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Different Supervisory Styles for Different Organizational Levels: A Phenomenological Case

Study

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Abstract

This phenomenological case study explores the deliberate and intentional use of three supervisory styles at three different organizational levels in a South African retail food chain. The organization set out to use the paternalistic/clan supervisory style at the store level, which fits well with the interests and desires of frontline employees' interests and desires. The organization implemented a transactional supervisory style in order to enhance the financial outcomes for the organization at the regional manager level. Then, at the senior level the CEO implemented a transformational supervisory style with his direct reports in order to establish a transformational organizational culture at the head offices. The researchers interviewed 58 workers across the three levels, which revealed evidence of each of the three styles mentioned previously. Because of the conceptual differences in the three supervisory styles the researchers looked for additional problems where the styles come together – an organizational 'wind shear' of sorts. The researchers found no significant problems and it is suggested that this occurred because of the organization's practice of promoting from within, thus allowing people to 'carry along' the relationships built at the prior levels.

Practical implications: The study implies that it may be in the best interest of other organizations to consider using multiple supervisory styles to achieve different types of outcomes at different organizational levels.

Different Supervisory Styles for Different Organizational Levels: A Phenomenological Case Study

The purpose of this article is to report the findings of a phenomenological case study of Kauai Juice in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. While presenting a seminar on the alignment of supervisory styles to followership styles to the senior supervisory of Kauai Juice the senior author of this current study learned from the CEO of Kauai Juice that he, the CEO, tried to use multiple leadership styles based on what he thought was best given each different store and each different level of supervision within the company. In response to a question by the senior researcher the CEO explained that he saw three different supervisory styles (paternalistic/clan, transactional, and transformational) that fit the store manager level, the regional manager level and the senior vice-president level respectively. The vice-presidents in attendance at the seminar indicated surprise to hear this and through the ensuing dialogue it became apparent why there was a sense of confusion among various supervisors in the restaurant organization. An outcome of the dialogue was that the CEO, while wanting to implement three distinct supervisory styles, did not communicate this concept well throughout the organization. In addition the CEO realized that he was not specifically hiring/promoting managers that fit the desired supervisory style. This idea of deliberately selecting the 'right' supervisor for the pre-determined strategy fits Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory in that, according to Fiedler, leaders can not change their style, therefore the right leader/supervisor must be hired to fit the strategy.

This notion of different styles based on the hierarchical level in the organization seemed intriguing in that the literature is silent on the notion of intentionally using multiple styles except for the Situational Supervisory model developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982). However,

Hersey and Blanchard's model promotes different styles for different employees based on the employee's level of readiness and ability – not organizational levels.

In order to study Kauai Juice to determine if, in fact, the three supervisory styles exist and if this approach is successful, the researchers chose to use an exploratory, single-case, multiple-site, case study. Yin (1994) proffers that the case study method is an acceptable system of inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-live context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Additionally, the case study inquiry “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 13). In this current case study certainly the phenomena cannot be observed separate from the context and it is the context that facilitates the phenomena. While the specific selection of supervisory styles in Kauai Juice may be limited by the social-cultural factors of urban South Africa, specifically in Johannesburg and Cape Town, the concept of multiple styles selected for specific environments may be appropriate for other organizations in other settings.

Case studies generalize to the concept but not to the population, thus, in this case study the authors sought to more fully understand the phenomena of using multiple supervisory styles in an organization rather than understanding the food retail operations.

According to Tellis (1997) interviews are the most commonly used means of collecting data for case studies. This current study used interviews as the sole means of collecting data. The authors collected data from interviews of 42 front-line employees from 12 of the 30 Kauai stores along with 12 store managers, four regional managers, four general managers, and the CEO. The data indicated that Kauai was successful with this strategy. This research endeavor contributes to the literature by explaining what Kauai Juice has done and suggesting that other organizations

may want to consider an intentional use of different supervisory styles at different organizational levels.

