Harvard Business Review

OnPoint

ARTICLE

Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks

by Tiziana Casciaro and Miguel Sousa Lobo

Included with this full-text *Harvard Business Review* article:

Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks

The Idea in Brief

When people need help completing complex projects, they select the colleagues best able to do the job—not just those they like. Right? Wrong. Faced with a choice between a "competent jerk" and a "lovable fool" as a work partner, people usually opt for likeability over ability.

This has big implications for your organization. Good things happen when people who like each other collaborate—projects flow quickly; people gladly help each other. But there's a cost: people who like each other typically share similar values and ways of thinking—making it difficult to generate fresh ideas. Moreover, most individuals avoid skilled but unpleasant colleagues—leaving competent jerks' expertise untapped.

How to leverage likeable people's attractiveness *and* competent jerks' knowledge? Apply this three-pronged strategy:

- **Manufacture liking in critical relationships.** For example, create cross-departmental project teams to encourage a shared identity based on the project and to deemphasize functional alliances.

- **Leverage the likeable.** People listen to likeable colleagues, so have widely liked individuals serve as evangelists for important change initiatives.

- **Reform the jerks.** Use coaching, incentives, and interpersonal skills training to burnish competent jerks' social skills.

Your payoff? Avid collaboration, copious sharing of knowledge and expertise, and exceptional performance throughout your organization.

The Idea in Practice

MANUFACTURE LIKING

To foster positive feelings among people in your organization, use these tactics:

- *Promote familiarity.* Familiarity increases liking, so mix up people's workspaces to provide opportunities for mingling. Create informal gathering areas where people can engage in water-cooler-style chats. Conduct all-office get-togethers where people from different functions and units can mix.

- *Foster bonding.* You'll need an aggressive approach if people are divided by intense animosity (for instance, they're loyal to different premerger companies) or they've long competed for resources. In such cases, put people through an intense cooperative experience, such as Outward Bound–type off-site adventures. But make these experiences novel and authentic: they quickly lose their effectiveness if people view them as trite or contrived.

LEVERAGE THE LIKEABLE

Widely liked people are frequently unexceptional performers. But their ability to cultivate positive working relationships between diverse groups can generate enormous value for your organization. To get the most from them:

- *Identify them.* Through 360-degree evaluations and social network analyses, find out who's best at deflating frustration and anger between groups, insulating people from complaints so they can work undisturbed, and connecting people from different parts of your business.

- *Protect them.* Some managers deem likeable people's "soft" contributions as less important than more quantifiable contributions. During downsizing decisions, carefully consider the value these "affective hubs" generate for your organization.

- *Position them strategically.* Assign likeable people to roles where they can link people from different parts of the organization who might resist (or never think of) collaborating. For example, have them lead a program to communicate new practices throughout your organization. Others will listen to them and embrace important change initiatives.

REFORM THE JERKS

Link rewards for skilled but unpleasant people to their willingness to improve their social skills. One investment banker who was charming to potential clients but not to coworkers was denied a promotion to a managing director position.

Also use coaching: explain how off-putting behavior is self-defeating. Provide immediate feedback when you see such behavior, rather than waiting for a year-end performance review. After coaching from his boss, the obnoxious investment banker's behavior improved—and he was promoted the following year.

New research shows that when people need help getting a job done, they'll choose a congenial colleague over a more capable one. That has big implications for every organization—and not all of them are negative.

Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks

by Tiziana Casciaro and Miguel Sousa Lobo

One of management's greatest challenges arises from a natural tension inherent in every organization. People are brought together because they have the variety of skills that, in concert, are needed to carry out a complex activity. But this variety inevitably leads to fragmentation of the organization into silos of specialized knowledge and activity.

It's an understatement to say that resolving this tension is crucial to success in today's knowledge-based and collaborative business environment. How do you ensure that relevant information gets transferred between two parts of an organization that have different cultures? How do you encourage people from units competing for scarce corporate resources to work together? How do you see to it that the value of a cross-functional team is more, not less, than the sum of its parts?

