

## Leadership Styles Season1 – Choose Your Own Adventure

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### ABSTRACT

This is the journey of two growing leaders, "Adam" and "Sandra" in a biotech company "Organics" where a lean organization structure is being piloted. They are both incredibly talented, energetic, and enthusiastic striving for the best results in the company. While both are coveted leaders in their organization, their approaches to leadership are completely different. Adam comes from a very technical background, hands-on, and immediately jumps into solving the issues and refuses to accept failures. Sandra prefers a team-focused approach, giving most of the ownership to her team members and letting them learn even if it ends in failure. Both report into senior leaders and have peers and team members with varied skills and mindsets. In a familiar scenario, let us look closer to see if they can achieve their goals, and manage their organization's targets while sticking to their respective leadership styles in the short and long term.

### THE SCENARIO

**Disclaimer:** All the characters and scenarios are fictitious based on a collection of real events.

On Sunday afternoon an email appears in two senior leaders, Kathy and John's inboxes from a key internal stakeholder outlining an urgent request from the Health Authority. If the request can be fulfilled within 48 hours, there is a high probability that the drug approval can be accelerated by three months, allowing patients in need to have access to an important treatment.

Prior to the weekend, the Senior Leadership team (SLT) had been informed that this request could come as early as Sunday (regulatory agency in earlier time zone) and were tasked with informing their teams to be aware over the weekend in case the notice comes in. Both Kathy and John regularly check their emails over the weekend, but both missed notifying their team leaders Adam and Sandra that this request may be coming any day.

### CHAPTER 1 - EXPECTATION

On Sunday afternoon, Kathy and John instantly connect with each other to go over the request and hash out a plan. Later that afternoon, they sent out an email to their team leaders, Adam, and Sandra to initiate activities for a successful delivery of results within 48 hours. They fully empowered each of them to take the next steps and to be notified immediately if there are any obstacles that may prevent them from reaching the target.

After receiving notification that Adam's team had delivered the first step of the results generation, the SLT was elated thinking now the response to the agency was on track to be available much earlier than expected. Later in the day, Sandra's team informed the SLT that there were some errors in the work that Adam's team had delivered that needed correction and had to wait another day. In the end, the team delivered within the last minutes of the 48- hour deadline.

The SLT were a bit disappointed in the approach from Adam and Sandra's teams as it led to the stress of potentially missing the deadline. Even though the request was met in time, Kathy and John were concerned about the lack of coordination between both units.

### REFLECTIONS:

- What do you think of the SLT's approach to handling the request and dissemination of information to their respective teams?
- Did the SLT give Adam and Sandra enough guidance to feel empowered?
- Do you agree that the SLT had a valid concern with Adam and Sandra's coordination of efforts even though the overall timeline was met?

## CHAPTER 2 - READY TO ROLL

It was a typical Sunday evening. Adam starts checking his inbox on his work mobile phone to be prepared for the next day. He notices an important message requiring immediate response and a request for his team to provide results within 24 hours and has a significant impact on the company's product approval. Immediately, he goes to his laptop and notices none of his team members are currently online. Adam does not want to disturb his team with phone calls on the weekend and starts drafting the work plan including completing the first draft of the results on his own by the next morning. He then asks his team to validate and confirm that his results generated are correct. Once confirmed, Adam sends the results out by the end of day and notifies SLT (in fact couple of hours ahead of schedule) and receives applause for delivering the first part of the results much ahead of schedule.

### REFLECTIONS:

- Holistically, what did Adam's team think of his approach?
- What did the team learn from this scenario?

## CHAPTER 3 - COMPOSED

Sandra keeps an eye on work emails occasionally as a general principle however she did see the same email that Adam received on Sunday evening. Sandra's team requires the analysis outputs from Adam's team to effectively perform their task. On Sunday, Sandra's team is not available. She knows this request is critical but chose not to put any plan together without her team. Instead, she cancels her first meeting on Monday and schedules another meeting with her team to create a plan for finishing the task once they receive the results from Adam's team. Later that day, Sandra's team receive the first set of results and start executing the plan they created as a team. It is the end of the day; Sandra's team finds some errors in the outputs from Adam's team and immediately notifies Adam and the rest of the team before shutting down and leaving for the day. The next day, Sandra's team receives an updated version of the results they need and were able to complete their tasks as per Sandra's plan. Sandra recognizes Adam's team for providing the results ahead of time which gave some wiggle room for troubleshooting through the errors and ensuring overall quality of the outcome.

