

CASE 2

John Benson had been **head of the department** for about eight years. Over this period the department had high labour turnover and a considerable current of discontent among its 25 employees. John was an **autocratic supervisor**. Because he seemed to have the support of the division manager, the people in the department did little outward complaining about his leadership.

Nevertheless it was common knowledge in other departments in the division that the majority of the people in John's department were very dissatisfied, to say the least. These people were career employees performing technical work, and they received personal feelings of accomplishment from their work. Few compliments were forthcoming from their boss; while they resented this, their personal pride and possible fear of retribution kept them from saying anything to John. One of the things they resented most was John's frequent practice of taking credit for ideas and efforts of subordinates so that he could enhance his own reputation with **his superior**, the **division manager**.

One of his subordinates, **Will Michaels**, had become the **informal leader** of the department, although he did not seek the role. Other employees sought him out for advice and guidance, and he became the focal point of the gripe sessions which had become more frequent as time passed. These gripe sessions were quasi-social occasions such as lunch, and they usually ended with Will telling his fellow employees to complain openly about their grievance to both John and his superior.

Will had done this several times and, while he gained no positive results, he at least had the satisfaction of having a clearly stated position. This may have been one of the reasons why the other employees turned to him for advice. In any event, Will evidenced no fear of his boss, and he was generally recognized as a superior employee by his peers.

The **division manager retired**, and was replaced by a member of one of the departments in the division. He had not had prior administrative experience in the company, although he had had **managerial responsibility** at prior places of employment. Because he was familiar with the problems in John Benson's area of responsibility, he recognized it as a trouble spot; and after some consultation with the assistant division manager, he decided to replace John Benson as department head. John was quite surprised, since he had assumed that he could continue under the new division manager as well as he had under the one who had recently retired. When the new division manager demoted John, he said he could stay with the company as a technician in the department he had previously managed. This was done because of John's long tenure with the company and the fact that he was only eight years from retirement. John accepted the demotion with considerable dejection and malice, but he felt he had no choice under the circumstances.

Will Michaels was called in by the new division manager and asked to assume the **department head position**. He was informed of his former superior's demotion and the fact that John would now be working for him. The division manager told Will that he was chosen because it was believed that he could weld the department into a cohesive operating unit of the division. Will **accepted the responsibility** with what could be called confident apprehension.

THINK?

Before answering the questions below or discussing the case with others, try and work through systematically the **Case-study Analysis** steps 1 to 6 described in section 5.

CONTEXT?

All **managers** make **decisions** within their own unique **context**. Identify the **context** of the **key manager/supervisor decision-maker** in this case-study.

1. In making the transition from informal leader, can Will maintain the same relationship with his fellow employees?
2. What problems do you feel he will have with his former superior in the changed relationship which now exists?
3. Did the new division manager handle the situation properly?
4. Should Will have accepted the position as department head?
5. What kinds of problems does an informal leader face when he becomes the formal leader?
6. Is it wise for management to promote a generally recognized informal leader to a managerial responsibility?