

A Tale of Two Managers: Dunning-Kruger and the Impostor

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We have seen them in action. We may have even worked with one, or both contrasting types of managers. The Impostor Manager (IM) is modest and not self-aware of their abilities. Rather, they attribute their success to luck or chance. The Dunning-Kruger (DKM) manager is the opposite. She or he has an over-abundance of confidence in their skills and ability and often assumes the department's success can be attributed to their superior leadership skills. In this paper, the researchers discuss issues surrounding both types of managers and offer recommendations to develop these managers into high-performing leadership team members.

Keywords: Dunning-Kruger effect, the impostor syndrome, the impostor cycle

INTRODUCTION

As Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or a company's senior manager, you might have one or more DKE or IM managers reporting to you. The DKE manager presents him/herself as overly confident, not realizing that they do not know what they do not know. Due to luck or chance, the IM manager may lack confidence and feel that they are in a management position. The lack of confidence might cause the manager to hold back and not perform to their full potential.

This is common and there will be situations that will need to be addressed. On a positive note, managers with one of these conditions are more likely to be new, less experienced managers. In this paper, we will describe DKE and IM managers and provide some professional development techniques to better prepare these newer managers with pathways to success.

DISCUSSION

The DKE Manager

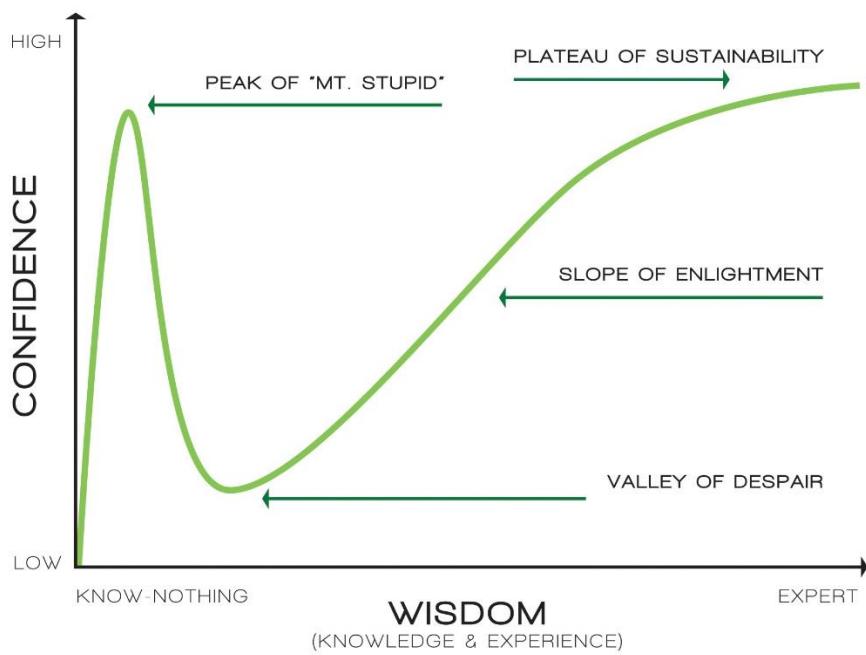
In their experiments, Dunning & Krueger requested college students to approximate their results on a series of tests that included grammar, logic, and humor. Dunning and Krueger were surprised to find that many students who performed poorly would often significantly misjudge their test performance. The researchers were surprised to find that students who scored poorly on the tests also significantly misjudged their actual performance. The researchers also noted that students who objectively performed well on the

tests often subjectively underestimated their performance. This result is referred to as the Dunning–Kruger Curve or the Dunning–Kruger Effect.

The resulting findings of the student studies, undergraduates presented poorly and fully overestimated their presentations. This outcome shocked them. Additionally, pupils who accurately functioned well usually underestimated their performance. The phenomenon can be described as the “Dunning–Kruger Effect (DKE)” (Rahmani, 2020, Pg 1). The DKE tries to clarify why humans can be surprised when evaluating their competence. Dunning and Kruger noted that humans may hold overly promising analyses of their capabilities in numerous collective and intellectual areas. Hence, people can overestimate due to a lack of skills and making faulty conclusions.

In Figure 1 below, note that persons with lower competence and with a high confidence level, early in their job will often climb the peak of “Mount Stupid” (author unknown). Still, over time the manager develops competence through knowledge and experience. But before the manager can redeem him/herself, they will often fall into the “valley of despair” (author unknown). This is a critical point where senior managers can help the DKE manager transition to competence through mentoring, intuitive management training and development opportunities, and job shadowing.