The answers to such questions lie not in an examination of organization charts but largely in an understanding of informal social networks and how they emerge. Certainly, organizations are designed to ensure that peo-

ple interact in ways necessary to get their jobs done. But all kinds of work-related encounters and relationships exist that only partly reflect these purposefully designed structures. Even in the context of formal structures like cross-functional teams, informal relationships play a major role.

In this article, we offer somewhat surprising insights into how informal networks take shape in companies—that is, how people choose those they work with. We then discuss some of the benefits and drawbacks of this phenomenon and offer ways for managers to mitigate its negative effects and leverage the positive ones.

How We Choose Work Partners

When given the choice of whom to work with, people will pick one person over another for any number of reasons: the prestige of being associated with a star performer, for example, or the hope that spending time with a strategically placed superior will further their careers. But in most cases, people choose their work

partners according to two criteria. One is competence at the job (Does Joe know what he's doing?). The other is likability (Is Joe enjoyable to work with?). Obviously, both things matter. Less obvious is how much they matter—and exactly *how* they matter.

To gain some insight into these questions, we studied four organizations selected to reflect a wide range of attributes—for-profit and nonprofit, large and small, North American and European. We asked people to indicate how often they had work-related interactions with every other person in the organization. We then asked them to rate all the other people in the company in terms of how much they personally liked each one and how well each did his or her job. (For a more-detailed description of the studies, see the sidebar "Who Is Good? Who Is Liked?")

These two criteria—competence and likability—combine to produce four archetypes: the competent jerk, who knows a lot but is unpleasant to deal with; the lovable fool, who doesn't know much but is a delight to have around; the lovable star, who's both smart and likable; and the incompetent jerk, who…well, that's self-explanatory. These archetypes are caricatures, of course: Organizations usually—well, much of the time—weed out both the hopelessly incompetent and the socially clueless. Still, people in an organization can be roughly classified using a simple matrix. (Indeed, with relative ease you can probably populate the four boxes depicted in the exhibit "Whom Would You Choose?" with the names of people in your own company.)

Our research showed (not surprisingly) that, no matter what kind of organization we studied, everybody wanted to work with the lovable star, and nobody wanted to work with the incompetent jerk. Things got a lot more interesting, though, when people faced the choice between competent jerks and lovable fools.

Ask managers about this choice—and we've asked many of them, both as part of our research and in executive education programs we teach—and you'll often hear them say that when it comes to getting a job done, *of course* competence trumps likability. "I can defuse my antipathy toward the jerk if he's competent, but I can't train someone who's incompetent," says the CIO at a large engineering company. Or, in the words of a knowledge management executive in the IT department of a professional services firm: "I really care about the skills and expertise you bring to the table. If you're a nice person on top of that, that's simply a bonus."

But despite what such people might say about their preferences, the reverse turned out to be true in practice in the organizations we analyzed. Personal feelings played a more important role in forming work relationships—not friendships at work but job-oriented relationships—than is commonly acknowledged. They were even more important than evaluations of competence. In fact, feelings worked as a gating factor: We found that if someone is strongly disliked, it's almost irrelevant whether or not she is competent; people won't want to work with her anyway. By contrast, if someone is liked, his colleagues will seek out every little bit of competence he has to offer. And this tendency didn't exist only in extreme cases; it was true across the board. Generally speaking, a little extra likability goes a longer way than a little extra competence in making someone desirable to work with.

Of course, competence is more important than likability in some people's choice of work partners. But why do so many others *claim* that to be the case? "Choosing the lovable fool over the competent jerk looks unprofessional," suggests a marketing manager at a personal products company. "So people don't like to admit it—maybe not even to themselves."

Yet *is* such a choice unprofessional? Is it a mistake to steer clear of the competent jerk when we have a job to do? Sometimes, yes. We may forgo the opportunity to tap a competent jerk's knowledge and skills because we don't want to deal with his patronizing, brusque, or otherwise unpleasant attitude—which is arguably a modest price to pay for the valuable assistance he can provide. We may even shun the jerk simply to deny him the satisfaction of lording his knowledge over us.

