

Seeking ways out of my black mood as CEO is probed

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I am considering seeing a psychiatrist because I think I am clinically depressed for I believe that I have all the symptoms. I am enveloped in a mood of blackness and depression, my soul is troubled — so much so that my work is getting affected.

My problems started late last month with my 30th birthday. I took a critical look at my life and concluded that it amounted to very little. I took an inventory and realised that I fall short of expectation.

Following my fiasco with Janet, I have no love life and I no longer stood a chance at being a father — that makes me stressed. I realised that I do not have many friends since no one sent me a birthday card or even invited me for a birthday party.

On the work front, I have been suffering all manner of mental torture and humiliation. Turns out that the CEO did not do a good enough job of explaining the “huge purchase” from our department.

Talk about breaking promises. So it has been left to me to explain how the

OFFICE DANDY

MAN - ABOUT - TOWN

huge hole in my departmental account came to be. Every morning, these two guys invade my office and demand that I produce every shred and morsel of paper that has been in my keeping.

When this started, I decided to go and have a chat with my CEO and tell him about my concerns. Gone was the happy chatty man who had invited me to his house.

In his place was this man who was claiming that there was a plot within certain circles to “finish” him. He told me that some guys within the organisation had been spreading untruths about his integrity and his performance.

In his words, “it is all lies, I am a spotless as snow.” I have read a few articles on body language and I can tell you that everything about his behaviour screamed guilty as sin. I even noticed and pointed out he had lost weight.

He said that he was on the Atkins diet hence the weight loss. I walked out

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of the office knowing that I was on my own and the CEO was more worried about taking care of his back.

So here I am in my depressed state waiting for auditors to make their usual entrance when Peninah, the tea girl, shows up. Any other day I would seem to be unhappy to see her, but today I welcome her buxom frame.

Financial misdemeanours

She asks me how I am doing and I tell her that I am down over the investigations. She sniggers and without invitation sits on a chair.

With her hand across her ample chest, she tells me that it is not me that they are out to investigate, rather it is the CEO. She says that she recently was assigned the task of serving tea

during a board meeting since the caterer had gone missing. She says, “of course they asked me since they think I do not know English.”

This surely had my attention. She reported that the meeting got very heated since some board members were questioning the CEO regarding financial misdemeanours within the company. She also reported hearing one board member say that the CEO would not receive his annual bonus.

Finally, she told me that the man was depressed because he could no longer pay his loans, his children's school fees and even his mortgage. Then she proceeded to give me more anecdotes about the meeting.

She told me about a board member who fell asleep and even dozed during

presentations, another who kept asking for more *mandazis* and *samosas*. This was really inside track information.

I must say that the information made my heart soar for a while. It meant that it is the CEO and not me who is being set up to take a fall. But then where does that leave me?

Could I be the sacrificial lamb in all of these? I have therefore decided that I will be more friendly and helpful to the investigators. I will submit every document with a smile, and offer more than they ask for. More importantly, I will submit that infamous email where the CEO gave his approval for the expenditure.

And in the meantime, I will have a drink and step up on my job search. My days here are numbered.

How decision making affects the outcome



RICKY'S MYTHS

RICHARD GITONGA



Several months ago, a couple of colleagues were involved in a stormy management meeting in which sensitive decisions needed to be made regarding the direction on some key business agenda items. The meeting was chaired by the CEO whose democratic management style allowed all the managers in the meeting room to take part in the decision making process.

The decision that needed to be made was a complex one as it entailed a significant level of risk. Unfortunately, to the chagrin of everyone in the room, the CEO opted to defer the debate to the next management meeting scheduled

a week later. The next management meeting was chaired by the CEO's deputy, whose style of management was heavily skewed towards an autocratic style. Due to this different approach to management, the decision that needed to be made was arrived at relatively quickly, albeit at the discomfort of those in the meeting room.

The main issue was that the communication involved from his authoritarian style was mainly downward and not on a “two way street”. The outcome of this scenario was that despite the expeditiousness of the decision, it left the egos and self-assurances of other managers a little deflated. Expectedly,

the outcome of these two meetings due to the differences in management style, and the resultant decision making process, where at best, mediocre. The initiative was implemented hurriedly and resulted in significant operational flaws that had serious implications on expected strategic outcomes. Unfortunately, no one was willing to take full responsibility of the results and the whole management team was left in limbo on what to do next.

Researchers have studied decision making for decades, thinking about how actions taken in the present situation will lead to a particular result. There are two basic approaches to management decision making. The first approach is rational and prescriptive, explaining how decisions ideally should be made.

Through decision tree analysis, logical methods have been constructed that represent relationships among key features of the decision making situation. Such models strive to determine the optimal choice among all available options. When managers apply a formal decision making process, they are using a normative, rules-

based approach. These approaches are normally used in risky situations characterised by some degree of uncertainty. The second approach involves descriptive accounts of how people actually go about making judgments and choices. While other executives may tell you that they are logical and objective when making decisions, research demonstrates that in fact most decision makers respond to objective as well as subjective criteria.

Cognitive tendencies

Because individuals often rely on subjective rather than objective methods, it is important to realise when subjective methods are distorting the perception of the decision that needs to be made. The cognitive tendencies individuals demonstrate when they have to make choices in conditions of uncertainty and incomplete information are called heuristics. The participants in the management meeting my colleagues attended included a mix of expatriates and locals.

From the onset of the discussion, there was a significant difference in how the problem was perceived by the various parties due to differences in business

and cultural backgrounds. While the local colleagues viewed the decision making process as paternalistic in nature, the expats viewed it as democratic. The outcome of this confusion was somewhat of a “laissez-faire” situation that simply degenerated in poor management practice and results below expectations.

Reflecting on the greater context of the business management world, there are CEOs and other business leaders who position themselves as virtuosos, when in actual fact they are simply novices who are surprised at themselves for holding C-Suite corner offices. Virtuosos have a high degree of competence, advance standards and have an easy and creative way of doing things. Novices, on the other hand, have a strong inclination towards rule based behaviour and are strongly limited and inflexible.

The managers who facilitated this meeting can probably learn something from the following words of conventional wisdom. A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself; he is a wave of the sea, or a feather in the air which every breeze blows about as it listeth.