

DIFFICULT BOSSES: REAL STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING

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Abstract

Purpose

The plight of dissatisfied employees has become a recurring theme. A question often asked by management trainees is “How do I handle my difficult boss?” Hence, this paper aims to address the difficult boss problem successfully from the perspective of the subordinate.

Design/methodology/approach

The conceptualized legacy framework had been presented to participants and who verified its accuracy by their experiences. They could apply the framework with relative ease. Workshops, interview and online questionnaires informed the development of the framework.

Findings

The framework proposes four legacy effects on subordinates that bosses leave after interaction, namely, tense, dark, false and calm legacies. The legacies assist subordinates in classifying their bosses as either a hammer, flat battery, fire-lighter or dynamo. Once the boss is categorized, strategies to assist subordinates in handling their difficult boss flow from the framework.

Research limitations/implications

While extremely useful for subordinates, bosses are limited in the use of the legacy model as it requires very high trust levels to exist. The nature of the difficult boss problem suggests that such trust does not exist.

Practical implications

Benefits of understanding the legacy framework has two benefits: subordinates can use the legacy tool to classify their bosses and find strategies for how to handle difficult bosses. For bosses, subordinate evaluation of their legacies presents an alternative avenue to seek feedback and improve “self-learning” through reflection.

Originality/value

The legacy matrix was shown to be applicable to all bosses at all levels in virtually all organizations. The value of the framework was also observed at the informal level.

Most employees, even those at the highest levels, have had the difficult boss experience at some time in their careers. This is often the critical point where people leave fine jobs. Top management then wonders, “Are we not an employer of choice?” or “Why would people want to work for the competition?”.

The plight of dissatisfied employees has become a recurring theme with book topics like *Monster bosses* (King, 2008) and *Good boss, bad boss* (Sutton, 2010) as well as regular articles directed towards cures for "horrible" bosses (Moss-Kanter, 2011) or "good" managers (Buckingham, 2006). A question I am often asked by management trainees is "How do I handle my difficult boss?" Hence the framework being proposed here was designed to address the difficult-boss problem successfully from the perspective of the subordinate and not to pursue covert strategies by them (Pretorius, 2016).

This article provides four actionable subordinate-focused strategies rather than proposing quick fixes for bosses. It seeks to apply alternative wisdom without extensive measurement before application. It suggests a practical strategy framework for subordinates to address their boss predicament. Finally, it provides a case example and research results.

BOSS STATUS QUO

Difficult bosses rarely change – that’s a subordinate perspective fact. That does not, however, mean one cannot do something about it. It is simple: identify the boss’ dominant legacies and archetypes followed by appropriate strategies for immediate application. The framework suggested in this article provides alternative application that can empower subordinates to do just that.

A boss refers to someone with decision making powers and authority to direct the work of subordinates. Bosses include manager supervisor and leader and may be referred to interchangeably. Bosses often have a boss too.

Experience suggests few bosses really believe that good subordinates exist and most of them endure subordinates as part of the job package. An opposing view proposes that good subordinates may be the result of the interaction between the manager and his subordinates rather than of the characteristics of subordinates themselves. As a result, one hardly notices the subliminal and unintentional effects of bosses on subordinates. Subordinate response is therefore every bit as consequential to the boss’s power as the capabilities ascribed to the boss.

Buckingham (2005) suggests that good managers are successful because they are “chess players” treating individual subordinates differently based on subordinate strengths while poor managers are “checkers players” who treat all subordinates the same despite their individual differences. The same probably holds true for subordinates who have to respond differently to various bosses during and after their interaction. Bosses, therefore, leave different legacies. To better understand the legacies left by bosses after interaction with subordinates, one should consider the opposing views of managerial effects.

“Opposing” views of managerial (boss) effects

The literature is filled with managerial style models. These models generally categorize bosses based on behavior of the manager on a continuum from autocratic to democratic management styles or some variation thereof. These style measurements, for the most part, discount the response of subordinates to their bosses. A widely applied classification considers the ability of the subordinate to direct a manager’s behavior towards “situational leadership” of instructing, delegating, coordinating and involving styles in reaction to how the subordinate is judged. Being performance-focused does not incentivize managers to seek and draw from alternative wisdom (Danby, 2008) but they rather seem to pursue quick fixes from the popular literature to address their challenges. Mills (2005), for example, suggests that management is about getting results and doing so efficiently.

