Golem Effect

Idea In Short

Golem Effect – is the opposite of Pygmalion Effect. It is a negative self-fulfilling prophecy: a negative self-held belief results in poor performance. When you notice the poor performance, your negative expectations are confirmed, reinforcing your beliefs even more strongly.

The Golem effect Pygmalion effect, rooted in Greek mythology, shows the compelling positive power of expectations. It refers to the positive case whereby positive expectations lead to increased performance.is a psychological phenomenon in which lower expectations placed upon individuals either by supervisors or the individual themselves lead to poorer performance by the individual. Often, this effect is common in educational and organizational environments. It is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. The Golem Effect can be dangerous in real life and must be overcome.

Historical origins

In Jewish mythology, the Golem was a creature built from clay and mud, designed to serve its master. Unlike Pygmalion's statue, a Golem is unfinished and raw. The creator of the Golem knows that given the opportunity, the creature will bring about trouble and destruction, something which eventually comes to pass. The story goes that the Golem grew so violent and out of control that it had to be destroyed. The effect takes this name because it describes how having low expectations of someone can lead to them performing worse.

Research

The first study to demonstrate the Golem Effect took place in the 1980s. It classified a sample of teachers as biased or unbiased based on their scoring of student work and examined how these teachers treated students, depending on their beliefs of the students' abilities. In other words: what was the effect of teacher expectations? Unbiased teachers

treated all students the same, regardless of how they perceived the potential of each student. However, biased teachers treated students more negatively if they perceived them to have low potential. This included behaving in a more dogmatic way towards these students, being less open, flexible and balanced towards them, and not treating them equally. They were also more critical of and less friendly towards these students. These students then performed up to 23% worse in tasks, compared to their peers who had been given high expectations.

Implications

This research from education enlightens us about the real-life negative consequences of the Golem Effect. The Golem can rear its ugly head with teacher or parent expectations of students, manager expectations of employees, or coach expectations of athletes. Students who experience low expectations, from teachers or parents, may also develop low self-esteem and feel unable to achieve and succeed. This will limit how much they plan challenging goals to help them grow.

Manager view

The Golem Effect has a similar influence in the field of business. It's not uncommon for managers to develop varying expectations for their team. They might believe a certain employee lacks skills, potential, or motivation. This is likely to change the way they manage that employee. They may give them dull, routine tasks, micro-manage them with specific targets and deadlines, and monitor them closely. Whether intended or not, the employee learns that they're not trusted, leading to several negative consequences. They become less motivated and less likely to achieve. They may lack confidence, distrust other employees and their managers, and have a lowered sense of responsibility. Managers may disregard valuable ideas from the employee, and they're likely to yield lower work productivity. This of course will benefit neither the employee nor the company. Managers who contribute to the Golem effect believe that certain employees lack the skills, potential or willingness to succeed. This leads to a change in leadership style, where managers may:

- Set more explicit targets and deadlines
- Assign more routine tasks
- Monitor employees on a regular basis
- Emphasize operational concerns instead of strategic ones

Dealing with Golem effect

Authority figures, such as managers and leaders should be aware of how their expectations can influence the performance of others. Developing their metacognitive strategies can help them better understand their thought processes and how they can fall into common thinking traps such as biased expectations. At worst, employees who fall victim to the Golem effect may choose to leave their positions or companies, ending a problematic and unsustainable situation.

Employee view

Whether explicitly communicated or not, managers make it clear to their subordinates that their trust in them is limited. When faced with this reality, employees do, in fact, become less motivated and less likely to achieve, thus completing a self-fulfilling prophecy. When managers view the employee's inferior performance, they may double down on their overbearing management style. In this way, the cycle sustains itself. The Golem effect's negative consequences are substantial. It may cause:

- Lack of employee self-trust and self-confidence
- Lack of employee trust in peers and superiors
- Disregarded ideas
- Discouraging responsibility
- Lower productivity
- Increased chances of employees behaving opportunistically
- Lack of encouragement of innovative problem solving

Dealing with Golem effect

Likewise, employees should be aware of the Golem Effect and develop their self-awareness and metacognitive strategies. This can help them to better understand what shapes their behavior and performance. This way, they can notice when low expectations might be limiting their achievement. It will also equip them with the resilience they need to overcome these expectations and prove them wrong.

Summary

The best way to overcome the Golem Effect is to use the Pygmalion Effect. One study found that increasing leader expectations of disadvantaged women led to the Pygmalion Effect. These women, who would have received low expectations before, had now improved their performance. So, if you're in a position of leadership replace your expectations with high ones. The Golem Effect can stop people from performing to their best abilities. This has negative consequences across several fields of life, and we should all be aware of this great power of expectations. Remember: the best way to help people to achieve and perform well is to believe that they can do so.