

CASE 2.1

Choosing a New Director of Research

Sandra Coke is vice president for research and development at Great Lakes Foods (GLF), a large snack food company that has approximately 1,000 employees. As a result of a recent reorganization, Sandra must choose the new director of research. The director will report directly to Sandra and will be responsible for developing and testing new products. The research division of GLF employs about 200 people. The choice of directors is important because Sandra is receiving pressure from the president and board of GLF to improve the company's overall growth and productivity.

Sandra has identified three candidates for the position. Each candidate is at the same managerial level. She is having difficulty choosing one of them because each has very strong credentials. Alexa Smith is a longtime employee of GLF who started part-time in the mailroom while in high school. After finishing school, Alexa worked in as many as 10 different positions throughout the company to become manager of new product marketing. Performance reviews of Alexa's work have repeatedly described her as being very creative and insightful. In her tenure at GLF, Alexa has developed and brought to market four new product lines. Alexa is also known throughout GLF as being very persistent about her work: When she starts a project, she stays with it until it is finished. It is probably this quality that accounts for the success of each of the four new products with which she has been involved.

A second candidate for the new position is Kelsey Metts, who has been with GLF for 5 years and is manager of quality control for established products. Kelsey has a reputation for being very bright. Before joining GLF, she received her MBA at Harvard, graduating at the top of her class. People talk about Kelsey as the kind of person who will be president of her own company someday. Kelsey is also very personable. On all her performance reviews, she received extra-high scores on sociability and human relations. There isn't a supervisor in the company who doesn't have positive things to say about how comfortable it is to work with Kelsey. Since joining GLF, Kelsey has been instrumental in bringing two new product lines to market.

Thomas Santiago, the third candidate, has been with GLF for 10 years and is often consulted by upper management regarding strategic planning and corporate direction setting. Thomas has been very involved in establishing the vision for GLF and is a company person all the way. He believes in the values of GLF, and actively promotes its mission. The two

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qualities that stand out above the rest in Thomas's performance reviews are his honesty and integrity. Employees who have worked under his supervision consistently report that they feel they can trust Thomas to be fair and consistent. Thomas is highly respected at GLF. In his tenure at the company, Thomas has been involved in some capacity with the development of three new product lines.

The challenge confronting Sandra is to choose the best person for the newly established director's position. Because of the pressure she feels from upper management, Sandra knows she must select the best leader for the new position.

Questions

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?
2. In what ways is the trait approach helpful in this type of selection?
3. In what ways are the weaknesses of the trait approach highlighted in this case?