But there are justifiable reasons to avoid the jerk. Sometimes it can be difficult to pry the needed information from him simply because he is a jerk. And knowledge often requires explanation to be useful—you might, for instance, want to brainstorm with someone or ask follow-up questions—and this kind of interaction may be difficult with a competent jerk. Furthermore, in order to learn, you often have to reveal your vulnerabilities, which also may be difficult with the competent jerk—es-

Tiziana Casciaro (tcasciaro@hbs.edu) is an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Harvard Business School in Boston. **Miguel Sousa Lobo** (mlobo@duke.edu) is an assistant professor of decision sciences at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business in Durham, North Carolina.

pecially if you are afraid of how this might affect your reputation in his eyes or in the eyes of others to whom he may reveal your limitations. By contrast, the lovable fool may be more likely to freely share whatever (albeit modest) information or skills he has and, without any intention of gaining an advantage, help others put them to use.

The Likability Bias: Pros and Cons

Some people are liked pretty much universally. In other cases, likability is relative: One person's friend may be another one's jerk. This is because our positive feelings can result from people's inherent attributes or from the situations we find ourselves in with them. This distinction is important to keep in mind as we try to manage this tendency of people to favor likability over competence in their choice of work partners.

Social psychologists have long known that we like people who are *similar* to us; people we are *familiar* with; people who have *reciprocal* positive feelings about us; and people who are inherently *attractive,* either in their appearance or their personality—that is, they are considerate, cheerful, generous, and so on. Each of these sources of personal likability can contribute, for better or worse, to the formation of an informal network.

For Better. That we like people who are similar to us—for example, in their background, their beliefs, their interests, their personal style—is one of the most solidly documented findings in the social sciences. After all, these people make us feel good because they reaffirm the validity of our own characteristics and attitudes. But there's a business, as well as a psychological, benefit when similar people choose to work together: Their similar values, ways of thinking, and communication styles help projects flow smoothly and quickly.

Benefits also result when we work with people who aren't necessarily similar, but are familiar, to us. When you launch into a task with those you already know, you don't waste a lot of time figuring out what to expect from them or explaining what you mean every time you say something. In addition, because you are usually relatively comfortable with individuals you know, you're likely to be more accepting of their differences.

We also like to work with people who seem to like us. This can produce a virtuous circle in which everyone is more open to new ideas, more willing to help, and more trusting than would typically be the case. A similarly positive environment can be created if you work with someone who has an attractive personality—someone who is empathetic, for example, or generous. You know that you'll have liberal access to her intellectual resources, however abundant or modest they may be, and are likely to reciprocate by freely sharing your own knowledge.

And a person who is physically attractive? Well, in such a case, the job you do together can be, in some indefinable way, simply a bit more enjoyable than usual.

For Worse. One of the greatest drawbacks of choosing to work with similar people is the limited range of perspectives that a homogeneous group often brings to bear on a prob-

Who Is Good? Who Is Liked?

To test our theory of work relationships, we conducted a series of social network surveys at four organizations: an entrepreneurial technology company in Silicon Valley, a unit of a multinational IT corporation, a U.S. university, and the Spanish country office of a global luxury goods corporation. We also surveyed a large group of MBA students at a U.S. business school. In all, we collected data about more than 10,000 work relationships.

We conducted multiple studies for two reasons. First, we wanted to see if the findings would remain consistent across different industries, types of organizations, and national cultures. Second, we wanted to see if the findings would remain consistent if we used different measures of likability, competence, and work-related interaction. For example, the definition of work interaction in the survey questions ranged from the very general ("We interact at work"—in which any kind of work-related interaction counted, whether formal or informal, but not other unrelated socializing) to the more specific ("When I have a question or issue about my job, I go to this person for advice or help" or "When I need to engage in creative problem

solving regarding my job, I go to that person to help me think out of the box and consider different aspects of the problem innovatively"). Although our results clearly were limited to the five groups we studied, the consistency of the findings on both counts was striking.