Moss Kanter (2012) states that “plain energy is a neglected dimension of leadership”. A person can have either an unhealthy or a healthy effect on someone else just by being present. This energy of one person may be harmonious or discordant with that of another. The energy of one person may be nurturing, or it may be draining to the energy of another. Energy levels vary in individuals, teams and groups between negative and positive as extremes. Wauters (1997) suggests that what one feels is reflected in energy while Krishnamurti (2010) refers to energy as that which gives drive and vitality. Chopra (2005) describes “recycled” energy as forming emotions. The example that Chopra uses refers to emotions most people experience, such as when walking into a room and sensing a “tension” or entering a holy shrine and sensing “calmness”.

Energy is not a new concept. Tosey and Llewellyn (2002) even propose “organizational energy” as an alternative application of the ancient chakra framework for energy when they describe the levels of energy within an organization. Their notion of the energy system is that it embraces multiple dimensions of human experience, the rational and the irrational, the material and the spiritual, the emotional and the intuitive as well as the aesthetic and the pragmatic. Leigh (2004) states that “energy and consciousness are synonyms and energy does not only hold information, it rather is information”. This can be shared from many levels despite its subtle nature.

Energy, though difficult to measure, therefore provides for inclusion of emotions, feelings, moods and vibes associated with contexts of frustration, anger and discernment that bounds rationality. Sun Tzu, cited in *The art of war*, mentioned over 2 000 years ago that energy is relevant when he suggested it is a matter of emptiness and fullness (Cleary, 2005) and explained:

When there are rifts between superiors and subordinates, when generals and officers are disaffected with each other, and dissatisfaction has built up in the minds of the troops, this is called emptiness. When the civilian leadership is intelligent and the military leadership is good, when superiors and subordinates are of like mind, and will and energy operate together, this is fullness.

Energy-related aspects overlap significantly with emotional aspects of the manager and subordinate. While debatable, Kim and Mauborgne (2005) claim that energy (with

beliefs and critical mass as the other two) is a “disproportionate influencer” in organizations for strategy implementation. Johnson (2009) proposed follower “mood contagion” that is related to charismatic leadership, but there appears a remaining gap for a practical tool to determine the energy that bosses leave behind.

Based on my experience as a strategy and turnaround consultant and from observing managers in practice as well as formal research on strategy and leadership, this article proposes an alternative application framework for subordinates (and bosses) at all levels.

AN ALTERNATIVE MANAGER TYPOLOGY FOR SUBORDINATE USE

This article asserts that a boss (manager) can directly influence the subordinates’ or followers’ experiences of mood and atmosphere both during and after interacting with them. After the interaction, the boss vacates and leaves the subordinate with a short term “legacy.” This legacy is proposed as an alternative concept describing this “disposition” left behind after interaction between the two parties. Legacy left by a boss includes the atmosphere, mood, ambiance, feelings, expectations and so-called “vibe.” Legacy is not entirely a new theory, but rather a different application of the existing wisdom of energy systems to those with difficult bosses. It depends less on formal measurement and more on intuitive judgment.

George (2010) confirms that people that are mindful of circumstances can become more effective as leaders (bosses). So, being mindful of one’s effect as a boss on subordinates can be an important step towards eventual strategy implementation. Figure 1 illustrates legacy as a framework of the boss archetypes (thus the result as experienced by the subordinate). The framework is proposed to direct coping strategies for subordinates on how to handle a difficult boss. Once the legacy is determined, such strategies follow naturally.

Legacy as typology

Legacy is best described by the following quote:

”Some bosses are like clouds, the minute they disappear, the day suddenly gets brighter” (www.humortadela.com.br)

The proposed legacy typology is described and explained along two metrics – “expectation effect” and “energy effect.” The effects interact to form four legacy archetypes. The subordinates experience the relevant legacy of the manager after they had interacted. Legacy suggests that when bosses depart after having had an interaction with individuals, a team or group, they leave behind an immediate legacy that is experienced by the other party. This legacy may incorporate feelings, emotions, mood elements of the perceptions and experiences and may be based on unexplained, illogical and subconscious elements. The interaction could be direct (face to face) or even indirect (e-mail, sms, whatsapp or telephonic).

