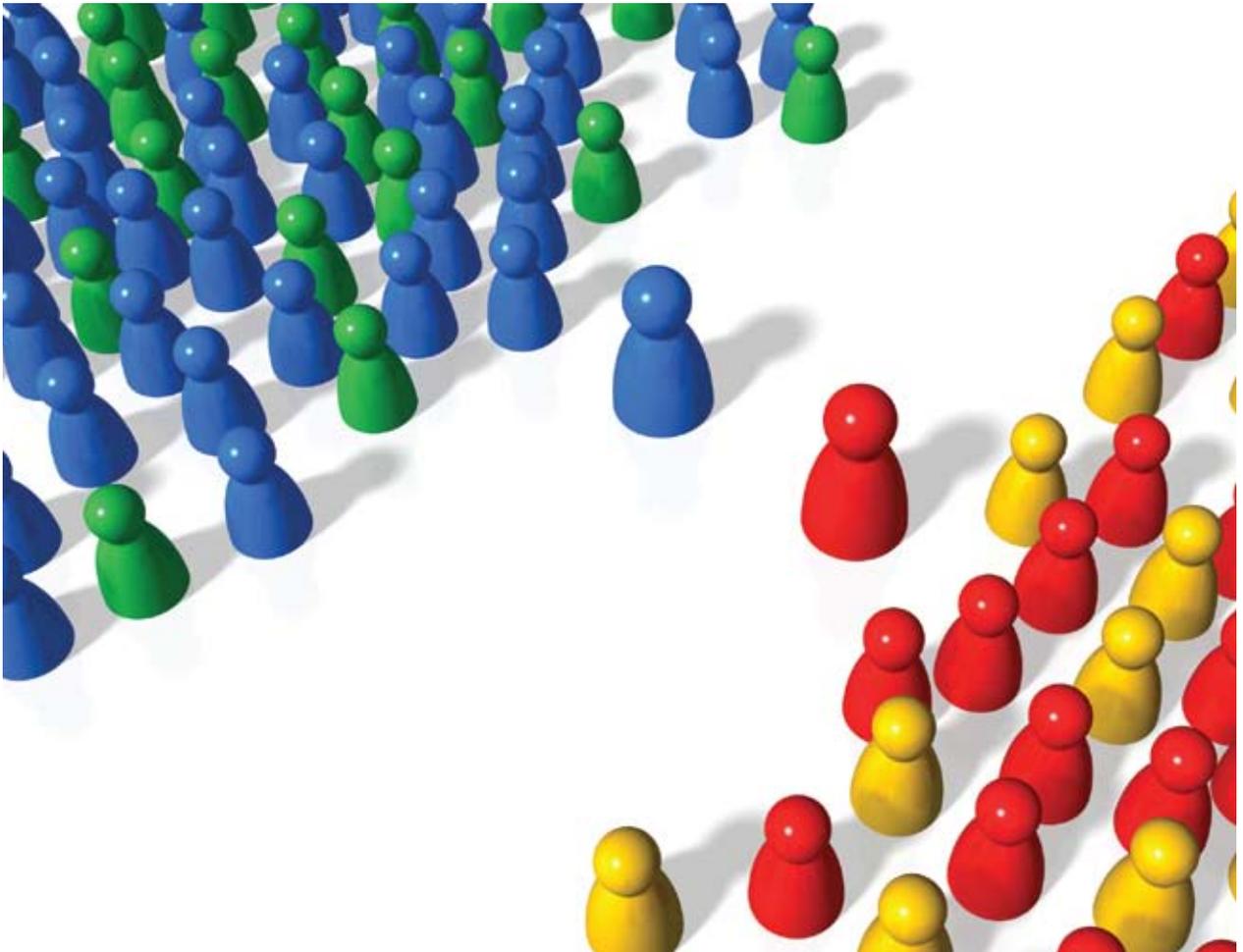


## How Ingratiation is Ruining Work Culture?



In a corporate scenario, why just being good at work won't give you that edge in office. Studies done in interview situations in 2005 by the University of Florida conclude that ingratiation could really work. They conclude, "Perhaps it's just human nature to be susceptible to flattery. One opinion says that flatterers indulge our self-love. But a less cynical explanation says that flatterers appeal to us because we believe they're like us. Researchers at the University point to the *similarity-attraction theory*, which states, that we are attracted to people who are similar to us." Does empty flattery backfire? Do bosses really reward brownnosers? What is *Ingratiator's Dilemma* and *Defensive Appreciation Psychology*? Read on to know more.