Our analysis of the responses took into account biases often present when someone is asked to rate other people. We corrected, for instance, for the fact that some people are generally very generous with their ratings and others are very stingy. We took into account the fact that people working in the same department or in the same part of the building would naturally interact more frequently, regardless of liking or competence. And we adjusted for the fact that evaluations of competence and likability tend to go together: If I like you, I'm more likely to rate you as competent, and, conversely, if we've worked together in the past, I'll tend to like you better. We were able to disentangle this overlap in our analysis, as well. For details of our statistical approach, see our working paper at www.people.hbs.edu/tcasciaro/AffectInstrumentalTies.pdf.

lem. A diverse collection of colleagues—whatever the tensions and misunderstandings that arise because of their differences—provides an array of perspectives that can lead to truly innovative approaches to accomplishing a task.

Even groups composed not of similar souls but merely of people who are very familiar with one another miss the chance to integrate the fresh perspective that new players bring to a project. Working with the same old colleagues can also dampen debate: People may hesitate to challenge or reject a bad idea put forward by someone they know and like.

There is also an obvious downside when we gravitate toward people because they like us or because they are pleasant to work with. These individuals, however terrific they may be, aren't necessarily the ones most suited to tackling the task at hand. The required expertise or knowledge may lie elsewhere, in someone who in fact doesn't like us that much or isn't attractive.

One other danger of people working primarily with those they like: They may simply have a good time and get nothing done. An experienced venture capitalist recalls the case of a very capable manager who hired individuals based on his personal affinity with them. "His team had a great time going out for a beer, but the quality of their work was seriously compro-mised," says the dismayed investor. "If you keep hiring only people you like, you can kill a company."

The objective, therefore, is to leverage the power of liking while avoiding the negative consequences of people's "affect-based choice"—to use the psychological term—of work partners. Keep in mind that we're not talking here about formal work relationships: You work with your boss and your direct counterparts in other divisions whether you like them or not. We're talking only about people's choices of informal, though work-related, interactions. Even so, that doesn't preclude executives from doing some things that will positively affect those interactions and the often task-crucial informal networks that grow out of them.

We offer three basic approaches. First, where possible, manufacture liking in critical relationships. Second, carefully position universally likable people so they can bridge organizational divides. Third, to put it bluntly, work on the jerks. The first tactic acknowledges that whether you like someone or not may depend on the situation. The second and third tactics acknowledge that being a jerk or being likable can be an intrinsic characteristic of a person, almost regardless of the situation.

Manufacture Liking

Given the central role that our feelings about people play in our work relationships, is there anything a manager can do to foster positive feelings toward one another? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is yes.
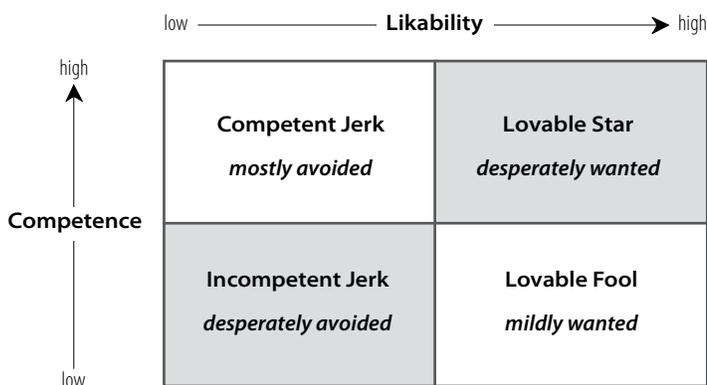
Promote familiarity. In a well-known psychological experiment, a person shown a photograph of himself and a reversed image of the same picture consistently preferred the reversed photograph—simply because it was the image he was used to seeing in the mirror! And just as people like the images they're used to seeing, so they tend to like other people they're used to seeing around—they, too, are known and predictable. Familiarity is, in turn, one of the reasons why physical proximity strongly affects the degree to which people like each other: Research has shown that regular exposure to someone generally increases the comfort and pleasure of interaction.

The power of familiarity to generate positive interpersonal feelings argues for some careful thinking about the design of office space. This could involve anything from mix-

Whom Would You Choose?

