Case 2.2: A Remarkable Turnaround

Case Synopsis and Analysis

Carol Baines took over her husband's office supply store and grew it from a $200,000 business to one with sales over $3.1 million. She spent time learning the business and demonstrated persistence, intelligence, sociability, and determination. Based on the information in the case study, Carol seems well liked, compassionate, and considerate. She appears to have high levels of emotional intelligence and seems to be an extraverted, open, and conscientious leader who is somewhat agreeable with low levels of neuroticism.

The case study allows for discussion and analysis not only of Carol's key leadership traits but also of emotional intelligence and the Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3).

Learning objectives:

- Students should be able to evaluate key traits vital to the success of a new leader.
- Students should apply the Big Five Personality Factors to a leader.
- Students should be able to debate/discuss emotional intelligence as applied to a leader.

Answers to questions in the text:

1. How would you describe Carol's leadership traits?

   Carol is resilient, persistent, intelligent, sociable, and determined. She seems well liked, compassionate, and considerate, and appears to have high levels of emotional intelligence. She is an extraverted, open, and conscientious leader who is somewhat agreeable with low levels of neuroticism.

2. How big a part did Carol's traits play in the expansion of the company?

   One cannot say with certainty how large a role her traits played in the expansion of the company. However, Carol took over the business with few applicable skills and no real knowledge of the industry. Given that, it seems as though her intelligence, determination, and emotional intelligence played a key role in helping grow the business. She used her openness to familiarize herself with the company and the overall business and persevered despite personal hardships. These traits did seem to play a major role in the expansion of the company.

3. Would Carol be a leader in other business contexts?

It seems as though Carol would be a leader in other business contexts. She was unfamiliar with the office supply industry before assuming the leadership role and made the company successful nonetheless. She could, presumably, use her openness, intelligence, sociability, and determination to succeed in other arenas as well. It is also important to keep in mind that success in one venue does not always guarantee success in another.

Potential teaching approaches:

This case study is conducive to group discussions and exercises.

Below is a way to structure a class based on the trait approach and Case Study 2.3:

- First, break the class into small groups and ask the groups to develop a list of the top 5 (or 10) major traits they believe are important for a strong leader. Students should prepare this list without referring to the book, based on their experiences.
- Large-group discussion of the top 5 (or 10) lists, followed by a lecture on the trait approach.
- Students then read Case 2.2 and list five key reasons why Carol Barnes is a leader (again, in small groups). Students should discuss her traits in these groups and touch upon the Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3) as applied to Carol as well.
- Professor then discusses the questions from the case study with the entire class. Large-group discussion should center on traits of the leader, Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3), and emotional intelligence.
- Finally, the professor may choose to conduct in-class exercises listed below.

Exercises for this case study:

1) Carol has decided to become a leadership trainer. In small groups, discuss what sort of training program she could offer to help others lead successfully. Students should spend 5 min brainstorming that concept. Then they should create a one-page outline covering the major components of a training session. Here, the professor could have some groups develop an outline for emotional intelligence training while others develop an outline for Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3).
2) Role-play: One student is "Carol" and the others are her sons. Carol and her sons should talk about leadership. Carol should explain how to best lead the company. Students playing her sons should ask questions about how to successfully lead the company for the next 20 years. Together, they should develop an informal list of goals to help develop the sons as leaders. Students should then report on these goals to the larger class.

3) Have students reflect and create a list of emotional intelligence (EI) leadership traits they feel they possess. Then, place them into pairs and ask that they share each other's lists. Ask students to look for commonalities between their lists and the EI traits that Carol displays in the case.

Case 2.3: Recruiting for the Bank

Case Synopsis and Analysis

Pat Nelson is the assistant director of human resources tasked with recruiting college graduates who can be groomed for higher-level leadership positions within a bank. He hires people with strong interpersonal skills, confidence, integrity, and work ethic. He also looks for applicants with analytical and technical skills.

Unfortunately, 25% of new hires leave the bank, and upper management has asked Pat to reevaluate his hiring criteria. The case asks students to consider the traits that are needed in a banking job and to evaluate how recruitment may influence retention.

Learning objectives:

- Students should evaluate key traits needed for novice, yet high-potential employees in a financial institution.
- Students should begin to understand the relationship between retention and recruitment and analyze how traits of applicants may influence retention.