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Poonam Motiramani and Monisha Dhingra had joined XYZ together as financial consultants after duly clearing their Chartered

Accountancy course. Given that both of them had done their article-ship together in one of the Big Fours in Bangalore, finding a job in the

corporate world was not very tough for them. To make it even better, both looked resplendent and were often teased by their colleagues for choosing the CA course instead of going into the glamour world. Things were pretty awesome for both of them, good friends, as they already were, great work exposure during article-ship and a well paying job in a Multinational Company (MNC), everything perfectly in line with what they had thought.

But in a couple of odd months these girls realised the truth about the functioning of the corporate world, the hard way round.

Even after days of hard efforts of dealing with numbers, toiling away for long hours in their offices, and completing a financial restructuring plan of a client in a time, that is way too low compared to that taken by their colleagues, when the boss paid no attention to Poonam and Monisha or their work, they definitely knew something was amiss.

To add insult to injury, a chatter box, Sudhir, who was hired months after Poonam and Monisha had already won the biggest Cubicle. The boss loves him even though it seems his only talent is his ability to compliment and fawn over the higher-ups. Is it just their imaginations, or do bosses really reward brownnosers?

They always asked themselves, "Nobody likes a brownnoser. So, why does the boss always seem to fall for it?"

This is not a rare story; we see incidents like this happening in our daily lives.

While the earliest generation of people resented from complementing each other, it was not until William James wrote his

famous quotation, "the deepest urge in human nature is the craving to be appreciated", that free flow of appropriate complements started making their way thru the human genes.

And once people started realising how good it felt while being on the receiving end of compliments, the to and fro of complements became very common and got itself aligned with simple fundamentals of demand and supply. And in today's world when everything has been commercialised, so have the compliments.

The smart breed of employees, like Sudhir, in corporate world, who are not the very best in their work areas have, as a measure of make-up for missing traits, found solace in and are unhesitant to polish boss's boots with insidious audacious praises philosophically matching in execution with the economic policy by Bretton Woods of budget balancing whereby a country with budget deficit tries to balance it by debasing the currency or by issuing more currency than the amount of metal element in stock.

Ingriation often induces

**A**mong many ideas, some measures adopted by employees include: **Staying late beyond the situational demands and shooting a mail to all concerned with a "cc" to the boss at the time of leaving the office, mooching on and around the boss, trying to complete a file way too early hence rotting the entire organisational structure and giving rise to unhealthy and untimely demand of completion of files.** ☺

bosses to sway effective marketers, (i.e. employees having sycophant nature), too near to the finish-in-line-for-promotion, sometimes overriding, even the organisational hierarchal structure, to make way to accommodate such wet-blankets (employees like *Sudhir*) far beyond the economic value additions that these employees are ever expected to generate. While the super-performers (Poonam and Monisha), sadly dumb in personal relation skills, rot through the organisational hierarchy because they miss the eagle eye of the bosses, or should we say that they never tried catching one, leaving them dumbfolded, shell-shocked and raising conspicuous doubts about the egalitarian belief in the organisation. However, mere rewarding effective marketing employees doesn't necessarily lead to unhealthy or bad organisational image as some employers do not mind rewarding employees, good both as marketers and workers, whose views and long term scopes match with that of the organisation and in whom they see an infinite positive energy, which they feel is worthy and capable of leading the organisation.

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Yes-men or brownnosers appear to be like us by always complimenting and agreeing with us. Nevertheless, most of us enjoy getting compliments, and we grow fond of people who heap them on us. Based on this theory, we are more likely and more willing to favour these people.

