

Bosses with mood swings make workers most anxious

January 3 2018



Managers who have mood swings cause more tension in the office than bosses who are nasty all the time. Credit: University of Exeter

Bosses who have "Jekyll and Hyde" personalities cause their staff the highest levels of anxiety, a new study has shown.

Managers who have mood swings cause more tension in the office than bosses who are nasty all the time, according to a new study. Not being able to predict how their boss is going to act towards them has a detrimental effect on the productivity of workers.

Far from the stereotypical view that ruthless and unsympathetic managers cause the greatest issues for employees, new research carried out by the University of Exeter has shown that bosses who switch between being friendly and severe at the drop of a hat are actually most damaging.

Experts found even a poor but consistent [relationship](#) with managers was better for workers than one that was influenced by [mood swings](#). The impact is worse when colleagues don't have a supportive relationship with their co-workers.

Academics measured how "ambivalent" staff felt about their manager – to what extent they had both positive and negative views about them.

Dr. Allan Lee, from the University of Exeter Business School, who carried out the research, said: "The focus is usually on trying to work out if relationships between staff and bosses are good or bad, but they can sometimes be both, and it is important to measure that. Bosses reward and punish their workers, and this has an impact on self-esteem. If their staff have to adopt different roles at different times because they have a manager who can be both nasty and nice they view him or her in an ambivalent way.

"It is very negative for an employee to be ambivalent about their boss. Having a clear attitude towards them is much better for their performance. If your boss is both pleasant and unpleasant to be around it is hard to know what they think about you, and if you can't predict how they will act. This makes it hard to trust them. This creates negative emotions and makes staff feel anxious, causing poor performance at work."

The study shows employees can compensate for an ambivalent relationship with their boss if they have a good relationship with other colleagues.

Researchers carried out four surveys in three companies – two in the UK and one in India, asking what they thought about their bosses and how they performed in different tasks. The 320 staff who took part worked in a service centre, providing telephone-based customer service support

or outsourced human resources services and other business tasks. A total of 60 teams of staff were examined, they shared a single supervisor but worked independently of each other.

"Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Ambivalence and Task Performance: The Cross-Domain Buffering Role of Social Support" is published in the *Journal of Management*.

More information: Allan Lee et al. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Ambivalence and Task Performance: The Cross-Domain Buffering Role of Social Support, *Journal of Management* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0149206317741190](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317741190)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Bosses with mood swings make workers most anxious (2018, January 3) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-bosses-mood-workers-anxious.html>

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