriented and maintenance-oriented behaviors. Task-oriented behaviors are characterized primarily by communication from the leader to the follower, low amounts

of feedback from the follower, directive nature, and focus on goal accomplishment. Maintenance-oriented behaviors are characterized by: communication flowing between leader and follower, high amounts of feedback from the follower, participative in nature, and focus on the relationship between leader and follower.

Style 1 (or S_1) of the quadrant is a good leadership approach to use when the follower has low competence for the work to be accomplished but a high degree of commitment



to the project (see Figure 11-2). Competence is usually defined in terms of an individual's set of knowledge, skills and abilities with regard to their ability to accomplish any given task. Commitment is defined as an individual's identification and confidence in accomplishing any given task.

You see the necessity for an S_1 , or Tasking style, many times at the beginning of a project because as you remember, the definition of a project is that the work is both temporary and unique. The unique aspect of project management many times means that the work has never been done before; thus, many times team members do not have the technical or administrative background to do the work they have been assigned. If this is the case, the leader will have to "stay on top of their work" and direct followers in the smallest of details. Failure to guide followers in an S_1 situation could result in the follower and project team experiencing failure that could have been avoided with an adequate leadership style.

As followers learn just how difficult the work, or tasks, at hand are in the project, their commitment begins to wane. Now not only is their competence low but their commitment is also low. Thus, a Style 2 (S_2) leadership approach, or Coaching style, would be appropriate where a leader has to coach the individual with both high task and high maintenance behavior. Much like raising a child, a leader would have to be highly directive and also highly supportive in assessing how the individual was doing and feeling about the project. A fundamental assumption of situational leadership models is to grow individuals from S_1 to S_4 ; therefore, losing commitment is not just a natural consequence but an expected one in most project teams. Project leaders, thus, have to be aware of how project team members are doing with regard to both task accomplishment and morale.

When followers gain competence, as shown in Figure 11-2, leadership styles move from S_2 to S_3 . An S_3 leadership approach, or Encouraging style, has low task and high maintenance behaviors. This is typically called the encouraging quadrant, where leaders try to encourage followers to do the work they are qualified to do. Why do followers not want to do the work? They typically lack the confidence, according to situational leadership theory, to take risks and do the work independently.

Think of the example of a person preparing and training for a parachute jump. They read the necessary manuals and learn the material on how to open a parachute, what to do in an emergency and how to land successfully. They train in ground school and hone their skills to perfection before the first jump. Yet when they are in the plane they still do not want to make the jump even though they are qualified, or competent, to do so. This is akin to what a person in an S_3 quadrant is like....competent but unsure of their own abilities. An S_3 leadership would encourage the person to do the work they are qualified to do.

Remember that an important part of the definition of commitment is confidence in accomplishing the tasks. As followers gain confidence, they move from S_3 to S_4 which is characterized by high competence and high commitment. Thus, leaders would need to have low task and low maintenance behaviors since all one would have to do is ask the follower for something and not only would the individual be qualified to do it, they would also have the confidence to finish the task.

