# **Leadership Case Study**

Tammy Bowles

University of Louisville

LEAD 490: Leadership and Management

Professor Teresa Feliciano

November 18, 2024

## Introduction of the Leader

I interviewed Melanie Tapp which is an Expert in Workforce Development and Strategic Solutions with Madisonville Community College. I chose this person due to their leadership style which I observed while being involved with classes offered through economic development. I wanted to learn more about her leadership development over the course of her career and what insights she has to offer which will help mentor me in becoming a better leader.

Before contacting Melanie, I looked over her LinkedIn profile and the websites for Hopkins County Economic Development and Madisonville Community college to review her biography and learn more about her background. I reached out to Melanie by email and introduced myself by giving her a brief overview of my career background, why I decided to return to college, and my future career goals. I also defined the purpose of the leadership interview project, how the course covers different leadership styles and how it applies to leaders and followers and why I chose to interview her. We decided to meet over coffee, and I had my questions ready ahead of time. At the close of the meeting, I thanked her for her time and asked if we could connect for future opportunities to collaborate.

Melanie shared her career development and what led to her current position. She initially graduated with an associate degree after high school and returned to college later in life where she completed her bachelor's degree. Her education along with her work experience provided a foundation for her leadership role as an expert in workforce development. She has a background in healthcare administration and economic development. Her career started in healthcare administration in 2004 as an activities director and after completing her bachelor's degree she was promoted to the director of activities and within two years made a career advancement to executive director. As an executive director she was the director of a senior living community where she was responsible for overall management of the facility. Some key responsibilities included staff supervision, financial management, compliance and regulations, communication liaison, marketing, emergency management, quality improvement, record keeping and documentation. Using these experiences and the value she brought to the senior living facility; she was offered a position as the director of workforce development with Hopkins County Economic Development Corporation. This is where I attended seminars and classes offered to people in my community for industries, local business owners and entrepreneurs. Melanie worked directly with local businesses and industries to troubleshoot any issues and assist in recruiting or job expansion. She served on the job expo committee to help lower employment rates and help local businesses find qualified employees. After working with economic development for four years she took her current position with Madisonville Community College as the director of workforce solutions. She drives strategic initiatives that bridge the gap between education and industry that will foster a relationship which will empower both students and local businesses. Some of her key achievements are new industry partnerships, curriculum enhancements, partnerships with local agencies to bring soft skills training to the lineman program at the community college, creating a workforce summit to showcase and target workforce development programs aimed at upskilling and reskilling to enhance employability, collaboration with college leadership to encourage a cross-functional teamwork, and community engagement with local businesses, the chamber, and economic development. Melanie has a true passion when it comes to creating opportunities and enhancing skills to create programs that work. Her leadership role in each position she has acquired shows growth in leadership skills developed.

**Leader Questions and Responses**

1. What is your background and how does it contribute to your leadership role today?
   * She spent 15 years in healthcare administration, working in a high-demand, highly regulated environment that required constant agility and strict adherence to goals. Then transitioned into workforce development at an economic development corporation, where she began learning grant management and the process of identifying company needs. These experiences shaped her approach to leadership, ensuring she remained focused on achieving organizational standards with both rigor and flexibility.
2. What are some significant learning experiences that shaped you as a leader?
   * In healthcare, she encountered numerous situations where quick adaptation to regulation changes or urgent patient needs was necessary. These experiences taught resilience, accountability, and the importance of staying solution focused. The transition to workforce development presented a new set of challenges, particularly in grant management and economic alignment, which pushed her to strengthen problem-solving and strategic planning skills.
3. How have you learned your leadership skills?
   * She developed leadership style primarily through hands-on experience, learning on the job and gaining insights from both successes and setbacks. She has been active in civic and community groups, forming industrial alliances and organizing training opportunities for peers and companies. These roles have helped her hone a collaborative approach and understand different perspectives and essential qualities.
4. Did you have a mentor that helped form your leadership skills?
   * Yes, her main mentor was a previous supervisor whose goal was to help her grow professionally, eventually leading to the move away from Economic Development. His motto was that by building her up to be the best in her current job, he could also prepare her to excel in her next role. He focused on long-term career path and future opportunities, creating a strong sense of loyalty and motivating her to work even harder. His approach taught the value of investing in people, a principle that she strives to bring to her own team.
5. What is your leadership approach to decision making?
   * “Direct and data-driven, yet highly collaborative in decision-making”. Her team alongside her will evaluate potential outcomes and decide on the best course of action, but once the decision is made, she expects them to work independently. This approach empowers her team to take ownership of their roles, while allowing them to focus on the end goals effectively.
6. What are your core values and ethics within the workplace?
   * Integrity, respect, and commitment are her core values. She emphasizes these by setting high standards and working hard to uphold them in everything. Accountability is essential to her leadership approach, as she believes it’s vital to hold herself and her team to consistent standards. These values create a culture where the department can thrive and support the college’s mission.
7. Significant changes you have had to make to lead?
   * Coming from a highly structured healthcare background, she had to learn to be flexible in her current role. To accept that setbacks can happen and that schedules may need adjusting. Also embracing flexibility while still maintaining high standards helped her adapt to new demands and create a more balanced approach to leadership.
8. How would your colleagues describe your leadership style?
   * Her colleagues would likely say that she is direct, has high-energy, and solution focused. She sets high expectations but is willing to work alongside them to meet goals as a team. She prioritizes both excellence and efficiency, aiming to lead with clarity and purpose.
9. What is your Path-Goal style according to the questionnaire?
   * “My approach aligns most closely with a direct but supportive style. I set clear goals and expectations, providing resources and guidance to help my team achieve them. However, I trust my team to take ownership of their goals and the steps to reach them, making our working relationship a partnership” (M. Tapp, personal communication, October 28, 2024).
10. What advice would you give to me to become an effective leader?
    * “One area I’m working on is creating more growth opportunities for my team and establishing clear paths for their advancement within the college. Like many jobs, it often feels like we have more work than people, and I’m known for saying “yes” to new projects to ensure excellent results” (M. Tapp, personal communication, October 28, 2024). Her advice to an aspiring leader is to find balance, to set high standards while giving your team the support, training, and autonomy they need. Leading with a focus on both results and the development of your team to ensure sustainable success for everyone involved. Sound advice to share with someone on how to be an effective leader.