Since this case study is about one company as an exemplar it is logical that the data collection be limited to a single organization. Yin (1994) posits that replication and redundancy of findings determines the number of people interviewed rather than a sampling logic as might be found in empirical quantitative studies. For this present study it was presumed that redundancy of findings would occur by interviewing three to four employees from each of the 12 stores. Redundancy occurred before the researchers interviewed people in all of the 12 selected stores, but since we were scheduled to be in all 12 stores and there would be no savings in time or money by stopping early, we elected to finish all 12 stores.

Although financial performance is not part of this case study and, as such, financial numbers are not reported, it should be noted that just prior to the introduction of the three supervisory styles the company set an aggressive performance goal of increasing gross margin by 30 percent. While there are many elements that contribute to financial performance it should be noted that during the supervisory style implementation no new stores were started and no major changes occurred in the South African economy that would explain a large improvement. In addition to Kauai Juice's marketing efforts and public relations work that certainly contributed to the improvement the CEO indicated confidence that the improvement in the store-level, regional-level, and headquarters level was a significant contributor to the improvement, which he ascribed to the multiple supervisory styles.

A review of the literature did not reveal any prior studies that either support or encourage the use of different supervisory styles at different levels, but this notion is compatible with Miller's (1987, 1996) concept of configuration approach. Configuration approach proposes that all organizations can be explained through the use of four macro variables: (a) strategy, (b)

structure, (c) environment, and (d) leadership. Although there is an infinite number of possible combinations of the details from these four macro variables Miller contends that only a few combinations would be successful. This is similar to, but is less open than, contingency theory. Miles and Snow (1978) in their presentation of the four archetypes (prospector, analyzer, defender, and reactor), which are based on the configuration approach, present the idea that organizations may have more than one archetype in the organization depending on the focus of the individual departments. For example Miles and Snow indicate that while research and development departments may be prospectors, the accounting departments may be defenders. For this article, a detailed discussion of Miles and Snow's archetypes is not necessary and the reader is encouraged to review Miles and Snow's work in the existing literature for a deeper understanding the concept. It is sufficient for this article to note that a matrix of configurations is proposed within Miles and Snow's work but Miles and Snow, Miller, or the literature in general does not advocate the intentional use of different supervisory styles in the organization, thus, the Kauai Juice case is worth exploring.

Method and Procedures

Following the seminar with the CEO and general managers the CEO began to communicate more clearly that he wanted to have: (a) a paternalistic/clan supervisory style at the store manager level; (b) a transactional supervisory style at the regional manager level, and (c) transformational style at the vice-president level. The CEO also began training store managers and district managers on the paternalistic and transactional styles. The CEO indicated that he was already using the transformational supervisory style at the headquarters and did not need specific training.

In March 2005 the researchers secured approval from Kauai Juice headquarters to visit six Kauai Juice stores in Johannesburg and six stores in Cape Town during the month and

conduct interviews with store-level employees, store managers, and district managers. Kauai Juice has 39 retail locations in malls, airports, and physical fitness facilities. The company produces and sells high-quality juice drinks, smoothies, salads, sandwiches, etc. The company has over 325 employees in South Africa.

The 12 stores were specifically selected to provide a cross-section of all store locations (malls, airports, fitness centers) and a cross section of store size (from 6 to 40 employees). The primary researcher and one secondary researcher (one was from Johannesburg and one was from Cape Town) conducted each interview together and recorded their field notes separately. This allowed for confirmation between the two researchers' notes and an opportunity for one researcher to record something that the other researcher might miss.

Kauai Juice's headquarters personnel contacted each of the stores and advised the store manager that the research project was authorized and in the two situations where the store manager did not get the call prior to the research team arriving, the researchers asked the store manager to contact the headquarters and confirm the legitimacy of the study. Store-level employees were pulled from duty situations for the 10-minute, on average, interview. Each store-level employee was given ten Rand (at the then present exchange rate this was equal to \$1.67) for his/her time, which was about what the employee earned per hour of work. Store managers were interviewed and given twenty Rand as a token of appreciation for participating.

Each interview began with an introduction and a short description of the research and each employee was asked if he/she wanted to participate. No employees were required to participate in the study. The two researchers each asked questions and if a problem in communication occurred the secondary researcher would rephrase the question or ask follow-up probing questions to clarify what the employee meant in the interview (the primary researcher is

from the United States while the secondary researchers were from South Africa and were familiar with local culture and language idioms).