The proposed legacy framework differs from human energy fields, which refers to the “subtle energies which can be felt” (and seen) during interaction between parties (Leigh,

2004). Legacy is “post-interaction” and can therefore be reflected upon by the receiver (observer) of the legacy. While open to subjectivity and bias, it does not matter because it is the “reality” of the observer (subordinate) rather than the intention of the actor (boss) that determines the legacy.

Expectation effect has two extremes on a continuum. It ranges from how confused the subordinates are about the required outcome or alternatively how clear they are about what is expected once the boss departs after their interaction. Clarity turns the legacy positive. It improves as the boss shares information, points out key aspects, shows alternatives, tests understanding, assists in meaning making and elicits feedback – all aspects of successful delegation.

Energy effect also has two extremes on a continuum. It ranges from feelings of low (no) energy by subordinates to positive feelings when the boss departs. Positive feelings improve the legacy when the boss shows respect to the individuals, trusts them and encourages them to give opinions (and listens to their opinions).

In combination, energy and expectation combine to form four archetypes for bosses based on the legacies they leave behind. Figure 1 shows how these legacy archetypes are related.

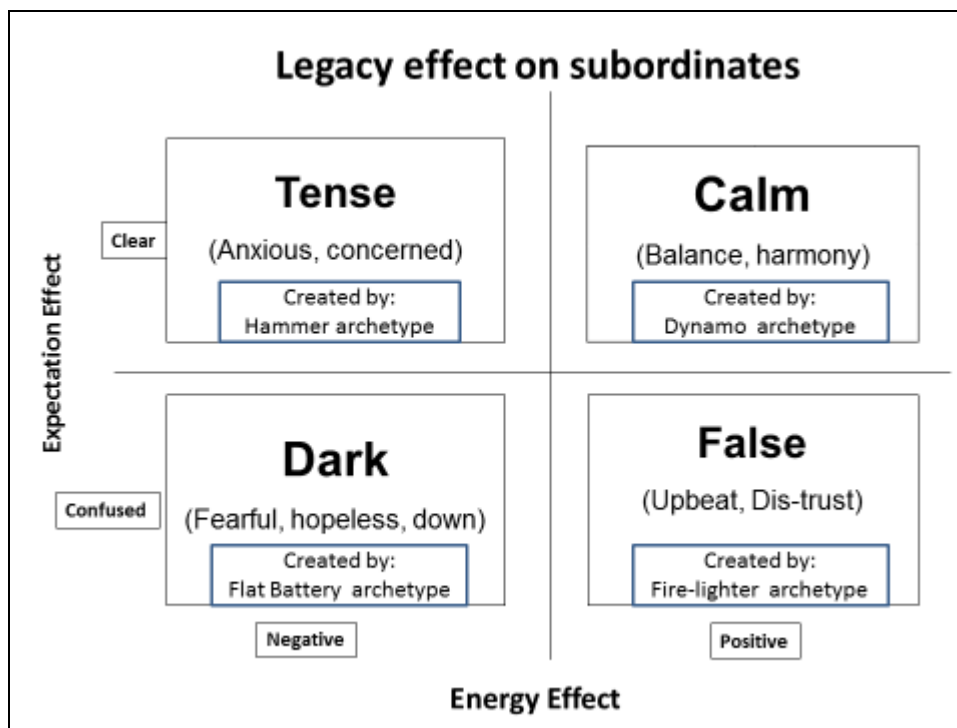


Figure 1: Legacy effect and archetype matrix for boss evaluation by subordinates

Legacies left by bosses may contain several seemingly illogical elements especially for the energy component but flowing together in the different combinations, the legacy archetypes are described as follows:

Tense legacies refer to subordinates that experience anxiety and are concerned that they will not achieve the clearly stated required targets (expectations) of the boss.

Subordinates feel discouraged and stressed as they understand the gap between goals and their direct situation leading to limited engagement. For them it appears as if they have to ascend a steep mountain. How am I going to achieve what is required? This forms the key question of the tense legacy. Typically, subordinates exposed to the tense legacy ask, "where do I start with this task?" or state, "my boss does not listen to our situation."

Dark legacies refer to subordinates that experience fear and have no hope to achieve what is expected. Matter of fact is they are not at all sure of what the boss expects. Their fear leads to a negative experience. Subordinates feel worried and depressed because they cannot see how they can escape their dire situation leading to no engagement. For them it seems that the situation is hopeless but they are unsure how to act. A subordinate experiencing this boss induced legacy feels disempowered and mostly responds out of fear for the consequences. Subordinates may suspect that the boss is also not sure. They feel down and drained of energy. The key question of the dark legacy is: "what now?" Typically, subordinates exposed to the dark legacy ask, "where are we going with this?" or state, "the boss wants results but is unsure herself" or "we must achieve but he withholds important information from us."

