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Undeserving bosses match inept employees



Washington, Nov 01:A collaborative study by researchers at the University of Granada and the University of Lovaina has revealed that people who think they don't deserve their job try to surround themselves with less competent employees in order to justify their privileged position.

Rosa Rodriguez Bailin and Miguel Moya Morales, both professors of Social Psychology and Methodology of Behaviour Sciences Department Social Psychology and Methodology of Behaviour Sciences Department (University of Granada) and also by Vincent Yzerbyt (University of Lovaina, in Belgium) managed the research.

And the research has shown that qualified people prefer to work with competent and sociable partners in jobs that imply responsibility. However, people who think they are unable to hold a specific job try to work with less competent and sociable partners.

The research team point out that "power could be defined as the influence that a person has over other people and over themselves". They have also warned that people who have power do not always exercise it properly.

The research included 73 volunteer students from the Faculty of Psychology, the Faculty of Sciences of Education and the University School of Social Work, all three at the University of Granada.

The great majority of these students (85.7 percent) were women between 18 and 25 years old.

Those involved in the research had the opportunity to exercise power. They were told that they would be representatives at a conference of students, and that they could choose a partner to attend the event and work under their direct supervision.

They were divided arbitrarily; half of them were told they deserved the granted power (legitimate) while the others were told they did not (illegitimate). All of them could choose between a very competent and sociable subordinate and a person with noticeably less competence and sociability.

Regardless of whom they chose ("legitimate" or "illegitimate" boss), the students clearly distinguished the privileged position of one candidate from the other.

It was found that the illegitimate bosses preferred the less competent and sociable candidates in a higher proportion than did the legitimate bosses. In addition to this they requested more information about the candidate positively described than about the candidate described more negatively.


The research showed that "illegitimate bosses" have similar opinions about their subordinates qualities and aptitudes, in the same manner that the students that took part in this study formed their own during the experience.

However, the authors said that "their tendency to work among less competent candidates could be based on the fact that they try to prevent the subordinates from becoming competition for them".

The research team therefore concluded that people who need to justify their position tend to work among less qualified persons.

The research has been published by the scientific magazine Psicothe.

Bureau Report

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