

IS3103 Information Systems Leadership and Communication
Mini Case: Supernova (for Lecture 2 Discussion)

Box 2.3 Case Study
**The Importance of Leadership Communication
 Style: SuperNova Microcomputer**

Jay Brooks is the project director of a product development team at SuperNova Microcomputer. His team of 30 employees has been charged with the task of developing a new “cutting edge” tablet computer for the consumer market. This group of 30 consists of the best technicians within the organization.

Unfortunately, Jay’s team has been experiencing numerous difficulties and delays in the development of the new computer system. A number of team members have complained to the president of SuperNova, Sam Lowell, that Brooks is stifling creativity within the team and that Laura Martin, the project assistant, would be a much more effective leader. “We could get this project moving if Laura were in charge,” claims one team member.

Brooks, who was hired from a major competitor six months ago, is a very directive leader. He holds a daily meeting from 8 to 10 am in which each unit of the entire team presents its latest innovations. All new ideas must be cleared through Brooks. Many team members have complained about these meetings, claiming that “Brooks might as well build this system by himself if he is going to approve every chip.” In addition, all team members must complete a worksheet isolating the specific tasks they have undertaken each day. This worksheet, wryly called “form 1984” by members of the team, is a major source of dissatisfaction among team members.

Laura Martin has been with the company since its inception a decade ago. Laura was passed over for the job as project director because Sam Lowell felt that she was not as technically competent as she needed to be. Laura was disappointed, but she accepted the decision because, overall, she has been very happy at SuperNova. Indeed, Laura has been instrumental in promoting the open, democratic, employee-oriented management style that is characteristic of SuperNova. As project assistant she interacts frequently with all members of the team. She has discovered that many of the members feel unappreciated. One team member complains, “We are expected to create one of the most advanced home computer systems in existence, but we are treated like a bunch of rebellious third graders.”

Sam Lowell is disturbed because the project is falling way behind schedule. After only six months, major delays have pushed back the target date for the project by a full year. The team members themselves don’t seem to be aware that they are falling behind any projected schedule; they only realize that the project is bogging down.

Things have gotten to the point that a number of team members are threatening to quit. If they leave, the entire project will be jeopardized. Further, rumors are spreading through the team that upper management is disappointed with productivity and may replace several key members. All in all, members of the team seem very frustrated. “We just want to build the best product that we can,” says one team member, adding, “I only wish they would let us.”