False legacies refer to subordinates that experience positive feelings and are keen to participate. However, they are unsure what the boss expects them to achieve. Subordinates feel motivated to be part of the team but are concerned about the expectation as these bosses appear unable to voice it clearly. It seems that the situation is not understood by the boss; therefore, the false mood. Subordinates experiencing this legacy effect feel a disparity between the unclear expectations and what they think is the reality of the situation. This leads to tentative engagement. The energy level is high but only short-term until the sense of reality sets in. The key question of the false legacy is: "Let us go but where to?" Typically, subordinates exposed to the false legacy ask, "why does he want our opinion – doesn't he know where this is going?" or state, "she is a great person but does not know the job."

Calm legacies refer to subordinates that experience harmony and balance. They are positive that they will achieve the clearly understood goals (expectations) of the boss. Subordinates feel encouraged and motivated. They understand the gap between set goals and their direct situation leading to creative engagement. For them it appears as if they have to approach a tough task but can do it with the support they have. Calm legacies are characterized by the absence of stress despite being stretched by the expectation (stretch goals). The question of the calm legacy is: "what can block me?" Subordinates exposed to the calm legacy ask, "How can we help to make this better?" or state, "she lets me make the decisions on the ground – it means I am trusted."

The legacy, therefore, is about short-term effect, but, if continued for longer periods, might become a key contributor to the development of a positive subculture within a team, department, or unit.

Challenges addressed by the legacy effect framework to create value

Tart (1972) indicated that the judgment of energy concepts exists mainly in the mind of the observer and therefore suffers from the problem that it is not necessarily the "scientific truth". Energy has no existence independent of the target person's mental state. The legacy as

a construct may be conscious, semi-conscious or even sub-conscious judgment of the interaction outcome. Western culture would judge this as subjective which has negative connotations”. Subjectivity is the enemy of science and generally means it is not real. One cannot study it and therefore it is unreliable. To address the subjectivity, and give legacy effects more and practical value with scientific-oriented managers, empirical research was undertaken to measure it (see text box). The value of the research lays in the quantification of the legacy effect concept as it helps to measure the reality of the receiver, in this case, the subordinate perspective.

BOSS ARCHETYPES WHO CREATE THE LEGACY EFFECTS

The legacy effects result from the various actions, approaches and behaviors of a boss *as interpreted by the subordinate*. Elements contributing to legacy include the boss’s own maturity level, ability (Covey, 2004), openness (Dyck and Neubert, 2009), ego (Blanchard, 2007) and possible dysfunctions (King, 2008) that are subconsciously judged by the subordinate/s. For each legacy category, a boss that is typical of the ones that create such legacy effects is described. Figure 1 also shows the boss archetypes that create the associated legacies and which are explained as follows.

Hammer archetypes that create tense legacies: This type of boss drives subordinates hard (often forceful) to achieve above average objectives and results. They have low consideration for the subordinate’s feelings and are without regard for the subordinate’s perceived situation or problems. Often, these bosses are technically competent and able but think they are the only ones who can successfully execute the job at hand. The subordinate is clear on what to do and which results to pursue but feels unmotivated and experience low energy to attempt the tasks. Thus, the “hammer” archetype suggests bosses that force results and, in doing so, deplete subordinate energy levels.

Flat-battery archetypes that create dark legacies: This type of boss looks for performance but fails to be clear as to what exactly is to be achieved. With low consideration for people, he or she is closed to alternative opinions despite being potentially self-confident and having technical ability. The result is confused subordinates that feel unmotivated and drained of energy. Subordinates experiencing this legacy mostly respond in fear and from a position of feeling helpless because they do not know the consequences of executing the job successfully or not. This legacy describes the worst-case scenario where subordinates feel desperate and stressed. Thus, the flat-battery archetype suggests bosses that drain subordinate energy and leave subordinates confused. The worst case of a flat battery has been referred to by respondents as a “dead battery.” Subordinates report cases where the boss was able to deplete their energy completely.

