

Source: Gulati, R., Mayo, A., & Nohria, N. (2014). *Management*. New York: South-Western, Cengage Learning.

Case 4: Wolfgang Keller at Königsbräu-TAK⁵

A graduate of Harvard Business School, 34-year-old German national Wolfgang Keller was named general manager of the Ukrainian subsidiary of Königsbräu, a large German brewery. His tenure had been remarkable for a successful turnaround effort at Königsbräu-TAK, which many believed placed him in line for a senior position at the corporate offices. Yet he continued to have difficulty managing the behavior of Dmitri Brodsky, Königsbräu-TAK's commercial director and Keller's subordinate.

Since hiring Brodsky, a Ukrainian national 10 years older than he, Keller had been having

reservations about Brodsky's skills and management style. As commercial director, Brodsky had done a great job redesigning the sales force organization and developing a comprehensive set of information and control systems. Although these were successes, Brodsky's methodical and analytical approach to the redesign efforts took more time than expected. While he was pleased with the new systems, Keller believed that Brodsky had neglected to build effective and productive working relationships with customers and the sales team. Brodsky's management style, described as "formal and distant," seemed to

prevent him from developing close relationships with his peers. Brodsky rarely talked about his family with colleagues, nor did he participate in social outings with other managers. Brodsky also refrained from visiting sales representatives and distributors whom Keller believed were critical to Königsbräu's future in the Ukraine. All of these factors were issues for Keller, who believed that loyalty and enthusiasm were cultivated through personal relationships.

In contrast to Brodsky, Keller enjoyed being involved with the sales team and working with customers. Keller was described as a "hands-on" manager who was action oriented when dealing with problems, but also impatient, jumping quickly to solve problems as they arose. Many believed that Keller did not know how to delegate authority. Believing that Brodsky did not manage with the level of urgency that was required, Keller regularly intervened with Brodsky's team. After one performance evaluation, Keller's boss cautioned that if he wanted to advance, Keller would have to learn to step back from functional responsibilities and be more of a team player.

When it came time to review Brodsky's performance, Keller indicated to Brodsky that he had

"a low level of leadership and no personality" and that Brodsky was "not a leader for the sales force." Brodsky vehemently refuted Keller's characterization of him and claimed that Keller's micromanaging style prevented Brodsky from being successful. He felt that his own behavior was in reaction to Keller's interventions.

The leadership styles of Keller and Brodsky were fundamentally different, and each had difficulty appreciating the value the other person brought to the business. For example, each man thought differently about workplace relationships. Keller, highly extroverted, believed that personal relationships and contact with peers, subordinates, and customers cultivated loyalty and enthusiasm. Therefore, he thrived on creating a collegial environment at Königsbräu-TAK. Brodsky, on the other hand, did not actively seek close workplace relationships. In fact, he tended to avoid them. Despite being less extroverted than Keller, however, Brodsky was successful at the company. Redesigning the sales force organization and developing the information and control systems were positive contributions to the company. Furthermore, Brodsky felt that Keller was cramping his style.

Case in Point

Wolfgang Keller at Königsbräu-TAK

1. Compare and contrast Keller's and Brodsky's leadership styles.
2. Why was Keller concerned about Brodsky's performance?
3. How can Brodsky improve his management skills?
4. How should Keller manage Brodsky?

Answer →

The Wolfgang Keller case demonstrates that differences in personality can create interpersonal tensions. When these differences appear, individuals often challenge, avoid, or become irritated with one another. Despite the inherent complications and difficulties, working with people who have different personalities can be valuable. In fact, different personality traits may be more suitable to certain job functions. For example, someone who is highly extroverted and conscientious may have a successful career in marketing or sales, like Keller. Someone who is less extroverted may have a successful career managing information technology systems or conducting research.

A recent study concluded that extroverted leaders perform better when their team consists of many introverts. The reverse is also true; an introverted leader tends to produce better results with a team of extroverts. The extroverted team members help to draw out the introvert. If a team consisted of all extroverts, there would be many ideas but little follow-through. With a team of all introverts, few novel or innovative ideas would surface. While we often prefer to work with people who are more like us, the collective performance of the group may be limited in such a situation.⁶ So how do we begin to work through these differences so that our interactions with others are more effective? To do this, we must learn more about our own tendencies and predispositions.⁷