FIGURE 1
THE DUNNING-KRUGER EFFECT



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Nold & Michel (2023) discovered that the Dunning–Kruger effect caused humans to overestimate their skills and become unaware of the uncompleted tasks at hand. As a result, the leadership of several organizations may underestimate their skills. Dunning and Krueger published their research findings in a fascinating article in the *Personality and Social Psychology* journal (1999). Hence, the Dunning–Kruger effect (DKE) describes a certain bias where people with low levels of ability are inclined to overestimate their strengths and abilities. DKE also causes intellectual bias where people have low skills or knowledge. The mental bias shown by people with lower ability levels are inclined to overvalue their skills. Some people may also lack sufficient awareness of their decision-making. Additionally, poor cognitive bias might cause people to be unable to accurately assess their abilities, skills, and knowledge.

Individuals might also overestimate their skills or abilities. However, people with positive abilities or knowledge may underestimate their skills (Hansen et. al.). Although the DKE may be widespread across

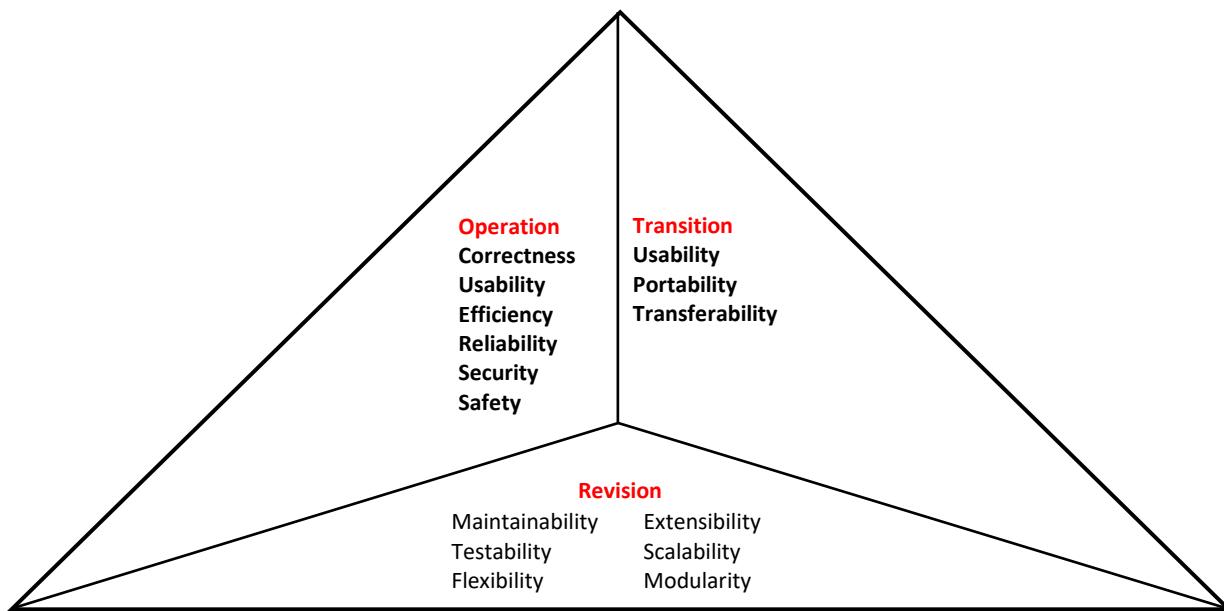
several diverse areas, most research highlights university students, or businesspeople. DKE also occurs when individuals' poor proficiency may prevent them from rigorously evaluating others (Nold & Michel, 2023). The manifestation of DKE could also be different across areas. On the contrary, the actual evidence supported the DKE and asserted that metacognitive differences can cause differences in outlining bordering between low and high presentations.

Nold & Michel (2023) revealed that people with less ability may deem themselves more skilled than they show themselves. The major concern with people with DKE is that they do not know what they don't know. Hence, the ability to be aware of the unknown can be defined as metacognition. Metacognition can be unique to people due to the human capacity to reflect on themselves.

Nold & Michel (2023) noticed that an intuitive manager or supervisor could aid a DKE. Old & Michel (2023) found that persons who are low achievers and have inflated feelings of their abilities may be receptive to feedback from supervisors and peers. DKE's in authority might act like they are experts but may not perform well.

Fortunately, PTM (PTM), or the performance triangle model bolsters organizations for an agile design and can help organizations with people with DKE. Old & Michel (2023) implied that the PTM for an agile design of organizations provided a practical method. In addition, the PTM included a toolkit to incorporate flexible thinking and strategies.