The primary researcher transcribed the two sets of field notes into a single word-processing file for easier evaluation and to combine comments. The next sections present what the literature implied should be found and what was found.

Paternalistic/Clan Supervisory Style and Findings from the Case Study

Few studies exist in the recent organizational literature on the use of the clan culture and supervisory style with the noted exception of Chan's (1997) case study of DHL. Chan includes among the characteristics of a clan organization: (a) the importance of the individual clan member, (b) importance of internal stability, (c) internal cohesiveness and a sense of we/they, (d) differentiation of the clan from the external environment, (e) minimum dilution of the clan culture, (f) importance of clan identity, (g) greater acceptance of deviance by clan members than deviance of non-clan members, and (h) a set of clan elders who establish the law and mete out justice (p. 95). According to the University of Manitoba anthropological studies website, the clan member derives his/her rights from the father or mother figure in the clan (<http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/descent/unilineal/clans.html> - retrieved July 2005). Cameron and Quinn (2005) define clan culture as being inward focused with a sense or feeling of family. There is a sense of autonomy with people acting more out of a sense of duty towards vision rather than compliance to rules. According to Cameron and Quinn clan leaders take on a parental role in the organization.

Recent studies such as Bae, Chen, Wan, Lawler, and Ochieng-Walumbwa (2003); Gorton, Ignat, and White, J. (2004); as well as Hoppenbrouwers (2002) use the terms 'paternal' and 'paternalistic' without defining it, thus treating it as an a priori form of knowledge. Since the clan culture uses a father or mother figure as the authority it is logical to look for a paternalistic

supervisory style in the clan organizational culture. Paternalistic supervisory (while the majority of Kauai store managers were male a minority were female, thus maternalistic supervisory could be substituted for paternalistic in this article) is a form of supervision in which the leader is an authority figure and determines what is best for the employees, much as a parent would be positioned in a nuclear family. Paternalistic supervision can be supportive and benevolent as presented by Lee (2001) or domineering as presented by Chou (2002). Although Liang; Ling, and Hsieh (2007) posit that paternalistic supervisory is limited to China, the paternalistic/maternalistic form of supervisory is found in various people groups of South Africa.

In March 2003, Kauai Juice decided to introduce a supportive and benevolent form of paternalism with one of the goals being to become an employer-of-choice in the markets that Kauai Juice served. According to Lee (2001), this form of paternalism would be characterized by respect, consideration, and the provision of information from the store manager to the employees.

Interviews with the CEO and the general managers in March 2004 led to the discovery that in addition to becoming the employer-of-choice Kauai Juice sought to create a work environment in which employees felt valued and safe. The CEO commented that for many of Kauai Juice employees their job with Kauai may be their first job, even for employees who are over the age of twenty-five. Based on the work of Chan (1997), Lee (2001), and the goals set by the CEO, we sought to find evidence of the following through the interviews with store employees:

1. Recognition of the store manager as an authority
2. Recognition of the store culture as that of a family.
3. Determination of the store manager as someone who cares about the employee
4. Willingness to go to the store manager with both work and personal problems

5. Determination that the local store is different than, as well as, better than other Kauai stores.
6. Determination that Kauai Juice, as an employer, is better than other similar-industry employers.
7. Recognition of the workplace as a safe place to be.

Of the 42 front-line workers interviewed, 42 indicated that they see the store managers as the authority figures in the company but also recognize the district managers and general managers when they visit the store. Of interest, even when front-line employees worked for more than one store manager (due to shift and day assignments) the front-line employee saw the position of the store manager as much as the person of the store manager. Thirty-eight of the front-line employees responded with terms and phrases which indicated that they felt that the store was like a family with the store manager acting in a parental authority role and the other employees as siblings or family members. The researchers asked if the front-line employees felt that they could go to the store manager with problems, either work or personal in nature and 39 indicated that they had in the past and would continue to bring problems to the store manager. Only one employee indicated that interactions with the store manager were not productive. Forty of the front-line employees indicated that the store manager was willing to listen to ideas from the employees. This information confirms the elements of clan culture regarding the manager as a clan leader and the authority of the clan exist.