Fire-lighter archetypes that create false legacies: This type of boss, often not clear about the expected objectives and results him/herself, knows that people are crucial to achieve performance. Fire-lighter bosses are strong on human considerations and can apply techniques (genuine, learned or superficial) to show that they are in touch with the feelings of the subordinates. They are energetic and easily able to motivate subordinates. Unfortunately,

these bosses are not clear about expectations, which leave their subordinates confused. If these bosses are perceived to have low competency, the false legacy is strongly based on low trust. The confused subordinates feel in conflict, willing to participate but not clear what exactly to do. Subordinates experiencing this legacy mostly respond by appearing to be “doing something”. Thus, the fire-lighter archetype suggests a boss that “energizes” people – but then what?

Dynamo archetypes that create calm legacies: This is the ideal legacy and describes the effects of competent bosses who are clear about the expected objectives and results to be achieved. At the same time, they find balance between human considerations and performance through openness to opinions. They are able to energize others and give clear direction. The subordinates feel no conflict, are inspired to act and know exactly what is expected. Subordinates experiencing this legacy feel empowered and are involved, proposing alternatives and participating. This legacy describes a scenario that bosses strive for and many believe they are successful at. Unfortunately, when one asks the subordinate, few bosses achieve dynamo status. Thus, the “dynamo” archetype suggests a boss that can energize people and turn them into “activists” (Kellerman, 2005) that know what to do. Dynamos fall into Mills’ (2005) category of leaders as they address vision (expectations) and energize (motivate) subordinates to pursue the vision.

STRATEGIES TO USE THE LEGACY TOOL

Subordinates and managers can use the legacy tool with great effect to improve their work life and that of their teams. I propose the strategies based on my experiences and feedback received from cases that I followed.

How subordinates can use the tool

Buckingham’s suggestions that good managers are chess players because they treat followers as individuals applies when selecting a strategy as there is no “generic” strategy to handle all boss archetypes. Each archetype must be treated according to the archetype characteristics.

Subordinate strategies for hammer archetypes that create tense legacies: Signal to the hammer that you are well prepared and did your homework. The hammer wants to see subordinates working towards the goals – so demonstrate your engagement. Give them regular feedback on project progress and use their preferred language of “performance” and “targets”. If they have a hindrance (most do), find ways to assist with it but without emphasizing own effort. Be careful of not trying to stroke their ego just to get along.

Subordinate strategies for flat battery archetypes that create dark legacies: Be prepared for situations or create a place where one can help them in a difficult situation. Signal to flat batteries that you support them. Look for a way to help them clarify the goals of which they are unsure (without being obvious). If flat batteries have dysfunctions, find ways to assist them to overcome it without acting like their “psychiatrist.” Refrain from trying to stroke their ego. Be careful of their ability to drain people’s energy.

Subordinate strategies for fire-lighter archetypes that create false legacies: Signal to fire-lighters the team impact by clarifying the goals for the boss within the team context. One way of doing this is by “reverse delegation” where one asks clarity questions about the task at hand. Make them aware of the issues. Paraphrase the goals for improved clarity and propose potential solutions based on the “happiness” of the team.

Subordinate strategies for dynamo archetypes that create calm legacies: Signal to the dynamo that you can work independently and take responsibility – show you are an activist. Give inputs when asked and offer solutions. While this archetype is the easiest to handle, observe issues and risks and warn the boss in time. They tend to be open to such contributions.

Bosses can also benefit from the legacy framework

Bosses who are open to self-improvement can use the legacy tool to great effect to improve their management focus. It requires obtaining feedback from their subordinates (and peers) about their dominant legacy. More so, it requires honest and deep reflection – accepting the feedback as the reality of their subordinates even if it opposes the boss’s intentions. Ideally, bosses should strive towards the dynamo archetype. The aim is to achieve clarity and to leave positive energy.

Suggestions for bosses when using the tool

For bosses to obtain legacy feedback, a very high level of trust must exist and if subordinates fear potential retaliation, the results will be skewed. (I saw this when I compared the results of two groups of respondents). Those completing the paper copies in the different firms all rated their bosses as more inclined towards the dynamo category compared to the responses of the anonymous web questionnaire where there were more hammers and flat batteries reported instead. In some cases where the overall energy was negative, there were more hammers and less flat batteries. It is meaningful not to have the boss present when the evaluation is done. For small team evaluations, anonymity remains problematic.