FIGURE 2
THE PERFORMANCE TRIANGLE



Psychologists Dunning and Kruger authored a groundbreaking article titled "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments." (Rahmani, 2020, Pg 1). Additionally, they illustrated four experimentations in which they asked university undergraduates to approximate their performance involving tests consisting of reason, syntax, and satire (Rahmani, 2020, Pg 1).

Rahmani (2020) suggested that further research could involve correct self-evaluations, or poor insight and a lack of precise awareness of peers' performances could occur. Accordingly, the Dunning-Kruger Effect demonstrates point A. Point A involves novice humans who embrace a faulty higher sense of assurance while implementing tasks. This application of tasks leads to Point B. With time and gained experience they may be aware of the complicated areas of their occupation. As the employees continue to

spend more on their careers, they get more experience, strengthening performance. This event leads to point C.

However, confidence would never be higher than the starting point. Then subpar performing people achieve accuracy in their own self-evaluations (Rahani, 2020). Therefore, competence can be necessary to discover areas of inability. Understanding the DKE can be significant for leaders in entrepreneurship and in education in general. Voluntary self-improvement requires humans to find the differences in one's knowledge as well as perceive others.

Rahmani (2020) further noted various practical applications involving DKE. First, program leaders should be conscious of the apprentice's projected self-confidence. As a result, belief in their performance might not truly reflect their accurate performance. Consequently, trainees tend to undervalue their performance. Rather than self-evaluations, program leaders should consider granting more weight to reviews completed by leaders, peers, and staff. Moreover, these combined evaluations might be more accurate than a self-evaluation alone (Rahani, 2020).

Mentoring underperforming and overconfident individuals could result in delivering factual feedback from multiple sources. However, constructive criticism might not be sufficient for the improvement of performance. (Rahani, 2020). Consequently, setting concise expectations for areas of competence and potential consequences should be mandatory. Also, when mentoring adequately performing employees occurs, they might be insecure about their performance. Program leaders must remember that self-doubt could be critical to improved performance. However, meaningless reassurance may not motivate the employees to improve. Employees must tolerate periods of doubt and self-confidence to improve and rebuild their self-image. Therefore, program directors can remind employees of the learning process and encourage hope in time with perseverance or resilience (Rahani, 2020).

Hugten, Coreymen, Vanderstraeten, & Witteloostijn, (2023) showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) can be integrated with the DKE. The research looks at the relationship between experience and ESE from a DKE. This perspective highlights awareness of shortcomings as a tool through which experience negatively links to self-efficacy during early careers. Also, learning and mastering experiences are mechanisms that are related to self-efficacy with a U-shape.

In addition, Hugten et al, implied that the DKE perspective involves consideration for experiencing the path to mastery. ESE research notes that untested people may lead with poor self-efficacy. Consequently, failure and negative experiences cannot lead to lower ESE adjustment because humans cannot report low ESE. By contrast, the DKG perspective generates room for descending adjustment to self-employment by acknowledging that various inexperienced people have a more inaccurate level of efficacy. (Hughes). Noted that the conventionalization of their human experiences in research might be rudimentary. Measures such as yes or no reveal much less prowess than elements out of control. Consequently, the more experienced humans may flounder less but may be less confident due to lower modifications of ESE in the past.

Sanchez & Dunning (2018) noted that the researchers noted situations most approximate to overconfidence in tasks. Sanchez & Dunning (2018) showed that prevalent customs indicate that novelists can be persistently troubled by their overconfidence and may also forecast the specifics of the course of time and attitude. A circumstance where humans could be less competent may also lack the cognizance of their shortcomings.

Moreover, Sanchez & Dunning (2018) turn over the range of unconscious and consciousness inept stages. Thus, humans do not begin with the Dunning-Kruger state but gain it through minor experiences. Sanchez & Dunning (2018) noted the patterns of under confidence and overconfidence. Therefore, Sanchez & Dunning (2018) showed that beginners appear overconfident with an adaptation of problems and in learning tasks. Therefore, people may be complacent with obtaining adapted behavior.

Sanchez & Dunning (2018) also investigated how competence versus confidence developed over time as humans increased their experience with complex tasks. Sanchez & Dunning (2018) noted that overall subjects in the study appeared to be overconfident in their diagnoses. The researchers in the study showed that confidence showed over $M=69.3$ percent which exceeded accuracy $9M=60.3\%$ ($37\%-3.70$, $p=.005$). With overconfidence, the research focused on the patterns of overconfidence.

Nakatani & Wynekoop (2020) noted that critical thinking may also be crucial, especially among the soft skills obtained. As a result, employers sought college graduates with that demonstrated skill. Critical thinking will be necessary for adapting to a plethora of incoming tasks. Consequently, critical thinking might be learned over time, however, effort and persistence will be crucial to learning a higher order skill.