But in an article, "Business Psychology" published in a leading management magazine, the researchers have put forward some fundamental points as to how an empty flattery backfires while skilled flattery paves the way for substantial gains. The researchers quote that "you are taking a chance when you flatter your boss. You could improve your performance rating, but if you are inept, your stock will fall." When bosses catch on to brownnosing "yes-men," the plan actually backfires on them as he might probably get disgusted with the brownnoser and brush off his flattering words. The effective marketer is careful not to cross that

**In order to keep ingratiation under check, what is required is to get integrity and honesty embedded in the genes of employees through effective and repetitive situational communication of organisational goals and objectives aligned parallel to employee/(s) interests.**

line and make his plans obvious. Psychologists call this problem the *Ingratiator's Dilemma*. It refers to a brownnoser's attempt to get on someone's good side without overdoing it or making his scheme obvious. [Source: Giacalone]

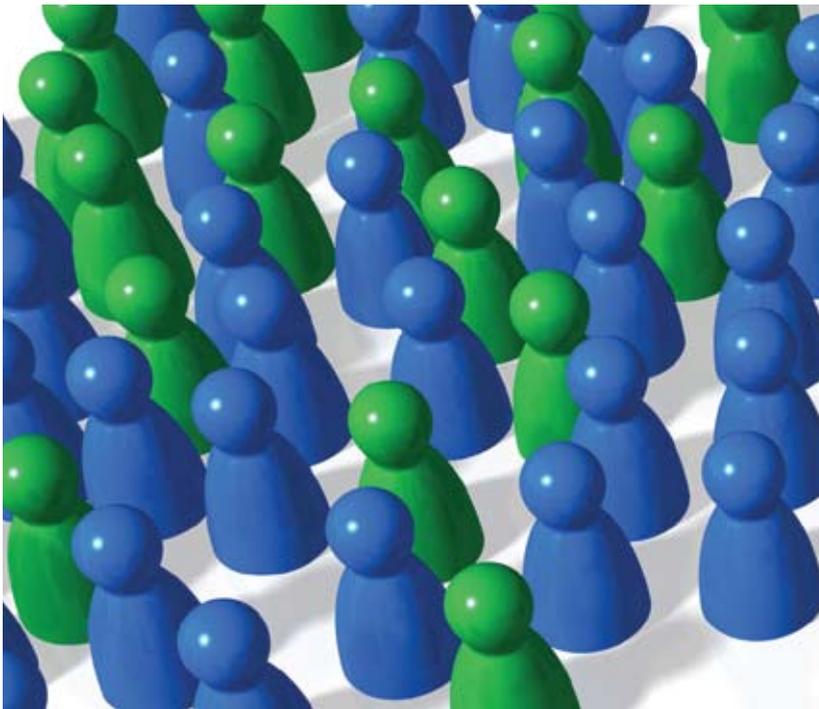
Even if people don't consider themselves a brownnoser, they might run into this situation. For instance, to get an effective recommendation letter written by the boss, one might do a bit of shoe polishing. Also, flattery is a subjective issue and calls for double opinions more times than

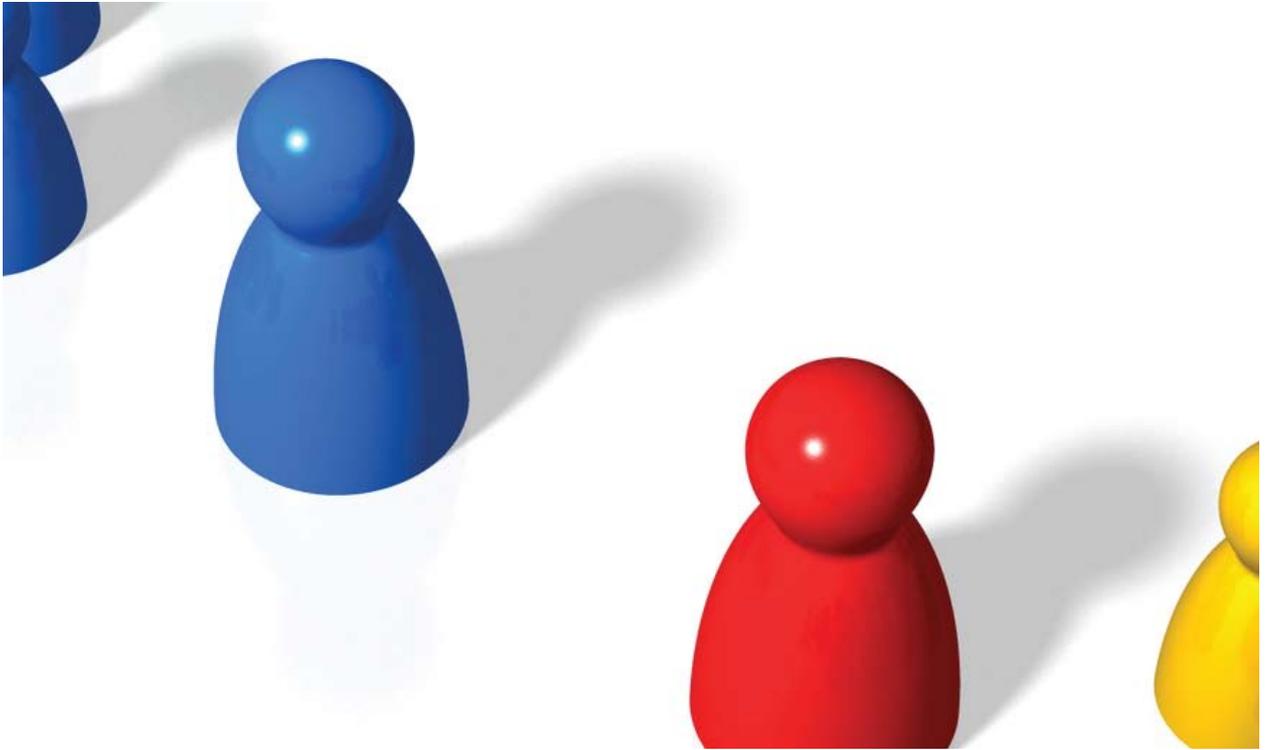
not. Studies show that when we witness someone flattering another, we are likely to be suspicious of such moves. But if the same person aims the compliment at us, we will probably fall for it. Although we, as a third-party observer see right through a brownnoser, but when our boss or we ourselves are the target, we are unable to or might not see that clearly. This is a simple and a fundamental human psychology termed as "*Defensive Appreciation Psychology*", whereby we genuinely condition our brains into believing the compliments to be true, thereby not doubting them as ingratiation.