If you were faced with the need to accomplish a task at work, what sort of person would you pick to help you—someone able to get the job done or someone enjoyable to be around? Studies done in four very different organizations consistently showed that most people would choose a "lovable fool" (someone who, to varying degrees, is more likable than competent) over a "competent jerk."

	low ———— Likability ————→ high	
high	**Competent Jerk** *mostly avoided*	**Lovable Star** *desperately wanted*
Competence		
	Incompetent Jerk *desperately avoided*	**Lovable Fool** *mildly wanted*
low		

ing up people's work spaces ("I generally don't care for people in Finance, but I've actually grown to like Sarah since she moved into the next office") to creating areas in an office that foster informal, watercooler-style chats.

You can also design processes that give people an opportunity simply to become acquainted and thus make them more comfortable with each other. The "peer assist," a knowledge management process in which team members aim to capture the expertise of other colleagues before starting a project, generally involves some initial interaction—say, a cocktail party—the evening before work begins and any work-specific goals are addressed. This allows people to get to know one another a bit, independently from the work at hand, while relationships are still emotionally neutral and haven't yet been subjected to any task-related interference, such as the potentially competing interests of the assisting and assisted parties. Less formally, all-office get-togethers on Friday afternoons can be more than culture- and morale-building exercises. They offer an opportunity for people from different functions and units to become familiar with one another, thus making it easier for them to share knowledge in the future.

Redefine similarity. Similarities can be created where they might not naturally arise. It's no secret, for example, that marketers and researchers tend to be wary of one another. Their personalities, as well as their departmental allegiances, are generally very different. But if you create a product management team that includes both marketers and researchers, there is a chance their similar identities as "Product X people" may begin to feel stronger than their dissimilar identities as "marketing people" and "R&D people." Superimposition of the shared identity, by overriding natural differences, may lead to increased cross-functional cooperation, both formal and informal.

Foster bonding. Often, however, cooperation fails to emerge despite a redefinition of similarities. Where there exists powerful forces of distrust or animosity, either because of strong dissimilarities (for instance, loyalty to different premerger companies) or because of a troubled history (years of competition between functional areas over budget allocations, for example), you won't be able to get people to like each other simply by inviting

If someone is liked, his colleagues will seek out every little bit of competence he has to offer.

them to some TGIF gatherings or by sticking them on a cross-functional team. Promoting positive feelings in those circumstances requires stronger methods.

One involves putting people through an intense cooperative experience. In a famous experiment conducted more than 40 years ago by social psychologist Muzafer Sherif, groups of 11- and 12-year-old boys were brought together in a camp setting. Initially, they were randomly assigned to two groups. These were kept separate to foster ties within each group, and competitive activities were designed to produce animosity between the two groups. Then, to see if exposure to one another in a fun environment could reduce the hostility that had been generated, the competitive activities were suspended, and the boys got together for such benign activities as watching movies. In fact, though, hostility increased, with fights erupting at every turn. Sherif figured that something else was needed: a situation that would force the boys to cooperate with one another. So he created several. For instance, a truck taking the two groups on a camping trip broke down, and all of the boys had to push it up a steep hill to get it going again. Over time, episodes like this decreased hostility and, by the end of the camp experience, the number of boys who said that they had a best friend in the other group quadrupled.

The Outward Bound–style off-site experiences used by many companies are based on this venerable psychological principle. Such tactics can be problematic, however, because novelty and authenticity are critical to their success. The moment they become trite or feel manufactured, they lose their effectiveness. The challenge for managers, therefore, is to constantly find new ways to take advantage of this old concept.

Leverage the Likable

What should managers do to make effective use of people—fools or otherwise—who are likable almost regardless of the situation? Perhaps the best way to capitalize on their personal qualities is to have them play the role of "affective hubs"—people who, because they are liked by a disproportionate number of people, can bridge gaps between diverse groups that might not otherwise interact.

We don't necessarily like such people because they are similar or familiar to us. More likely, we are drawn to their attractive personality traits, sophisticated social skills, and old-

fashioned "chemistry"—a chemistry that may arise from our sense that these people genuinely like us. Such individuals aren't necessarily the best performers (although they can be—that's the lovable star). More commonly, because of the time they devote to interacting with people, they may actually lag slightly behind their peers in terms of measurable performance. But their ability to establish positive working relationships between groups that would otherwise tend to be disconnected can be crucial to an organization's success. Managers can do several things to get the most out of such people.

