

CASE 7.3

Taking on Additional Responsibilities

Jim Madison is manager of a district office for the Social Security Administration. The office serves a community of 200,000 people and has a staff of 30 employees, most of whom work as claim representatives.

The primary work of the office is to provide the public with information about Social Security benefits and to process retirement, survivor, disability, and Medicare claims.

Jim has been the manager of the office for 6 years; during that time, he has made many improvements in the overall operations of the office. People in the community have a favorable view of the office and have few complaints about the services it provides. On the annual survey of community service organizations, the district office receives consistently high marks for overall effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

Almost all of the employees who work for Jim have been employed at the district office for 6 years or more; one employee has been there for 22 years. Although Jim takes pride in knowing all of them personally, he calls on a few of them more frequently than others to help him accomplish his goals.

When it comes to training staff members about new laws affecting claim procedures, Jim relies heavily on two particular claim representatives, Shirley and Patti, both of whom are very knowledgeable and competent. Shirley and Patti view the additional training responsibilities as a challenge. This helps Jim: He does not need to do the job himself or supervise them closely because they are highly respected people within the office, and they have a history of being mature and conscientious about their work. Shirley and Patti like the additional responsibility because it gives them greater recognition and increased benefits from receiving positive job appraisals.

To showcase the office's services to the community, Jim calls on two other employees, Ted and Jana. Ted and Jana serve as field representatives for the office and give presentations to community organizations about the nature of Social Security and how it serves the citizens of the district. In addition, they speak on local radio stations, answering call-in questions about the various complexities of Social Security benefits.

Although many of the claim people in the office could act as field representatives, Jim typically calls on Ted and Jana because of their willingness to take on the public relations challenge and because of their special capabilities in this area. This is advantageous for Jim for two reasons: First, these people do an outstanding job in representing the office to the public. Second, Jim is a reticent person, and he finds it quite threatening to be in the public eye. Ted and Jana like to take on this additional role because it gives them added prestige and greater freedom. Being a field representative has its perks because field staff can function as their own bosses when they are not in the office; they can set their own schedules and come and go as they please.

A third area in which Jim calls on a few representatives for added effort is in helping him supervise the slower claim representatives, who seem to be continually behind in writing up the case reports of their clients.

(Continued)

(Continued)

When even a few staff members get behind with their work, it affects the entire office operation. To ameliorate this problem, Jim calls on Glenda and Annie, who are both highly talented, to help the slower staff complete their case reports. Although it means taking on more work themselves, Glenda and Annie do it to be kind and to help the office run more smoothly. Other than personal satisfaction, no additional benefits accrue to them for taking on the additional responsibilities.

Overall, the people who work under Jim's leadership are satisfied with his supervision. There are some who feel that he caters too much to a few special representatives, but most of the staff think Jim is fair and impartial. Even though he depends more on a few, Jim tries very hard to attend to the wants and needs of his entire staff.

Questions

1. From an LMX theory point of view, how would you describe Jim's relationships with his employees at the district Social Security office?
2. Can you identify an in-group and an out-group?
3. Do you think the trust and respect Jim places in some of his staff are productive or counterproductive? Why?
4. As suggested in the chapter, *leadership making* recommends that the leader build high-quality relationships with all of the followers. How would you evaluate Jim's leadership in regards to leadership making? Discuss.