Additionally, Nakatani & Wynkoop (2020) implied that various critical thinking could be clear. Critical thinking abilities in research are generally considered as the ability to assess information in business. A crucial step in becoming a critical thinker could be to ask about issues such as metacognition and an individual's awareness of the individual's thinking abilities.

Nakatani & Wynekoop (2020) noted that unskilled people often lack metacognition and may overestimate their skills. Thus, the bottom quartile of employees grossly overestimated their ability and test score performance.

Boz & Coz (2019) noted that Bandura implied that humans usually predicted the occurrences of the objective successes people can have to control daily life situations. Consequently, humans may display expectations. Also, based on many studies, Kruger and Dunning showed that humans found that individuals who might perform unsuccessfully may lack abilities in their field. They also may tend to embellish their expectations or strengths in the workplace. Boz & Coz may also have a lack of recognizing their strengths well in meta comprehension and metacognition as well as self-monitoring as well.

Additionally, these individuals might not be incompetent enough in their abilities and skills to make proper assessments. They also may lack the ability to make the correct judgments in their work. Boz & Coz (2019) noted that individuals may also lack the proper ability to assess their judgment in various situations and further noted that in the Kruger-Dunning studies people would often overestimate or puff up their learning and power of their performance. In contrast, people who did not inflate their skills tended to perform well and did not underestimate their skills, knowledge, and abilities.

Boz & Coz (2019) also revealed that one of the implications of Dunning-Kruger may be that individuals might believe that they may not determine the skills they need to refine or develop over time. Also, self-efficacy might be linked with their behavior. Self-efficacy may be defined as a person's beliefs about their abilities to perform a certain task. Also, self-efficacy beliefs may affect the way individuals act, think, and believe they perform in each situation. Self-efficacy might be closely correlated with human behavior and performance. Therefore, self-efficacy could be based on humans' self-perceptions regarding certain behaviors and abilities. Boz & Coz (2019) further noted many studies reported a positive correlation linking intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy.

However, exaggerating or elevating self-efficacy beliefs or using the Dunning-Kruger Effect could lead to numerous negative consequences. Boz & Coz (2019) showed that people with elevated performance may lead to overconfidence and individuals may fail at their tasks. Therefore, over-possessing these traits could lead to performance inadequacy. Therefore, Boz & Coz (2019) implied that people who possess self-confidence may have high self-efficacy which could lead people to relax and reduce in areas of concentration, effort, and performance.

Boz & Coz (2019) noted that an inflated amount of self-efficacy beliefs and Dunning-Kruger syndrome might exhibit an overconfidence in an individual's performance and abilities. Thus, these employees might be more apt to take risks they deem worthwhile. The employees could attempt to tackle difficult service problems because of service failure even when they might not be prepared. Therefore, taking unwarranted risks could jeopardize service failure recovery and worsen customer dissatisfaction.

Hugten, Coreynrn, Vanderstraeten & Witteloosuin (2023) indicated that (ESE) entrepreneurial self-efficacy can be involved by integrating DKE into conceptualizing a person's experience. Also, Hugton et al., noted their research included a probable relationship between ESE and DKE. However, learning and mastery of experience might be mechanisms through which experience can be correlated with positive experience. Consequently, a U-shaped relationship exists with experience and ESE can be involved with two-fold experience. The experiences should conceptualize the experience more than a one-time duration but be able to mix the DKE and experience.

Brilon, Grassi, Grieder & Shulz, and Shulz (2019) noted that the hypotheses of strategic operation foster overconfidence. Thus, Brilon et al. compare an atmosphere where people compare a situation where

employees may have an incentive to deter their competitors. First, people who overcome uncontested might update their confidence thus creating irregularity in making progress. Therefore, researchers show research evidence in evidence of overconfidence in the DKE.

Brilon et. al, (2019) noted that evidence in the psychology and the business field suggests that many people hold exaggerated thoughts in their own beliefs in contrast to others. Overconfidence might negatively affect people, businesses, and society holistically. Also, for example, it has been changed by excessive entry into various markets. Brilon et. al. noted that their findings showed that the knowledge accumulated in a strategic human environment could affect self-confidence. Also, Brilon et. al., proved that the areas where researchers uncover effect could justify levels of skill that could be overconfident.

Brilon et. al. suggested that people lack the information to judge their relative ability correctly and may be overconfident. Concerning their study, researchers found that after experiencing a strategic environment, low-skilled people are over enthusiastic over their relative environment. The researchers found evidence that this area may not be due to lower metacognitive skills. However, it might be applied to the experiences of low and highly skilled employees due to various feedback they receive.

