subordinates, and the nature of the relationship is associated with differences in support and rewards. When examining predictors of workplace conflict, for example, Landry and Vandenberghe (2009) found significantly less substantive (task-related) conflict within LMX supervisor–employee relationships. Additionally, LMX relationships may help prevent workplace stress and burnout by increasing emotional support and socialization (Thomas & Lankau, 2009).

Case Study 8: eXtreme Confusion at ECX

When he accepted the position of senior project manager at eCommerce eXchange (ECX) six months ago, Ryan Harron thought he'd be working for Marcia Davenport in product support. His first day on the job, however, he learned that Marcia had just left ECX for another opportunity; instead, he'd be working for Tim McDonald, the newly promoted director of product development. Unwittingly, Ryan went along with the change. Several months later, however, Ryan sat at his desk wondering if he should look for another job.

Ryan and Tim didn't see eye to eye on anything. Having worked in technology project management for nearly 10 years, Ryan was experienced, innovative, and self-directed. His last manager had been very "hands off," which suited Ryan well. He was a "big picture" guy who liked to figure things out on his own. He excelled at creating new processes to maximize efficiency and was skilled at explaining complex and technical information technology (IT) concepts to those on the business or consumer sides.

Ryan's new manager was the exact opposite. Very detail-oriented, Tim was a taskmaster focused on closely overseeing his team. He wanted to know what everyone was working on at all times and demanded to be consulted before taking any ideas to a client. When it came to dealing with his employees, Tim's style vacillated between blunt and confrontational to completely avoidant, and Ryan considered him downright rude at times. Tim had worked in ECX's IT department for 7 years before his most recent promotion, and in the IT department his chief responsibility had been to manage very structured, technical aspects of new project designs. While this approach might have worked well within IT, Ryan believed that for product development to succeed, the team needed encouragement to innovate and incentives for creativity.

During his first month on the job, Ryan noticed that members of other teams occasionally worked from home, so one day he casually asked Tim about ECX's remote policy.

Tim glared at Ryan and shot back, "We don't do that on our team."

Ryan recoiled, much like a 5-year-old being scolded after asking for another cookie, and he vowed never to ask that again. Yet a few months later after Ryan worked from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. testing a new system before going live, Tim told Ryan he could work from home the next day. Shortly after that, Rachel, another team member, worked from home because her son was home sick. The inconsistencies left Ryan very confused.

To make matters even more confusing, after three months on the job a new vice president of product strategy was brought on board and was assigned to indirectly oversee all departments pertaining to product development, including Tim's team. Energetic and inspirational, Will Garcia's style was 180 degrees different than Tim's. Will wanted employees to take more ownership in the development and execution of their projects. Instead of starting from scratch for every client, he wanted to create a process and template that could be used repeatedly, with modifications for client needs. He applauded creativity and had recently praised Ryan both publicly and privately for several jobs well done.

Ryan felt caught in the middle. He loved Will's style but felt smothered by Tim on a day-to-day basis. For example, noting Ryan's desire to tackle new challenges, Will asked Ryan to research a new online payment method. Ryan's excitement at the opportunity was quickly squelched when he received an e-mail from Tim that read, "Don't waste your time. I'll deal with Will."

Ryan had no idea what that meant. Confused, he wondered to himself, *Is Tim going to tell Will that he doesn't want me to work on the payment project? Or am I just going to look like an idiot in our next ECX meeting when Will asks what I've come up with and I say "nothing"?*

Ryan just couldn't figure out Tim and also didn't know how much more of his contradictory directives he could take.

Fortunately for Ryan, he didn't have to muddle through much longer. Once Will got his bearings in understanding ECX 's corporate culture, his vision and authority led him to make some organizational changes. Product development was floundering; only one new product had emerged during Tim's tenure as director. Will didn't want to lose Tim's talent in technology, but he also realized that Tim was much better managing details than the big picture. Will's solution was to promote Tim laterally to be the director of IT. Here, Tim could structure and organize projects to his heart's content. And to Ryan's delight, Will promoted him to director of product development. Ryan would have far more freedom to be creative in his problem-solving approaches. He'd still have to work with Tim because product

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development and IT were interdependent departments, but he felt confident that he could do so on his own terms.

Questions for Consideration

1. Using Likert's four systems, which leadership style do you think Tim McDonald used? Provide evidence to support your beliefs. Which leadership style do you think Will Garcia used? Again, provide evidence from the case to support your beliefs.

2. Identify Tim's and Will's transactional and transformational qualities, providing support for your assertions from the case.

3. Tim's leadership style failed him as director of product development, yet Will seems to think that Tim will succeed in leading the IT department. Use contingency theory to explain where Tim might have gone wrong with product development and whether or not you think he will succeed with IT.

4. Use LMX theory to explain the differential relationships held by Rachel and Tim versus that between Ryan and Tim. What about between Ryan and Will versus Tim and Will?

5. Do any of the theories emerge as "better" than the others? Why do you believe this to be the case? What situations might surface that would make a different theory or theories better at explaining the situation?