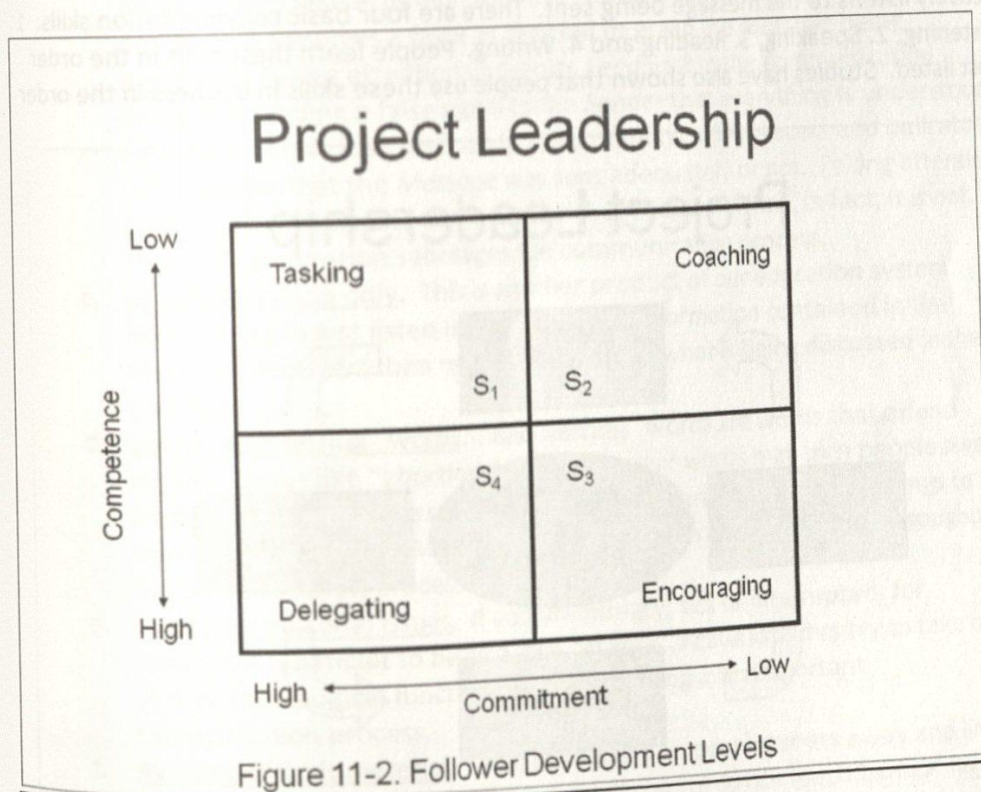
S_4 leadership, or a Delegating style, is nice because it frees up a project manager's time to do other things rather than mentor and train an individual. The problem comes when a project manager misdiagnoses the appropriate leadership style to use for the situation in which an individual is in the project. What would happen if you assumed someone was S_4 when they were really S_1 with regard to leadership style? Or what would happen if you treated someone with S_1 behavior when they really needed S_4 ? This would not be a good way to manage and lead people. Adequate diagnosis of a situation is what

makes situational leadership so difficult to apply. We will discuss how accurate project situational diagnosis can improve the communication process.

The Basic Communication Process

The basic communication process is outlined in Figure 11-3. There are four key elements of this process: 1. *Sender*, 2. *Message*, 3. *Receiver* (or listening) and 4. *Feedback*. The *Sender* in the communication process is responsible for encoding the message. This means that not only is the content of the message decided by the *Sender* but the transmission method is as well.

Transmission methods vary depending on lots of things. If project team members meet virtually (i.e., not physically present with one another) then e-mail and video-teleconferencing is probably appropriate. If there is a crisis situation, then using telephonic services would be the best way to communicate quickly to resolve the crisis. Written forms of communication are more permanent and effective when you have the time to document major decisions. Face-to-face communications are important for sharing the