Identify them. Attentive managers know if they have someone who could play—or is already playing—the role of an affective hub. But most managers aren't closely enough attuned to the emotional dimension of work to recognize such an individual. Take the case of an employee in one company's IT department. She was the person who dealt with breakdowns in the technical infrastructure of the company. Although less technically proficient than many of her colleagues, she acted, in the words of one, "as a coral reef barrier when the user community in the company had problems. Because she was liked by everyone, she could deflate users' frustration and anger, insulating us geeks from complaints and allowing us to solve the problem." After she was laid off in a cost-cutting move, her job was divided among more technically competent people. The result? "It was a disaster," according to her former colleague.

Granted, it's often difficult for a manager several steps up in the firm to identify and assess the value of such a person. One aid is the increasingly common 360-degree evaluation, which typically includes questions about how pleasant someone is to deal with. A more systematic approach is to perform a social network analysis with surveys whose questions are specifically designed to collect information on relationships between workers and on the structure of the network formed by those relationships.

Protect them. Even when affective hubs are identified and their value to the company is acknowledged, such soft contributions may be deemed less important than more quantifiable ones. When told about the concept of affective hubs, members of a management team at a large technology company exclaimed al-

Sometimes it can be difficult to pry the needed information from the jerk simply because he is a jerk.

most in unison: "Damn, we just fired him!" They went on to describe someone who was beloved within and outside the organization, a person other people would turn to when they wanted to make contact with someone in another part of the business or at an alliance partner. "It's not just that he knew everybody," according to one member of the team. "It's that everybody really liked him, and they were happy to do him a favor." Even though people were aware of his critical informal role, it wasn't enough to save him from being one of the first to go in a round of downsizing.

Position them strategically. Clearly, you don't want to waste the talents of an affective hub by letting the person languish in a job that is only loosely connected with other functions. Such individuals should be put in a position to link people from different parts of the organization who might otherwise resist—or never think of—collaborating with one another. Affective hubs also are useful in positions central to the diffusion of new ideas. Think, for example, of a program designed to communicate new practices or principles throughout an organization. How do you select participants? Do you chose managers? Star performers? Or do you chose the people who, because others will listen to them, are going to be good evangelists for the new ideas?

Work on the Jerk

Competent jerks represent a missed opportunity for the organization because so much of their expertise goes untapped. Dealing with jerks is so unpleasant that colleagues simply can't be bothered with them. What can you do with such people?

Reassess their contribution. The individual performance of the competent jerk is great. But how does he contribute to the performance of the organization as a whole? Does he help the people who work with him or actually hinder them? Take the case of an investment bank that hired an extraordinary rainmaker in a difficult and highly profitable market the bank wanted to enter.[1] Unfortunately, the qualities that made the new hire a phenomenal producer in this rough-and-tumble market also alienated lots of his colleagues. Over time, it became clear that the newcomer's manner was violating the culture of respect and polite behavior that helped de-

fine the company. What, then, to do about it?

Reward good behavior; punish bad behavior. If the contributions of the competent jerk are significant, it's probably worth trying to turn him into a tolerated, even if not actively liked, star performer. Changing the behavior of adults is never a straightforward proposition, of course, but some things can be done. Jerks who can be charming when they wish—but choose to do so only when convenient—may respond to incentives. The rainmaker was one of those. He could be very charming to potential clients but was not to his coworkers. So when it came time for him to be considered for a managing director position, the bank denied him the promotion.

Socialize and coach. Although the rainmaker could have quit, taking his revenue-generating skills with him, he did not. His boss adopted an aggressive coaching stance, scolding for bad behavior immediately after the fact, rather than waiting for a year-end performance review. The boss was effective in explaining in detail how the behavior was self-defeating—information that a self-interested and ambitious individual is likely to take to heart. After coaching from his boss, the rainmaker's behavior improved, and he was promoted the following year. (Sadly, there are people who are disliked because they are socially incompetent and probably never will be truly charming. For them, interpersonal-skills training, rather than incentive-based coaching, may be preferable.)