The SLT appreciates Sandra's team's work but nudges the team to be faster, minimizing risk while waiting until the last minute to deliver the results.

### REFLECTIONS:

- Holistically, what did Sandra's team think of her approach?
- What did the team learn from this scenario?

## CHAPTER 4 - INFORMED

Like their managers, some of Adam and Sandra's team members checked their emails Sunday evening. They did not receive the information request email but had an idea that it could come around that week. They quickly observed that their manager was online but did not want to bother by messaging and logged off immediately. They heard about the information request the next morning in the team meeting and were surprised that their managers did not alert them on Sunday. The teams could have been more prepared on Monday with an action plan. Regardless after hearing the plans on Monday, they were aligned with Adam and Sandra's plan and did their best to complete the task on time.

### REFLECTIONS:

- What pro-active steps should the team members in Adam and Sandra's units have taken with their bosses, team members, and other stakeholders?
- What did the team learn from this scenario?

## CHAPTER 5 - ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Adam and Sandra collectively received an email on Sunday night. Adam had seen this email first as he usually checks his emails on the weekend and quickly alerted Sandra by texting her and asked if she had some time on Sunday evening for a quick chat or if Monday morning would work better for her. Sandra had a commitment that night and was not able to meet until Monday morning but was able to exchange a few text messages to get things started on Sunday. They discussed whether it was appropriate to reach out to their respective teams on Sunday but since they did not give any indication that this may be a working weekend they decided to wait until Monday to start

fresh with everyone available and engaged. Adam insisted that he himself could get started that night on his part, but Sandra convinced him to give the team a chance on Monday morning. Knowing that Adam would not sleep well by sitting idle until Monday, they did agree that Adam would do some preparation work for outlining a draft project plan to achieve the necessary results in time.

The next day, first thing Adam and Sandra had met through their online video meeting system to review Adam's draft plan and made some critical changes where their two teams could work together through the request instead of a hand-over plan that Adam had initially proposed. While Adam's team was responsible for producing the output for Sandra's team to get started, they had strategized a plan where the teams could simultaneously work in parallel together. They then had a joint meeting with both Adam and Sandra's teams outlining the request, the urgency, and the impact it could have on receiving an accelerated approval time for their product in development. They had given the team the motivation they needed to get started and to work together towards meeting the request. Both teams spent these two full days working closely together and managing through the plan and delivering the expected results in the last minutes of the 48-hour timeline as expected.

The SLT gave appropriate applause to both Adam and Sandra for carrying through a well-crafted plan that included delivering results with high quality within the given timeframe.

#### **REFLECTIONS:**

- What did the team think of Adam and Sandra's approach to handling the request?
- Which leader would have taken accountability if either of the teams failed?
- What feedback if any should Adam and Sandra give to SLT?

### **CHAPTER 6 - EVALUATION (YEAR 1):**

The story ended successfully in all the above scenarios with the request being fulfilled and the agency having the information needed for accelerated drug approval and providing patients access to an important treatment ahead of schedule.

In the chapters explored above, all leaders, managers, and team members had good intentions, however there were varied approaches for driving results (which is close to reality). The purpose of this paper is not to judge what is the right approach but to remind and acknowledge there are always multiple approaches to solving problems.

There are a couple key points to consider helping navigate through challenging situations as discussed:

- ✓ Most people have good intentions
- ✓ Establishing transparent communication channels and project coordination plans
- ✓ Ask clarification questions
- ✓ Leadership can come from all levels
- ✓ Apply the appropriate leadership style that motivates the team to achieve the desired outcome
- ✓ Be mindful of the short-term impact vs. Long-term sustainability
- ✓ Balance individual working styles vs. management expectations

Double Loop Learning (Results fed back into the initial assumptions)

What if these requests came continuously for the next 3 months? Would the team be able to support all these requests that could impact their non-working days over an extended period? What could management do to plan around these scenarios and manage the expectations for a healthier and sustainable work environment? How can the results be incorporated into future requests to further build efficiency?

To be continued in Season 2 ....

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