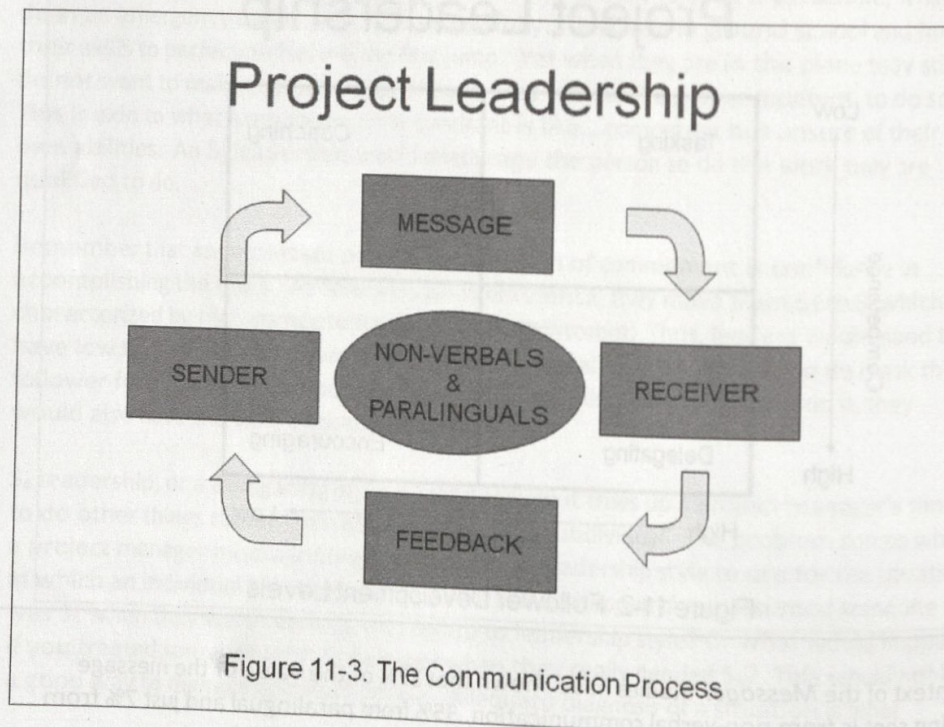
context of the *Message*. Studies have shown that 57% of the value of the message being sent is from non-verbal communication, 35% from paralingual and just 7% from

written. Non-verbal communication includes such important behaviors as body language, hand motions, posture, foot position, and head movements. Paralinguals include such things as voice, tone and pitch of an individual's voice. Thus, the *Sender* and the *Message* are tied together in the communication process since the *Sender* dictates how the *Message* is sent.

Receiving and decoding the *Message* is where most of the problems occur in the communication process. Some of the primary causes of problems in receiving a message are an individual's culture, education, and personality; the environment of where the message was received; and how much time the *Receiver* had to process the message. If a person is rushed to decode a *Message*, then the full meaning of the message will probably not be received. We all know the difficulty of receiving a *Message* when the *Message* is in a language not of our own. Active listening can assist a *Receiver* and improve the communication process.

Roadblocks to Effective Listening

How well a message is received is many times dependent on how well a *Receiver* actively listens to the message being sent. There are four basic communication skills: 1. Listening, 2. Speaking, 3. Reading and 4. Writing. People learn these skills in the order just listed. Studies have also shown that people use these skills in business in the order



shown. In other words, in any given business day, people spend most of their time listening, then speaking, then reading and then writing. As you move up the organizational chart with more responsibility, research also shows that even more of your day is spent listening. Active listening tends to be proactive whereas hearing is passive. You have to work at being an active listener.

Figure 11-4 lists the seven top roadblocks to active listening. While these are not in any particular order, or priority, we suggest you try to assess yourself to see if you are guilty of any of these behaviors and try to become a better active listener. The seven roadblocks to active listening are as follows:

- a. Trying to outline everything. This is a product of our education system because students often worry about passing exams. When a *Receiver* tries to outline everything, they miss important non-verbal and paralingual information contained in the *Message*.
- b. Faking attention. Difficult topics lead a *Receiver* to sometimes fake attention so that a *Sender* will not call on them to answer a verifying question. *Receivers* who fake attention with eye contact, a smile and insincere interest do not do themselves a favor as they fail to grasp the *Message* being presented. Faking attention undercuts *Feedback* in the communication process by sending a false signal to the *Sender* that everything is understood. *Feedback* should close the loop in the communication process and indicates to the *Sender* that the *Message* was sent adequately or not. Faking attention on the surface indicates to the *Sender* that all is well when, in fact, it is not. Thus, faking attention sabotages the communication process.
- c. Listening for facts only. This is another product of our education system. *Receivers* try to just listen for key pieces of information contained in the *Message*. *Receivers* then miss the context of what is being discussed in the *Message*.
- d. Use of "Red Herring" words. "Red Herring" words are words that offend people. Words like "abortion," "pig," or swear words may turn people away from listening to the *Message* when, in fact, there are important things to learn in the rest of the *Message*. Active listeners remain focused throughout the communication process.
- e. Interfering personal issues. If you are hungry, sick or interrupted, for instance, it is difficult to be an active listener. Active listeners try to take care of their physiological functions before engaging in an important communication process.
- f. Avoiding difficult material. Difficult topics turn poor listeners away and limit their learning. For example, there is a reason we do not teach Latin in high school anymore—it is too difficult a topic and people try to avoid it.
- g. Wasting your speed differential. This last roadblock to active listening is not so obvious but it is still true. The human being can listen at about 375 words