Along with, a mix of appropriate comments and flattery, all Sudhir did was to imitate his boss, his behaviour, language, etc. For instance, every boss probably has a style and a rhythm of all his own, and all Sudhir did was try to match it. Like the maxim says, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Mimicking his behaviour helped Sudhir win his favour.

Among many ideas, some measures adopted by employees include: staying late beyond the situational demands and shooting a mail to all concerned with a "cc" to the boss at the time of leaving the office, mooching on and around the boss, trying to complete a file way too early, hence rotting the entire organisational structure and giving rise to unhealthy and untimely demand of completion of files.

At an age where executives are competing for the best quotable compliments, bosses should understand, filter and then retain from among what is being said. It's seemingly getting very tough to be a good, just and jovial boss. It's very easy to get emotionally





rocketed when a nubile damsel with curly sheen shoots pampers targeted at the boss, like the *holi pichkaris*, but a good boss should be emotionally intelligent alongside being technically intellectual, so as to understand that a lot of his employees are watching him and that he needs to think and balance his actions in terms of accepted codes of organisational behaviour so as not to make things traumatic to the non regular marketing guys.

Also like two eminent authors of a leading management magazine in an issue two years back, have pointed, an organisation should also have the practice of having unpleasant conversations, even if that calls for interactions with the boss rather than preferring interaction only with those who either shower praises to the boss or have been in the organisation for a fairly long time.

While it's entirely human to trust

someone with a trustworthy track record who in-between passes crafted insidious compliments to portray deep respect to the target, it is exactly then people become venerable. These human tendencies give rise to inertial trusts because bosses are humans, after all. Such blind trusts, as per Paul Krugman, are the founding fathers of scams and misappropriations. It is only because the biggest and best financial advisors unconditionally trusted the top notch stock brokers, investment brokers and founder of leading ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) company, etc. that that scams in billions were possible. Also, such behaviour by the bosses gives rise to a psychological pompous characteristics in certain employees while the interest of the majority is slackened, inducing thereby a rickety organisational structure.

To tame these organisational

behaviours, bosses needs to revisit their trust once in a while. Of course compliments and pampers at workplace act as lubricants to keep the days running smooth and deepening further the elements of trust, but revisiting trusts once in a while has become an absolute necessity in this era of financial scams. The toughest part though is to effectively curb such unhealthy practices, as hard actions not only solve such problems fractionally, but also leads to proliferation of the organisational image as Employee-Unfriendly, a risk any organisation wouldn't want to take at an age when every organisation wants to be *'The Employer of Choice'*. In order to keep ingratiating under check, what is required is to get integrity and honesty embedded in the genes of employees through effective and repetitive situational communication of organisational goals and objectives. ■