Forty of the front-line employees indicated that they would not want to work for a company other than Kauai even if the pay was slightly higher. It is important to note that further probing by the researchers indicated that 20 of the employees would leave and work for a different employer in the same industry if the pay was significantly higher (more than double the current pay). The low-income status of most laborers in South Africa would certainly be a factor

in this. Of the Johannesburg store employees, none of the front-line employees indicated that they would be interested in working for a different Kauai store and considered their current store as the best store in the system. In contrast, 15 of the 22 front-line employees would be willing to work at a different Kauai Juice store if transportation was arranged. (Of note, most laborers live in the townships outside of the city proper and use transport systems consisting of buses and vans to get from home to work each day. Some stores were near public transport sites and some were not near a transport pick-up site thus making commuting to work difficult.) Probing questions by the researchers revealed that in Johannesburg front-line employees were trained in the store in which they were hired but in Cape Town most employees were trained in one central location. While the Johannesburg employees' interaction was limited with other stores, most were familiar with at least one other store. In addition, in both Johannesburg and Cape Town many of the Kauai Juice employees who lived in the same township would travel to work together and during the trips employees would share experiences in their respective stores thus there was a general shared-knowledge about other stores.

The general sense that the employees would not leave Kauai for employment in a different company within the same industry along with the employees' opinion that the current store was the best store in the system supports the notion of a clan culture in that there is allegiance and loyalty within the clan relative to outside the clan. The difference in training between the Johannesburg and Cape Town stores implies that if training occurs in the store where the employee will work there will be a greater sense of loyalty and identity with the assigned store.

Forty-one of the 42 employees interviewed indicated that the workplace is a safe place to be. Probing questions revealed that this sense of safety included feelings of comfort, security, physical and mental safety.

The interviewers asked the 12 store managers if they intentionally sought to create a family atmosphere and if they sought to make themselves available to employees to discuss work and personal problems. The store managers all commented that there was an intentional effort within the Kauai store system to build a sense of family and for Kauai to become the employer of choice in the regions where they have stores. The store managers all stated that they shared store performance information with employees and performance information about other Kauai stores as a means of giving employees performance targets towards which to work. Store managers could provide financial bonuses to employees for exceeding store-performance targets. The bonuses were about 10% of the wages paid to a store-level employee.

The researchers learned directly from The CEO that care and concern for employees extended to the employees' families and funerals. High death rates exist in South Africa because of AIDS and it is the custom that the family have a large celebration as part of the funeral and that the family is responsible to feed the greater family and network of friends. Kauai Juice managers and executives began to visit the family and to bring food for the family to use in the celebration and funeral process. In addition, the research revealed that Kauai Juice provided transportation support to front-line employees who were asked to work late shifts. Late shifts required employees to miss the normal bus/taxi transportation options and Kauai Juice managers and executives chose to provide a non-customarily provided service, transport, as a means of helping employees and keeping them from having to walk long distances in unsafe areas.

The information collected in the interviews with front-line employees and store managers supports the idea that Kauai intentionally used the paternalistic/clan supervisory style the stores. Employees stated that they were loyal to the company and, of note, 41 of the 42 employees indicated that they had or would recommend their friends to apply for work at Kauai Juice. Store managers indicated that the stores were performing at levels higher than a year before and that the

supervisory style and culture introduced during the past year was a significant reason for the performance. Managers referred to marketing changes as another significant contribution to the firm's performance.