per minute (WPM). Most people talk at about 170 WPM so if the speaker is a slow speaker, our minds tend to wander. Active listeners try not to daydream and stay focused on the *Sender's Message*.

Organizations spend lots of money each year training their employees to become better listeners. Active listening has many benefits, one of which is making you a better project manager in that you can become more effective in doing project tasks. You can also benefit from active listening with improved relationships among team members and stakeholders in the project. This will greatly improve the probability of successful project implementation and customer satisfaction.

Project Leadership

1. Trying to outline everything.
2. Faking attention.
3. Listening for facts only.
4. Use of "Red Herring" words.
5. Interfering personal issues.
6. Avoiding difficult material.
7. Wasting your speed differential.

Figure 11-4. The 7 Roadblocks to Active Listening

Discussion Questions

1. Define project leadership. Does a leader of a project team require any special skills apart from leadership in general?
2. How can a situational leadership perspective possibly help a project manager resolve problems and manage issues?
3. Discuss what would happen to project leaders if they had good situational leadership diagnostic skills. Discuss what would happen if they had poor situational leadership diagnostic skills. How can these diagnostic skills be improved?

4. Explain the basic communication process.
5. What are some common problems that inhibit active listening?
6. What percent of the value of communication is attributed to the written word? to non-verbal communication? to paralingual communication?

Application Vignette

Betty Wong, a Chinese American, was born in China but migrated to the United States with her parents when she was but five years old. She is now a project manager in a large healthcare company in the southwest. She was appointed as department manager to integrate and coordinate work for a very important client of the company. Her reputation as a meticulous, detail-oriented leader was the key consideration in her appointment.

Her new assignment requires her to supervise four males and two females with whom she has worked in the past as an equal. Betty is excited about her new position and is looking forward to becoming a supervisor. She feels this will finally lead to further advancement in the company as she can 'show the world' her abilities as a professional and manager. She is aware, however, that there are stereotypes that view Asian managers as excellent technicians with limited social skills. She believes once people see how she can lead people, this myth will be proved a myth. She also knows that several of the people she will be supervising are quite informal and tend to put off projects even to the point of being late and over-budget. She knows that their potential as individuals has not been adequately tapped to this point and she believes that adequately getting them to use their own talents will benefit the company.

Betty's first task was to impress her six 'supervisees.' She informs them about her high expectations for the project and how their contributions will lead to individual and group rewards. She does not want to do their jobs for them so she withholds assistance at this point in time relying on them to put something together. When she speaks to them about issues regarding the quality of their work, she takes an indirect route because she does not want to embarrass anyone in public. Her message does not get through to her group as two of them refer to her as a 'micromanagement freak' and 'unapproachable.' The work done by the group is at best barely acceptable. The division manager, Clayton Biggs, does not seem pleased with her group's output. He holds her accountable as one of his four department heads and says so in a very direct and firm way. Betty, however, counters with the argument saying that the group is just going through normal growing pains and that she will have the group functioning in tip-top shape in no time.

Betty decides to take matters into her own hands by assuming more and more of the work her group is supposed to do. She begins to stay longer and longer at work assuming more and more of her team's responsibility. She does not understand why

others have neither the same standard of excellence she has nor the drive to get things done right the first time. Her frustration begins to show with several of the group members as their contribution to the group continues to lessen. The anxiety and stress of this new job begins to show on Betty. Betty is embarrassed as she perceives that her supervisees do not respect her or her authority based on what she believes was a lack of support by her boss. She ponders whether she should remain in this job or this company.