Secondly, if subordinates have long-standing issues or a history with their bosses over a long period, they see the evaluation as a way to vent their frustrations. This might also skew the outcome of the result in the opposite direction. However, bosses should be open to the feedback. Several informal follow-ups of reported cases found the subordinates moved on – in itself a potential negative circumstance.

Finally, some bosses can – once they understand their own legacy – attempt to “fake” their actions and behavior. Subordinates can detect this easily and it might have the opposite effect.

IMPLICATIONS FOR USERS

Understanding the legacy of bosses complements the apparent deficiencies of style models (where the focus is on boss outputs but lacks the feedback from the reality of the subordinate) and has two benefits:

- Subordinates can use the legacy tool to classify their bosses and find strategies for how to handle difficult bosses – in itself a developmental process where subordinates address their own problems and take responsibility for it
- For bosses, subordinate evaluation of their legacies presents an alternative avenue to seek feedback and improve “self-learning” through reflection.

The legacy matrix was shown to be applicable to all bosses at all levels in virtually all organizations. The value of the framework was also observed at the informal level. After explaining the framework, most participants could place their bosses. They could also understand why the specific legacy was relevant using supportive examples.

CONCLUSIONS

Having a bad boss is not the end of the world; however, there is no generic strategy for handling all bosses. The legacy tool assists subordinates to identify their boss’ archetypes and then select the appropriate coping strategies accordingly.

For bosses, the legacy effects whether brought about by management style, behavior or action (or inaction), are illuminating. Respondents, who were asked to judge their own legacies, became aware of deficiencies in their management armor. Already respondent bosses became aware of their legacies and reflected on what it meant for them. Such feedback is critical for self-awareness in line with the suggestions by George (2010) about “mindful” leaders.

Because most bosses are also subordinates of other managers, they are responsible for the creation of legacies and experience legacies created by their superiors. For this reason, understanding the legacy framework is valuable to subordinates and managers. Not only does the proposed legacy tool complement style and behavior tools used in practice, it also extends the use thereof to include self-development as a priority.

CASE EXAMPLE – VICTIM OF DOUBLE JEOPARDY

Laura is a highly qualified investment-portfolio manager for an investment company. She reports directly to the branch manager/shareholder but also partly to his personal assistant who acts as the administrative manager in an office with less than 20 staff. She is the only one in the office who holds an honors degree in statistics as well as a CFA qualification. Most other staff came through the ranks. She has been in the current position for over eight years and handles a large portfolio of individual investors. Most days one would find her in the office more than an hour before any of her superiors.

She could identify her boss as a hammer and the administrative manager as a flat battery (closer to a dead battery) based on the legacies they leave behind. The instrument confirmed both classifications. She arrived at both classifications with relative ease. These two managers worked closely together and, while she is a peer of the flat battery in the management structure, they acted as if the flat battery was a direct boss of Laura too.

It was relatively easy for her to select options for the hammer. Based on the proposed strategies, she ensured that her preparation was always one step ahead by her anticipating issues. She recorded all transactions and kept lengthy records which she privately held and could produce on call. The hammer's Achilles heel was knowledge about the markets and trends and he is very sensitive about holding no formal qualification. He was a good salesman though. She supported him with high quality and up-to-date portfolio plans when he visited clients. All he had to do was present the plan to clients as if they were his creations. In this way, Laura made the hammer look good (ego stroke) and while the legacy was still tense, it was much more tolerable than before.

However, dealing with the flat battery was more difficult. Helping the flat battery see the bigger picture and understand the issues was very thorny as it was perceived as "belittling." The flat battery had an open door to the hammer and would quickly "report" Laura's "attitude" to him. There was also insufficient openness in the firm to address the issues especially as these were associated with personal issues and potential jealousy because clients did not want to work with the flat battery and bypassed the systems to obtain direct access to Laura. The flat battery experienced Laura's solving of client problems as negative and the cycle restarted. One strategy that worked for her was to give factually correct feedback to the hammer that satisfied him and the rest of the team during management meetings. As the flat battery would be exposed, he reluctantly kept silent and went along with this practice. Unfortunately the dark legacy remained and Laura had reached a point where she was considering other options.

CASE EXAMPLE – VICTIM OF THE LESS COMPETENT

Roberta has a PhD and lectures at a university where she has held a permanent position for 16 years. She has seen many bosses come and go. She reports directly to the head of the department, with 24 colleagues in a flat structure. Recently a new department head was appointed and immediately the tension levels in the department rose significantly.

