



SERVIÇO PÚBLICO FEDERAL
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE JATAÍ
CENTRO DE LÍNGUAS

24/11/2022

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The Elon Musk effect: have we reached our limit with awful bosses?

Fri 18 Nov 2022 17.43 GMT

If you passed by the Twitter headquarters in San Francisco on Thursday, you would have seen a stream of insults projected on to the side of the building: “Elon Musk: mediocre manchild, pressurised privilege, petty racist, megalomaniac ...” Inside, employees had received a message asking them to sign a pledge to work “long hours at high intensity” or leave their jobs. This came on the back of large-scale layoffs and an all-company email sent at 2.30am declaring “there is a good chance Twitter will not survive the upcoming economic downturn”.

Musk’s uncouth approach to managing people is long documented. Take allegations made about his behaviour at Tesla, where he reportedly yelled at one engineer “You’re a fucking idiot! ... Get the fuck out and don’t come back!”, according to *Wired*. Other colleagues told the magazine that he would publicly humiliate and demote people, and that staff were discouraged from walking too near his desk as he was prone to “unpredictable rages”. “He was shouting that I didn’t know what I was doing, that I was an idiot, that he’s never worked with someone so incompetent,” one former employee told the magazine about her sacking.

As bizarre as it sounds this kind of workplace behaviour is not as unusual as you might think. According to a survey by my colleague Amanda Goodall, about 13% of managers in Europe fall into the category of “bad bosses”. These are people who don’t provide

feedback, are disrespectful, do not give praise and recognition, stand in the way of getting the job done, undermine individual development, stop teams from working effectively, and don't give employees the help and support they need.

Surveys have shown that many abusive bosses actually think their strong-arm tactics serve the greater good – Musk certainly believes his employees must work long hours if they want to achieve great things. Research has consistently found that this doesn't work: people working for bad or abusive bosses tend to be less productive, and have worse mental and physical health.

What seems to be changing is our willingness to put up with awful bosses – be they just bad at their jobs or actually abusive. Following Musk's ultimatum this week, hundreds of Twitter employees are reported to be quitting. Across the US labour market as a whole, the consultancy firm McKinsey has estimated that up to 40% of workers are planning to leave their jobs. The economics of the job market provide a partial explanation: often we stick with abusive supervisors when there are few other options available, and post-pandemic, the job market has been going through a healthy period. (Conversely, a recent study by a group of economists found that when labour markets get worse, "unfriendly" approaches to leadership in a firm become even more common, as bosses are less worried about staff retention.)

Of course, many people do stick around despite a bad boss – and the reasons why they might stay don't offer much hope for Musk and the future of Twitter.

Some people working under an abusive supervisor fall prey to what psychologists call "learned helplessness". When people face difficult circumstances, they initially struggle to escape or fight back, but over time they start to treat the abuse as normal. They feel increasingly unable to change anything and become more and more passive. This means they miss opportunities to change, even when it is possible.

Another reason people don't leave bad bosses is they start to identify with them. This is a kind of workplace Stockholm syndrome whereby people begin looking up to their abusive bosses and even model themselves on them.

The final reason why some people working for abusive bosses stay is because they themselves show signs of psychopathy. One study concludes that an advantage that the average organisational psychopath has is that they "have access to greater psychological resources than their peers under abusive supervision".

Musk may think that despite a massive outflow of people, many of his best employees are likely to stick around. Judging from the research on the topic, it is likely that many of the people who have not been fired will leave. Those who do stay are likely to be less

productive, less healthy, more passive, more adoring of Musk and more likely to be a bit psychopathic themselves. The days of the bad boss may be numbered.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/18/elon-musk-twitter-billionaire-awful-boss>

Questão 1. Que alegações foram feitas acerca do comportamento de Elon Musk no ambiente de trabalho? (2.5 pontos)

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Questão 2. Quais atitudes são apontadas como características daquilo que Amanda Goodall denomina “maus chefes”? (2.5 pontos)

These are people who don’t provide feedback, are disrespectful, do not give praise and recognition, stand in the way of getting the job done, undermine individual development, stop teams from working effectively, and don’t give employees the help and support they need.

Questão 3. Aponte duas razões pelas quais muitas pessoas permanecem em seus empregos apesar de terem maus chefes. (2.5 pontos).

[Se a/o candidato apontar dois dos três motivos abaixo listados no texto, a resposta estará correta. Se apenas uma razão for apontada, a pontuação será de 50%]

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Questão 4. Proponha uma tradução para o português do trecho **destacado em negrito**. (2.5 pontos).

Expectativa de tradução:

O que parece estar mudando é nossa disposição para aturar péssimos chefes – sejam eles simplesmente ruins no que eles fazem ou de fato abusivos. Seguindo o ultimato de Musk nesta semana, relata-se que centenas de empregados do Twitter deixaram o emprego. No mercado de trabalho dos Estados Unidos como um todo, a empresa de consultoria McKinsey estimou que até 40% dos trabalhadores estão planejando sair de seus empregos. A economia do mercado de trabalho fornece uma explicação parcial: muitas vezes, nós continuamos com supervisores abusivos quando há poucas outras opções disponíveis, e o mercado de trabalho, pós-pandêmico, tem passado por um período saudável.