Answers to questions in the text:

1. Based on the ideas described in the trait approach, do you think Pat is looking for the right characteristics in the people he hires?

   Trait approach suggests that leaders typically have high levels of intelligence, sociability, integrity, self-confidence, and determination. Pat seems to be looking for each of these qualities in his new hires. However, the case study fails to mention the applicants' motives for working in a bank. In fact, students do not know whether Pat considers applicants' motives at all. A confident, determined, sociable, and intelligent person may be a great leader but lack commitment to the job. Perhaps Pat should consider looking at applicants' loyalty, commitment, and overall motivations for working in the bank, as well as the top five traits.

2. Could it be that the retention problem raised by upper management is unrelated to Pat's recruitment criteria?

   Yes. Retention could be related to recruitment. It could also be related to poor leadership, inadequate training and development, a poor working environment, long hours, compensation, and so on. This question could provide a great opportunity for students to analyze other potential reasons for the high attrition rate, as well as methods for rectifying the problem.

3. If you were Pat, would you change your approach to recruiting?

Some students may argue that Pat's criteria for selection are grounded in research. Trait approach, in fact, largely supports his criteria. However, most students will recognize the need to consider a candidate's commitment and loyalty as well as motivations for working within a bank. Indeed, the hires may be people with leadership traits. However, to ensure that they stay, Pat must explore commitment, loyalty, and motivation with each and every candidate.

Potential teaching approaches:

This case study is conducive to group discussions and exercises.

Below is a way to structure a class based on the trait approach and Case Study 2.3:

- First, break the class into small groups and ask the groups to develop a list of the top 5 (or 10) major traits they believe are important for a strong leader. Students should prepare this list without referring to the book, based on their experiences.
- Large-group discussion of the top 5 (or 10) lists, followed by a lecture on the trait approach.
- Students then read Case 2.3 and make a list of the major traits they believe a successful candidate for Central Bank should possess (again, in small groups). Students should discuss the traits in these groups for a couple of minutes.
- Professor then discusses the questions from the case study with the entire class. Large-group discussion should center on the relationship between retention and hiring, as well as the trait approach and how it may help inform and limit hiring practices.
- Finally, the professor may choose to conduct in-class exercises listed below.

Exercises for this case study:

1) In small groups, students will write new criteria to help Pat in his hiring process. Each group will come up with 5–10 traits that should be considered and rank those traits in order of importance. Then students will share and debate the findings in the larger class. If time permits, students could draft questions that Pat could ask the candidates to help discern their suitability for the job.
2) Students should then come up with a list of reasons why Central Bank has a retention problem. Then students can develop a plan of action to help minimize the problem.
3) Role-Play: Students can role-play a meeting between Pat and upper management. In this meeting, Pat and upper management should discuss the retention problem and

work to find new hiring practices. This "mock" discussion could begin with the hiring process but also include other ideas for retention if time permits.

4) Students should discuss and list the traits that may be missing from the new hires from this case. The students should also outline how these deficiencies may be affecting attrition rates. If the new hires do not possess the necessary traits and these traits cannot be taught or learned, what might be the outcome? Does it end there or should all employees be compared to a list of necessary traits? Where might this issue end?

Review Questions

Chapter 2: Trait Approach

1. What noted researchers are associated with leadership traits?
2. What methods have researchers used to investigate leadership traits?
3. Which traits are cited most often in research results?
4. What does the trait approach suggest about effective organizational leadership?
5. How might the trait approach be used for personal awareness and development?6. How has the focus of trait research shifted over time?
7. What are the Big 5 personality factors and how do they relate to leadership?
8. What are strengths of the trait approach?
9. What are criticisms of the trait approach?
10. How well do the 10 items on the questionnaire correspond with the five major leadership traits listed in Table 2.2?
11. What is charisma?
12. What traits distinguish charismatic leaders from others?
13. How does the trait approach fit with the four components of leadership?
14. What is the relationship between a leader's IQ and how he/she is perceived as a leader?
15. According to research, do the smartest people make the best leaders? Why or why not?
16. What is the difference between a trait and a talent?