Initially Roberta could identify her boss as a fire-lighter who tried to motivate staff but was actually achieving the opposite as she appeared mostly clueless about the subject field and operations. Ignorance was a word often used. Soon after the appointment and especially with the first round of performance evaluations the general moods and actions changed negatively. The instrument confirmed the classification but suggested that the boss later became a flat battery as soon as staff realized that she could not clarify expectations and generally drove energy down. Roberta arrived at both classifications with relative ease.

It was less easy for her to select options for the flat battery stage. Based on the proposed strategies, she ensured that she never shared her opposing views with colleagues openly. The hindrances of the fire-lighter was her poor self-image and being appointed to a position above competency. So, Roy shared good stories which in the longer term did not really help as the flat battery legacy appeared more descriptive of the legacy. Due to personal problems, the flat battery were often away for weeks at a time. Roy helped keep the boat afloat during such times and while it was still tense, it was much more tolerable than before.

This case contains a boss with personal hindrances that are obvious. Such hindrances make it more difficult to strategize as there was a lack of openness in the department with visible personal issues and potential jealousy. The dark legacy remained but fortunately the flat battery was denied a second term.

THE RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The formal research on which this article is based was initiated to respond to the question of whether the legacy of a boss can be measured. Therefore, the research methodology chosen aimed at addressing this question in terms of the validity and reliability of the measurement.

The research process

The legacy framework was conceptualized based on practical experience, insights accrued during consulting and management training courses presented and studying the literature. Firstly, I presented the framework to attendees (over 600 junior managers in the financial industry spread over ten different groups, institutions and geographical areas) to seek content and face validity for the proposed legacy construct with its concepts (expectancy and energy effects). Once the legacy framework had been presented to participants, they were asked if they had experienced or could identify a current or previous disposition of such nature. The response was affirmative. After explaining the archetypes, they were then also asked to judge their direct boss. They could do this with relative ease. Counts by show of hands were made about the numbers associated with each category of legacy.

Thereafter, a questionnaire with ten items each (rated on a 5-point Likert scale) for expectancy and energy respectively was piloted to measure the construct “effects.” Statements included elements like “I was treated well” and “my opinion was never considered.” Using convenience sampling, a new set of respondents (individuals who reported to a boss within the work environment) was invited by data collectors approaching them with a paper questionnaire to complete the questionnaire (358 responses). After factor analysis and data cleaning, the final questionnaire was sent to managers as a web link via email with a request to participate anonymously (121 responses). Expectation effect was identified with nine variables (questionnaire items) and a Cronbach alpha value of 0.9097. Energy effect was identified with eight variables and a Cronbach alpha value of 0.8975 through exploratory factor analysis. Together the two factors explained 54.09% of the cumulative variance in the factor space and were highly correlated ($r = 0.7084$). This high relation implied interrelated effects of the factor variables despite elimination of three variables that double loaded.

Thirdly, as a final judgment in the questionnaire, respondents were asked to classify their bosses as hammers, flat batteries, fire-lighters, and dynamos based on a one-line description of each archetype. This data were compared to the instrument results to seek strength of the relationship confirmation for the legacy framework.

Fourthly, anecdotal evidence was collected through informal discussions to explore elements of the different archetypes for deeper understanding.

Finally, the framework and findings were presented to a focus group of management academics for critique searching for rigor and elimination of bias, special conditions, and superficiality.

The key findings

The legacy framework as explained found validation from responding managers as it appeared easy to understand and use. They could apply it immediately to their own bosses. I was of the opinion that the counting of hands in support of different archetypes was more accurate than the questionnaire responses due to the latter's "anonymous" nature.

The frequency of dynamos (successful bosses) ranged from between 25 and 40% depending on the data collection method used. Finding fewer than 40% dynamos confirm that good management remains elusive in most organizations.

Hammers (16–35%) and fire-lighters (<10%) represented mediocre bosses, while flat batteries (35–40%) represented poor bosses in the sample.

The research on which this article reports, wanted to focus on solutions. The legacy framework is a useful tool to apply on the way towards solutions to overcome the legacies associated with poor and mediocre management. Except for the calm legacy, the tense, dark and false legacies have adverse effects on people and therefore organizations.

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