Transactional Supervisory Style and Findings from the Case Study

Transactional supervisory differs from paternalistic clan supervisory in that transactional supervisory focuses more on pay-for-performance than on relationship. The transactional leader does not presume that the employee will do anything except for a transaction in which the payment for service is large enough to motivate the employee to perform. In transactional supervisory the employee does nothing out of a sense of loyalty or altruism toward the organization or the leader but only acts as a means of gaining the payment. Bass (1985, 2000) defined transactional supervisory by saying that leaders “cater to the self-interest of the constituents” (Bass, 1985 p. 22) and that the transaction may be positive (reward) or negative (punishment) based on the desirability of the employee's behavior as defined by the leader. Notably Bass posited that in a full-range supervisory theory a leader would use a multitude of supervisory styles including but not limited to transactional and transformational (Bass did not address paternalistic/clan styles). In this present study, according to the CEO, Kauai Juice chose to not use a full-range supervisory approach at all levels but chose to focus on specific supervisory styles at specific levels of the firm.

Since transactional supervisory focuses on payment for service transactional employees should report a clear understanding of work needed and payment given and since transactional supervisory does not rely on relationship as a means of gaining compliance and performance transactional leaders and employees should both clearly indicate that while relationship is good it is not necessary in their work environment and, in fact, little evidence should exist that leaders and employees seek and maintain positive relationships beyond the exchange process. Since

employees in transactional-based work environment seek to serve their own self-interest as Bass (2000) implied, employees should be attracted to other employers who offer to pay more for the same work, thus showing minimal or no loyalty to the present employer. Since the Kauai Juice store managers work with front-line employees in a paternalistic/clan style but have to work with the district manager in a transactional style it seems logical that there should be some dissatisfaction in the store managers in that working upward is only based on the goal-attainment but working downward is relational-based. As a metaphor, the researchers proposed that leaders/employees at the intersection of different supervisory styles should experience a 'wind shear' or 'supervisory shear' in which leaders/employees find 'turbulence' and cognitive dissonance. To this end the researchers asked store managers:

- Is your relationship with the district manager based on achieving the store performance measures or is based more on a personal relationship?
- Do you do what you do in the store to gain the pay or do you do what you do more out of a sense of duty and commitment to the organization?
- Can you go to the district manager and ask for help with both work and personal problems?
- Would you leave Kauai to take a position with a different firm in the industry if you were paid more?

The data collected indicate that the district managers were more interested in performance than the store managers did and the district managers were less interested in relationship than the store managers were since the district managers are one step removed from the store managers' -front line employees relationship. The researchers also expected to find that the district managers would be more willing to take a job with a different employer in the industry if the different employer offered more pay for the same work. In addition, the

researchers expected to find that the district managers would be opposed to relational styles of supervisory since it might detract from short-term performance. To this end the researchers asked district managers:

- Is your relationship with the store manager based on achieving the store's goals on a relationship with the store manager?
- Is a relationship with the store manager important to you?
- Would you take a job with a different employer in the industry if you were offered more pay for the same work?
- Do you believe that the general manager to whom you report is interested in you or your attainment of the various stores' performance goals?

The results collected by the researchers from the twelve store managers and four district managers were surprising, although the answers in general confirmed the expected results such that it is was clear that Kauai Juice had, indeed, established a transactional supervisory style for the district managers and the store managers, but that there was more evidence of relationship than anticipated.

All the store managers indicated that there was a clear expectation by the district managers for store performance and it was the responsibility of the store manager to attain the results. While the store managers indicated that they received bonuses for attaining the store's goals they also understood the need to buffer communication and workloads among the front-line employees. This seems to be in accordance with the paternalistic/clan style in that internal members of the clan are buffered from outside forces. None of the store managers indicated that he/she would leave Kauai to work for another employer in the same industry if the pay was higher and the workload the same. This is in accordance with a paternalistic/clan supervisory style in that the clan leader is loyal to the extended clan allegiance than to outside non-family

clans. In addition, all the store managers indicated that they did what they did in the store more for allegiance to Kauai than for the salary, although salary seemed to play a larger role in the intrinsic/extrinsic benefit mix than the researchers heard from the front-line employees. Of interest, nine out of the twelve store managers indicated that they sensed a clear relationship component with the district managers and indicated that the relationship was important to them and that they believed the relationship component was also important to the district manager.