**Leadership Characteristics**

The leadership characteristics Melanie presents from her background, the interview, and her responses to the questions I prepared, is she is a problem-solver, has high moral values, integrity, high energy, empowers their followers, and who’s skills approach is human skills. Through her background and each career advancement she has developed and grown her leadership skills.

According to Kotter’s philosophy, leadership produces change and movement and both management leadership are needed for an organization to prosper (Northouse, 2021, pp. 16-17). Key characteristics according to Kotter are leaders create a vision, set strategies, communicate goals, build teams, inspire and energize, and empower their followers (Northouse, 2021, p. 17). All these characteristics align with Melanie’s skills as a leader. She collaborates with her team in decision-making yet empowers her team to complete the task independently. She communicates well with her followers to clarify the common goal. She has high energy which inspires and energizes her followers. Lastly, she is a visionary that creates a vision for the team, clarifies the goal, and set strategies in place to succeed.

Melanie strongly shows the important traits of a leader discussed in the five-factor personality model and leadership basic factors. The strongest factor associated with leadership is extraversion. After extraversion the other important factors listed from strongest to weakest are conscientiousness, openness, low neuroticism, and agreeableness (Northouse, 2021, p. 35). While reading each factor, I noticed that Melanie’s leadership characteristics aligned in the exact desirable order from the model by researchers Goldberg, McCrae, and Costa. “Extraversion is the tendency to be social and assertive and to have positive energy. Conscientiousness is the tendency to be thorough, organized, controlled, dependable, and decisive. Openness is the tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious (Northouse 2021, p. 35). Based on responses during the interview, these top three factors support Melanie’s characteristics as a leader.

Melanie’s human skills approach shines through her ability to work with people. She has great people skills and genuinely has concern for the success of others. “Human skills allow a leader to assist group members in working cooperatively as a group to achieve common goals” (Northouse 2021, p. 57). Human skills are equally important in each level of management. Technical and conceptual skills fluctuate, but human skills remain an important factor as a skill needed in an organization.

Individual attributes Melanie possesses which have an impact on leadership skills and knowledge are cognitive abilities, motivation, and personality. Her competencies are strong in problem solving skills, social skills, and knowledge of her field. According to Northouse (2021), “The skills model suggests that the career experiences that are represented in Figure 3.2 are acquired in the course of leaders’ careers influencing their development of knowledge and skills for solving complex problems” (p. 67).

I shared with Melanie the path-goal assessment and her results showed that she has a supportive leadership style. A supportive leadership style is one that takes a highly supportive and low directive approach. This supportive leadership style includes listening, praising, others, asking for input, and giving feedback. A leader that uses this style gives followers control of the day-to-day decision making but remains available to help assist (Northouse 2021, p. 110). The behavior of a support leadership style is one which includes the well-being of followers. “Leaders using supportive behaviors go out of their way to make work pleasant for followers, which in turn, provides followers with the confidence necessary to succeed” (House 1971, pp. 321-328).

**Recommendations for the Leader**

Melanie has some very strong leadership qualities obtained and strengthened over the years. A few recommendations I would give to this leader are; continue to improve their communication skills, start a mentoring program to share their knowledge base, foster a culture of continuous improvement, led by example, and lastly ensure their team feels valued and supported. Even though her communication skills are excellent, there is always room to improve listening skills by being an active listener, encouraging open dialogue, and seeking feedback. Fostering a culture of continues improvement is important to drive innovation forward, empowering others to become leaders, and creating an environment where learning and growth are of high value. Leading by example is a mindful practice which lets your team see you embrace new challenges and how you navigate them. Teams which feel valued and supported are more productive, take their own initiative, go above and beyond, and embody core values.

**Reflection**

After interviewing Melanie, I left the conversation with a renewed sense of clarity about what it means to be an effective leader. One of the key takeaways from this interview is I strive to grow in the same way Melanie has with each advancement in her career. I was impressed by her approach to empowering her followers. She spoke about how important it is to give team members the autonomy to complete tasks on their own while providing them the necessary support and guidance. I realized that empowering others not only boosts their confidence but also fosters a sense of accountability. Overall, I walked away inspired to develop my leadership style by focusing on my personal leadership development plan of practicing listening skills, community involvement, empowering others, and to improve my empathy and sensitivity characteristics. This interview was a valuable opportunity, and I am excited to integrate these practices into my development as a leader.

**References**

Northouse, P.G. (2021). Leadership: *Theory and Practice* (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.

House, R. J. (1971). A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness*. Administrative Science Quarterly*, 16, 321-328.