

# Survey shows danger of 'Jekyll and Hyde' boss

BY MATT RICHARDS

When Jo's company recently bid for a new contract – unsuccessfully – her boss did not take it well.

"He went into tunnel vision: 'I want it, they are wrong, they can't use someone else, they don't understand'," she said. "He takes negatives, complications and criticisms extremely personally."

It is not that Jo's Exeter-based office is always a tough place to work. Sometimes it can be the complete opposite – but it depends on what mood her boss is in.

"If he's in a good mood, it lifts myself and the team, and the wider atmosphere. You can see people be more productive, up-beat, happier to be there and be working."

Jo\* said these mood changes affect the relationships he has with her and her colleagues.

"On a positive day he's happy to support, input etc. On a bad day, suddenly he's having to do everyone's jobs. His mood affects his perspectives."

The problem is that, even with the positive experiences, not knowing which way her boss is going to go can be "an unpredictable minefield".

Jo's reaction is not out of the ordinary. New research shows that bosses with mood swings actually cause their teams



more stress than those who are simply scary or negative all of the time.

According to Dr Allan Lee of the University of Exeter, who led the research: "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."

So-called "Jekyll and Hyde" bosses are unpredictable, which means staff members have to adopt different roles at different times, which can increase stress and anxiety.

"If your boss is both pleasant and unpleasant to be around it is hard to know what they think about you... this

makes it hard to trust them," said Dr Lee.

The negative emotions that come from an ambivalent relationship between bosses and staff members can have a knock-on effect on performance. "Leaders who are creating ambivalent relationships are shooting themselves

in the foot as being unpredictable leads to tension and anxiety and poorer performance," said Dr Lee. "However, I also doubt leaders are aware they are doing this."

The research asked employees in both the UK and India about the relationship they had with their manager, and

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then looked at how this compared to performance.

The study did also find that strong relationships with your co-workers can help to mitigate some of the effects of an ambivalent and changeable relationship with your boss.

"After interacting with a difficult boss you might go and talk to a co-worker and express your emotions which may help make you feel less tense," said Dr Lee. "It is likely that other colleagues will have sim-

**'It is hard to know what they think about you'**

Dr Allan Lee

ilar experiences with the same boss and thus can provide support."

In Jo's office, they handle their boss-related stress through this kind of mutual support. "We all get on," she said, "and I think we actually talk about it to unite and clear some of his emotions from the air."

■ Jo's name has been changed for the purposes of this report.

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