Leadership Case Study: Sally’s Challenge

MTCR is a leading company in the development and manufacturing of a broad range of custom hardware solutions. The company prides itself and is well known for being refreshingly honest and straightforward in its dealings with customers and employees, and in its ability to deliver difficult projects on time. Sally has been a senior manager at MTCR for four years and leads a team in the custom services area of the company. In a recent 360-degree survey, Sally scored above average (at the 70th percentile) in the competency, **Collaboration and Teamwork**. Her report also indicated that her manager, peers, and direct reports saw this competency as a critical one for someone in her position. Some of the written comments in her survey indicated that if she demonstrated and applied this competency more often, it would have a significant positive impact on her success on the job. For these reasons, she’s focusing her personal leadership development over the next year on this competency.

Sally recently was assigned a complex and challenging client project. It would be a difficult assignment for her team that would require longer work hours than normal, some new roles and responsibilities for certain team members, and some changes in their normal processes. It would also require close coordination and cooperation from other parts of the organization. She determined that a planning team should be formed so she could get a wide range of input, gather the best ideas, and gain her team’s commitment. Sally selected some of the best people on her team, others who had great potential that she wanted to help develop further, and several people from each of the other departments involved.

She analyzed the project requirements and provided the team with a written situation briefing in advance, including some initial insights into both the challenges and potential solutions. The key points in her briefing were well researched, considered, and presented to the planning team in a clear way. Some of the team members,
she heard later, felt that some of the solutions would demand changes that would help one of the departments at the expense of the others.

Sally scheduled a project kickoff meeting for the planning team a week after she had circulated the initial briefing. Prior to that meeting she set up one-on-one and small team meetings that covered everyone in her department, even those not on the planning team. In those meetings she carefully walked through the situation, what their challenges would be, and how what they would accomplish linked directly to the company’s vision and future success. She also acknowledged that some difficult changes would likely be required, but explained how individual feedback would be gathered, recommendations considered, and personal situations taken into account. Sally made a point to wander around the department for good stretches each day during the next week, stopping in to talk informally with people in their cubicles, and getting as much feedback as she could on how people were feeling about the new project requirements.

At the project kickoff meeting she presented again the basics of their new assignment. After Sally had reviewed the project and its challenges, she opened the floor for initial reactions to the project situation and the briefing she’d circulated the week before. The discussion was generally positive and key insights were made by many members of the team. During a short break, some heated discussions and disagreements arose between project team members from the different departments. Sally saw what was happening and quickly stepped in. She acknowledged the concerns that were being expressed and asked those involved to meet with her personally later that day. She had already been briefed on the issues being discussed, had met previously with the other managers involved, and thought she’d have solutions ready by then to address the concerns.
Leadership Questions to Consider

1. Leaders who are seen as extraordinary at a particular competency regularly display some specific, associated behaviors. These are listed for each of the 16 differentiating competencies in the sections of your guide called, “Behaviors Defining This Competency.” To answer these first two questions, refer to the section in your guide for the competency, Collaboration and Teamwork.

   Although she generally followed most of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them stand out because Sally was:
   a. clearly demonstrating them through her actions?
   b. not practicing them as effectively as she could have?

2. Your guide also provides lists of linear development ideas for those leaders wanting to fix a weakness or a fatal flaw in a particular competency. These ideas are shown for each of the 16 differentiating competencies in the sections of your guide called, “Developmental Suggestions.” To answer these next two questions, refer to the section in your guide for the competency, Collaboration and Teamwork.

   Even though Sally doesn’t appear to have a fatal flaw in the competency, Collaboration and Teamwork, these linear suggestions can still offer her ideas about how she might evaluate and improve her own performance. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally:
   a. been practicing effectively?
   b. not been demonstrating effectively?

3. For leaders with an existing strength in a competency that they want to develop further, the guide provides a list of Competency Companions for each of the 16 differentiating competencies. These “cross-training” ideas are behaviors that are highly statistically correlated with the competency the leader wants to develop into a profound strength. To answer these last two case study questions, refer to the Competency Companion section in your guide for the competency you’ve chosen to develop, Collaboration and Teamwork.

   Which of those companion behaviors shown:
   a. was Sally employing in this situation?
   b. was not specifically mentioned in the case study, but might be effectively employed by Sally as part of her leadership development plan?
Possible Answers and Leadership Considerations

Following are some of the possible answers and leadership considerations surrounding Sally’s leadership challenges. You will likely find others as you think more about how she might improve her effectiveness as a leader and build her personal development plan. Again, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers here or in your own leadership situations. The objective of this activity is to get you thinking more about how you might apply to your own challenges the leadership research and tools that are available in your Competency Companion Development Guide.

Question 1—Using the guide section, “Behaviors Defining This Competency”

a. Although she followed many of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them standout because Sally was clearly demonstrating them through her actions?
   • Develop cooperative working relationships with others in the company (she did this by inviting a variety of people onto the planning team, including members of other departments, and by having discussions with the other managers about anticipated problems)
   • Proactively address conflicts and disagreements that affect team effectiveness (she did this when she quickly cut off the heated discussions and provided a more effective time and place to discuss the differences)

b. Although she followed many of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them standout because Sally was not practicing them as effectively as she could have?
   • Model teamwork by working effectively with other leaders in the organization (although she included some of their team members, she could have also included the other managers more explicitly in the planning process)

Question 2—Using the guide section, “Developmental Suggestions”

a. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally been practicing effectively?
   • Bring the group together to discuss ways to work more effectively as a team (she included people from other departments on the planning team, and had previously worked out some of the concerns of the team with the other department managers)
   • Don’t let conflicts between group members fester; bring people together to resolve their issues (Sally quickly intervened to set up a more productive discussion later in the day, after some heated arguments broke out in the meeting)
   • Plan projects as a group and make sure everyone knows who is doing what (she used the
planning team as a way to make this happen)

b. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally not been demonstrating effectively?
   - **Roll up your sleeves and help others when they need it** (although the case doesn’t indicate she wasn’t doing this, volunteering to help others in times of need—before being asked—is a great demonstration of collaborative behavior)

**Question 3—Using the guide section, “Competency Companions”**

a. Which of those companion behaviors shown was Sally employing in this situation?
   - **Relationship Building and Networking** (she included people from other departments on the planning team, and had previously worked out some of the concerns of the team with the other department managers)
   - **Strategic Perspective** (Sally made sure in the small group meetings to link the project directly to the company’s vision and future success)
   - **Develops Others** (she specifically invited onto the planning team some of her high-potential employees for the development experience)

b. Which of those companion behaviors shown was not specifically mentioned in the case study, but might be effectively employed by Sally as part of her leadership development plan?
   - **Practices Inclusion and Values Diversity** (she could have considered the company’s diversity objectives and policies when selecting members of the planning team)
   - **Communicating Powerfully and Prolifically** (this project leadership role gives Sally a great opportunity to work on her communication skills within her own team and across the company)