Reposition. If likable people can improve an organization when they operate in highly interdependent roles, competent jerks will probably do best when they work independently. There is often a place for people who don't need to be liked so long as they get their jobs done—even if you must sacrifice widespread access to their expertise.

• • •

Obviously, simply being liked doesn't mean a person is valuable to an organization. We all know the fellow that people adore whose performance is continually disappointing—to the point that his colleagues end up disliking him because he repeatedly lets them down. We all know the woman who builds relationship after relationship that ultimately go nowhere, at least as far as the organization is concerned.

Still, it's easy to be mistakenly dazzled by a high performer, even if his expertise is never tapped or shared because people don't want to work with him. And too many managers fail to appreciate the benefits that a likable person can offer an organization, particularly if those benefits come at the expense of some measure of performance. Building an environment in which people like one another—whether by creating situations that make liking people easy, by fostering those likable people who can play the role of an affective hub, or by improving the behavior of competent jerks—can help all employees work more happily and productively and encourage the formation of strong and smoothly functioning social networks.

---

1. "Rob Parson at Morgan Stanley (A), (B), (C) (Abridged), (D)," HBS case nos. 9-498-054, 9-498-055, 9-498-057, and 9-498-058.

Reprint R0506E
Harvard Business Review OnPoint 1118
To order, see the next page
or call 800-988-0886 or 617-783-7500
or go to www.hbr.org

Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks

Further Reading

ARTICLES

A Practical Guide to Social Networks
by Rob Cross, Jeanne Liedtka, and
Leigh Weiss
Harvard Business Review
March 2005
Product no. R0503H

This article focuses on the use of social network analysis to identify widely likeable people in your organization and leverage their ability to connect colleagues. The key to this analysis? Use it to promote the kind of connectivity that best suits your organization. The authors describe three types of social networks: 1) The *customized response network* excels at framing ambiguous problems related to innovation (as in strategy consulting firms and new-product development groups). 2) The *modular response network* is best when you know the components of a problem but don't know the sequence of those components in the problem's solution (e.g., in a law firm). 3) The *routine response network* is best suited for organizations where problems and solutions are predictable, but collaboration is still needed (a call center, for example).

How to Motivate Your Problem People
by Nigel Nicholson
Harvard Business Review
January 2003
Product no. 2780

Nicholson sheds further light on how to reform competent jerks. Start by using informal conversations to discern what's driving socially inept behavior. An incorrigible gossip, for instance, may crave interpersonal stimulus. Ask whether you or the business situation is contributing to the problem. Are you coming across as overly critical? Has a recent restructuring lessened your tolerance for the person's behavior? Affirm the person's value to your company, describe the problem behavior as you see it, assert that things must change, and state your desire for a mutually beneficial outcome. Finally, develop a menu of possibilities

for new behaviors: a gossip, for instance, may thrive if given opportunities to interact directly with customers.

What a Star—What a Jerk
by Sarah Cliffe
Harvard Business Review
September 2001
Product no. R0108A

This fictional case study further explores the dynamics that occur when a top performer has an abrasive personality. Four experts offer advice for curbing the bad behavior so the organization can benefit from the person's talents. For example, accept that managing competent jerks is part of your job. Be consistent in rewarding improvements in social skills and giving critical feedback on problem behavior. Appeal to the person's ego ("If you could learn to control your temper, you'd be really great") while also setting clear limits ("Your behavior is out of bounds; I won't have it"). If he can't change his behavior but you still don't want to lose him, carve out a place for him where he can work without poisoning everyone else's work environment.

To Order

For reprints, *Harvard Business Review* OnPoint orders, and subscriptions to *Harvard Business Review:*
Call 800-988-0886 or 617-783-7500.
Go to www.hbr.org

For customized and quantity orders of reprints and *Harvard Business Review* OnPoint products:
Call Rich Gravelin at
617-783-7626,
or e-mail him at
rgravelin@hbsp.harvard.edu