Case 2.1: Choosing a New Director of Research

Case Synopsis and Analysis

Sandra Coke must select a new director of research. Three candidates with differing leadership traits are being considered for the position. Candidate one is persistent and insightful; candidate two is extraordinarily intelligent and sociable; and candidate three has high levels of integrity. All three candidates seem to have adequate experience.

The case study provides interesting opportunities for discussion of trait theory. Students will debate which candidate has the best traits to lead the research team simply because of their own internal biases regarding leadership traits. In addition, without knowing more about the director of research position, it is difficult to determine the "best" traits for this job. For that reason, the case offers an opportunity to not only apply the trait approach but also understand its shortcomings.

Learning objectives:

- Students should be able to decipher prominent traits based on three different job candidates while understanding the tenets of the trait approach.
- Students should gain a better understanding of the weaknesses of trait approach.

Answers to questions in the text:

1. Based on the information provided about the trait approach in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, if you were Sandra, whom would you select?

   It is very difficult to select a candidate without more information about the director of research position and each individual candidate. Alexa Smith seems to have high levels of determination, persistence, and responsibility. Kelsey Motts has high levels of sociability, intelligence, and social intelligence. Thomas Santiago has high levels of integrity and is a strong problem solver. Seemingly, all three would have some level of intelligence, self-confidence, and determination since each completed successful projects in the past and seems well liked by their peers.

   Some students will argue that persistence is crucial for success, and Alexa should be chosen for that reason. Others will claim that Kelsey surely has persistence as well but should be hired because she is already seen as a leader and has high levels of sociability and intelligence, two of the top five most common traits of leaders. A few may state that integrity is fundamental for a research job and argue for the selection of Thomas. Based on the limited information and solely applying the trait approach, Kelsey or Alexa may be a better selection.

2. In what ways is the trait approach helpful in this type of selection?

   The trait approach allows us to identify key traits that make each candidate unique. Through application of this approach, we are able to accurately define Kelsey, Alexa, and Thomas's differing traits and decide who may be best for a particular job.

3. In what ways are the weaknesses of the trait approach highlighted in this case?

   The trait approach has limited utility because it offers an almost endless list of traits and fails to adequately prioritize those traits. Also, as society changes over time, certain traits become more important than others. In this case, we can imagine that all three of the candidates likely possess a number of the traits listed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. However, it is difficult to determine which trait is most important in a given scenario.

   Through discussion, students should be able to see that sociability may be important for the director of research position if the role requires considerable collaboration. However, if that role is rather isolated, it may call for a leader with integrity and persistence over one who has high levels of sociability.

Potential teaching approaches:

This case study is conducive to group discussions and exercises.

Below is a way to structure a class, based on the trait approach and Case Study 2.1:

- First, break the class into small groups and ask the groups to develop a list of the top 5 (or 10) major traits they believe are important for a strong leader. Students should prepare this list without referring to the book, based on their experiences.
- Large-group discussion of the top 5 (or 10) lists, followed by a lecture on the trait approach.
- Students then read Case 2.1 and make a list of the major traits of each candidate (again, in small groups). Students should discuss the traits in these groups for a few minutes.
- Professor discusses the questions from the case study. Large-group discussion should center on the limitations of this approach regarding this case.
- Finally, the professor may choose to conduct in-class exercises listed below.

Exercises for this case study:

1) In small groups, students will write a job description for the director of research role. Each group is assigned a candidate (Alexa, Kelsey, or Thomas). They are to write a job description that would lead to the selection of their candidate. Students should be careful to write a description that not only lists traits but also describes work that requires the traits of their candidate to shine through over and above the other traits.

2) In small groups, students can write 10 interview questions aimed at helping them discover other leadership traits of the candidates. If time permits, students can role-play interviews (below).

3) Students role-play interviews with each of the candidates. Here, students are assigned a role: Two students can be Sandra Coke and her assistant, with the others acting as each of the candidates. Coke and her assistant develop questions for the candidates and conduct 5-min interviews in order to determine each one's leadership traits and suitability for the job. Students then report their findings to the wider class and discuss the hires.

The trait approach is considered intuitively appealing as leaders are viewed as special people with special qualities. Ask student to pick one of the candidates from the case and argue that this person does possess special qualities. Ask students to write down their thoughts in 150–200 words. Do not allow students to sit on the fence. They will focus on one candidate only and then share with their small group.