Key Questions

1. How might the situational leadership model discussed in this chapter help Betty?
2. What could Clayton Biggs and Betty do to be more effective managers and leaders?
3. What would you recommend, if hired as an external consultant, to fix some of the communication problems in this vignette?

Homework, Exercises and Core Case

1. List the four major leadership styles in the situational leadership model discussed in this chapter.
2. Discuss the criteria on which to choose a leadership style in the situational leadership model discussed in this chapter.
3. Define leadership in project management. How is it different from the concept of management?
4. List the four major components of the communication process. Where do most of the errors occur in this process and why?
5. Do you believe leadership is a globally accepted concept? Why or why not?
6. Is there a difference between a project 'manager' and a project 'leader'? Why or why not?
7. Upon graduation, you might be thrust into a leadership position. What aspects of the communication process do you believe you will need to focus on to make you an effective leader?
8. What is the major difference between 'Coaching' and 'Encouraging' in the situational leadership model discussed in this chapter?
9. What is the major difference between 'Encouraging' and 'Delegating' in the situational leadership model discussed in this chapter?

10. Explain at least four of the barriers to listening in the communication process. How might a good listener overcome these barriers to ensure they get the message and provide appropriate feedback to the sender?
11. What are paralinguals and how do they affect the message being sent in the communication process?
12. Define non-verbal communication.
13. What is the primary reason a person should use an S₃ leadership style versus an S₂ style? How does one recognize any symptoms that would indicate the necessity for an S₃ leadership style?
14. Compare and contrast tasking and encouraging behaviors.
15. How do global considerations affect the concept of project leadership? Is global project leadership an impossible task?

Exercise 11-1—Which Leadership Style to Use? (Scenario #1)

Given the following scenario, choose the BEST leadership style to use and provide justification as to why you chose that style.

Mary was a hard worker and found that she enjoyed going to work every day. She was also a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) having earned her certification roughly ten years ago. People generally liked Mary but found her to be "bossy" and "arrogant." She viewed many of these negative comments as a reflection that she was one of just a handful of women in a predominantly male high-technology company.

Her new boss, Kent Short, was trying to decide whether to assign Mary to one of the hottest projects in the company. While she seemed to have the ability to get things done sometimes, many times her work was subpar and did not meet his expectations. Kent liked Mary but was a little afraid of her domineering attitude. If Kent did assign Mary to this project, she was going to have to be able to communicate with many diverse groups throughout the company and with vendors and suppliers. Having a project this visible would magnify any mistakes he made in selecting the right person for the job. As he considered his situation, he remembered some situational leadership material he had back in school and went to look for it.

Exercise 11-2—Which Leadership Style to Use? (Scenario #2)

Given the following scenario, choose the BEST leadership style to use and provide justification as to why you chose that style.

Supratek was a network design representative who was placed under supervision this past year. He had a very good understanding of technical details and expertise in computers, software and hardware. He made the jump to project management as a way to maximize his income and future flexibility in the company.

Unfortunately, Supratek's projects were always late and caused many problems with customers and top management. He also displayed little awareness of teams and did not seem to have any motivation in improving his performance. Upon further review, you decide how best to motivate him as his supervisor.

Core Case—What Makes a Good Leader

The following case is an in-class case. The case is divided into four (4) parts. Please complete Part 1 before class and be ready to complete Parts 2 through 4 in class.

- 1) Please think about a leader who made a difference in your life. We want you to list up to ten (10) characteristics of this leader that made him or her special.
- 2) Next, as a group, list up to (10) ten characteristics that define a good leader. Your group should reach consensus about these characteristics and your group should record your list.
- 3) Next, as a group, develop a one (1) to three (3) sentence definition of leadership. It cannot be something like "leadership is doing everything listed in Question 2 of this case." We want you to be as specific as possible in your definition. Again, record your group output.
- 4) Finally, present your outputs for Questions 2 and 3 of this case to class. Pick someone to present and let the instructor know who this will be.