The four district managers responded to the questions as the store managers did. The district managers acknowledged that the financial performance (goal attainment) was paramount for the store managers but the district managers also responded, as did the store managers, that relationship was important. Like the store managers, the district managers indicated that they were not interested in taking a job with a different employer in the same industry for an increase of pay for doing the same work. Like the store managers though, salary was more important than what the researchers heard from the front-line employees. The district managers indicated that they were confident that the general manager to whom they reported was very interested in the stores attaining the set financial performance goals.

the researchers asked probing questions about the unexpected importance of relationship and determined that the district managers were promoted from the ranks of the store managers and that the store managers were promoted from the ranks of assistant managers. Thus, the district managers were store managers at one time who had relationships-supervisory connections with front-line employees and the now-current store managers. Thus, when the district managers visited the stores that they oversaw, in at least one store and sometimes in more than one store the district managers had leader-employee and peer relationships with both front-line employees and the store managers. Likewise, the store managers knew the district manager when the district

manager worked at the store level and the past relationship carried into the present work-relationship.

The responses to the questions by the store managers and the district managers confirm that a transactional style exists but not in a pure form due to the prior relationships between the district managers, store managers, and front-line employees that occurred while the district managers worked at the store level. It may be that a purer form of transactional supervisory might be evident if district managers were only hired from outside of organization since it is clear from the evidence collected that the district managers bring the relationships along with them as they move upward from store manager to district manager.

Transformational Supervisory Style and Findings from the Case Study

Bass (1985, 2000) defined transformational as a style in which the leader seeks to improve the condition of the follower so that the follower will work to achieve the goals of the organization. The transformational leader, according to Bass uses four forms of behavior: (a) inspirational motivation, (b) individualized consideration, (c) idealized influence, and (d) intellectual stimulation.

The primary researcher asked the four general managers about their leader-employee relationship with the CEO. To check for the presence of transformational supervisory the primary researcher asked each of the four general managers:

- When you interact with the CEO do you believe that he refers to the greater good of the organization and future goals as a means of providing the reasons why you should work on behalf of the organization?
- When you interact with the CEO do you believe that he treats you as an individual and provides you what you need rather than treating all the general managers in the same manner?

- When you interact with the CEO do you believe that he uses ideals and virtues as the basis for asking you to think or behave in given ways?
- When you interact with the CEO do you believe that he seeks to give you mentally/intellectually challenging tasks?

The responses from the four general managers varied in response which implied that the CEO did, in fact, provide individual consideration to each general manager and the broader work experiences among the general managers compared to the district managers and/or store managers seemed to add to the variance in answers. Although there was a variance, the responses in general showed that the CEO was using the transformational supervisory style in working with the general manager. The four general managers indicated that there was evidence of inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and to a lesser extent idealized influence and intellectual stimulation. The lesser evidence of idealized influence and intellectual stimulation is not surprising since the researchers' experiences in South Africa indicate that these two areas are not well used in the general cultural approach to leadership.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

The interviews indicate that Kauai Juice has successfully used the three supervisory styles of paternalistic/clan, transactional, and transformational in the three respective levels of (a) store manager – front line employee; (b) general manager - district manager – store manager, and (c) CEO – general managers. Of note, the organizational supervisory 'wind shear' that the researchers expected to see was only mildly evident and seemed to be mitigated by the practice of promoting from assistant manager to store manager to district manager from within the organization. The practice of training the Cape Town employees in one store seemed to lessen the intensity of the employees clan-like store loyalty compared to the Johannesburg practice of training the employees in the hiring store, is also of note..

Not only does the evidence show that Kauai was successful in introducing and maintaining the three distinct supervisory styles, but it seems that Kauai was financially successful in that during the first year of use of the styles. The overall company financial performance improved by 30%, thereby exceeding the industry average. The CEO and general managers acknowledge the contribution of many aspects of the company including marketing and financial management, but also note the higher performance at the store and district levels, which they attribute to the use of the specific supervisory styles.

This configuration approach to using different supervisory styles for different organizational-level strategies may be something that other firms may want to consider. Future research may involve the macro-laboratory studies of introducing different supervisory styles that match up with organizational-level specific strategies and measure the results after a requisite period of time. Confounding factors of a study like this should consider environmental, general economic issues, and training programs to select and equip leaders with the needed supervisory style.

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