

*Driving the success of your business through optimal organization design*

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# MULTIPLE BOSS BOSS BOSS SYNDROME:

*a symptom of inadequate  
organization design*

Welcome to 'multiple boss syndrome' - a condition prevalent in many organizations, with an increasing number of employees becoming "afflicted"



During a meeting with his vice-president of human resources, John Ross, a director of HR for Sales and Marketing is instructed to make the implementation of a new leadership program his first priority. When John returns to his desk, he reads an e-mail from the VP of Sales. The e-mail outlines plans for what is to be John's first order of business - the design of a new sales training program for the company's representatives.

Welcome to multiple boss syndrome - a condition prevalent in many organizations, with an increasing number of employees becoming "afflicted" with the syndrome.

The problem is largely the result of more complex organizations that are inadequately designed. Companies are often more complex and need to be organized in more than one way - such as by function ( e.g. Sales, Manufacturing); customer type (e.g. consumer and commercial customers); product type, and geography, to name but a few examples.

These vaguely defined relationships between different functions are referred to as dotted line, lateral or matrix relationships. In these relationships, the accountabilities and authorities between people in different functions are ill-defined. The result is that people are often not quite sure who can get whom to consider what, do what, or stop doing what.

Although defining the accountabilities and authorities associated with role relationships is necessary for people to work together effectively, they are hardly ever specified. Most organizations do not mention these accountabilities on job descriptions or in training and orientation sessions.

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In the absence of specification, people make up their own rules about who can do what in relation to whom. This is a major source of conflict and confusion, heavy workloads, wasted effort and slowed decisions in many organizations. Indeed, turf wars, personality conflicts and power plays are often due to lack of clarity around the accountabilities and authorities of the individuals involved.


"Perhaps instead of multiple boss syndrome, we should refer to this as the failed boss syndrome...the failure of accountable managers to design

organizations that support, rather than impede, optimal performance and employee satisfaction," says the president of Capelle Associates Inc., Dr. Ron Capelle.

Resolving the multiple boss syndrome is a task that needs to land squarely on the desk of executives and senior managers. The CEO or head of the organization must ensure that both managerial and cross functional accountabilities and authorities are clear and well established at each level of the organization. Some senior executives who are accountable for both the managerial and cross functional sides have an important role as a cross over point manager. It would be the responsibility of the cross over point manager to set context and prescribed limits and have a conflict resolution mechanism. The critical importance of this role is seldom understood.

"What is needed is a system that clearly defines managerial and cross functional accountabilities and authorities - an organization design that clarifies the organization's strategy and decides the functions that must be performed to implement the strategy," says Dr. Capelle. Such a design would include ensuring that roles are placed at the right organization level and in the right function. Finally, it would require that role accountabilities, authorities and relationships are clearly established to ensure people can work together well from level to level and function to function across the organization.

Such accountabilities and authorities would integrate the organization vertically and form the spine of the organization. If the spine is weak, everything else the organization does will be sub-optimal.

"Clear managerial and cross-functional accountabilities and authorities are the hallmark of world class organizations." Dr. Capelle continues. "When clearly defined relationships are established, along with a mechanism for resolving disputes, multiple bosses and other dysfunctional working relationships can often be eliminated. In fact, the current well-being and future success of the organization and its employees depend on it." 

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Email us at [info@capelleassociates.com](mailto:info@capelleassociates.com), or call us at 416.236.3044 to learn more about how you can use Organization Design to further enhance your business success.