Additionally, the well-documented gender differences in confidence might be explained by different experiences in environments of women and men. Thus, according to Brilon et al., (2019), empirical studies note that women might be more honest than men. Moreover, women might be found to be more apt to compete with men overall. Therefore, evidence may include that women might compete more with each other rather than compete with men.

Brilon et. al., (2019) indicated that various research in management and finance stressed the importance of manager's overconfidence in company performance. Thus, leaders' personal qualities can have a crucial impact on the performance of companies with managers being confident enough to engage in various organizational products. The Brion et al., (2019) study might be like evolving literature that stresses the role-playing of over-confidence.

Brilon, et. al, (2019) noted that the behavioral mechanism might foster overconfidence in the strategies of the employees leading to self-deception which can discourage others. Also, the authors showed that social image and social signaling concerns may be mutually exclusive drivers of self-confidence issues. Brilon et. al., (2019) implied that their study involves both symmetric and asymmetric treatments in their study. In symmetrical conditions, players on both sides have their actions. This may be more realistic, but the condition may be more confident in unscrambling the effects of the tactical behavior. More than one asymmetric treatment where only one player (receiver) may opt out of the competition. Therefore, these strategic treatments. Thus, these asymmetric treatments might bolster future investigations of the mechanisms that cause overconfidence in strategic environments.

The Impostor Manager

“Impostor syndrome is the province of the successful, of the high achievers, of the perfectionists. That is the irony.”

Hilton, K. (2021, 11/23)

Impostor syndrome is a common phenomenon across most segments of the general population. For example, college students, especially those attending prominent institutions, may feel that they are “out of their league” attending classes with many highly qualified students who appear to be smarter. Typically, the “impostor syndrome” student becomes insecure about attending a high-status university and begin feeling inadequate and self-doubt.

Early research suggested that impostor syndrome only affected female executives. However, subsequent studies discovered that impostor syndrome can impact anyone---younger or older, women, men, and individuals from every ethnic and racial background (Cuncic, 2024). Researchers have since found that imposter syndrome can lead to anxiety, depression, decreased job satisfaction, lack of confidence, and an inability to achieve goals. Impostor syndrome can affect students, new employees, or new executives, the

common thread is a fear of being overwhelmed in their station then. Of course, whatever affects individual employees can also affect all other employees (Cuncic, 2024).

Impostor syndrome can affect someone at work and other aspects of their life (Albers, 2022). At work, impostor syndrome might cause an employee to attribute their success to chance, or luck instead of their work ethic and personal abilities. Impostor syndrome could cause the employee to hold back from applying for a higher-level position or asking for a raise. In addition, employees might think that they must overwork themselves to achieve the exceptionally lofty standards they set for themselves.

Typically, within a family, a parent can recall a situation where the parent felt unprepared and incapable of raising children. A parent experiencing impostor syndrome must address these feelings to make decisions without fearing they will mess up their child for life. Students in school experiencing impostor syndrome might refrain from asking questions or speaking in class, fearing that their classmates or teachers might consider them clueless. In their relationships, some people feel undeserving of affection from loved ones and worry that their loved ones will discover that they are not that great. In this situation, the person will often sabotage their relationship and end it before their loved one does.

Impostor Syndrome Symptoms

You may have impostor syndrome if you:

- Believe that everyone knows more than you
- Think that others believe you are more skilled than you are
- Dismiss your success and credit it to luck, people you know, others' poor judgment, or other things besides your abilities Source: "What Is Impostor Syndrome"? - WebMD
- Notice "the impostor cycle" happening in your life
- Worry that you do not belong, and others too will finally realize that
- Feel like you always must do your best or more than what is asked of you
- Feel uncomfortable being praised
- Hold yourself back from reaching goals
- Are afraid you will disappoint others
- Have a tough time forgetting mistakes, even small ones, that you have made
- Feel that you would not doubt yourself if you were brighter, smarter, better, etc.
- find it important to get others' approval
- Source: Booth, 2024, *WebMD*

The Impostor Cycle

Employees with Impostor Syndrome display behaviors that researchers refer to as The Impostor Cycle. As noted in Figure 3 below, the "impostor" employee avoids important tasks until just before the deadline, obviously nervous about their competence to conduct the assignment to the satisfaction of their supervisor. Fear of failing and the anxiety that goes along with that fear energize the employee to perform at a higher level than expected and complete more work than necessary. In the end, although the employee completed the assignment well, the employee does not permit that triumph to be accepted. Rather, the employee starts to worry about the next assigned task, resulting in new feelings of self-doubt (Booth, 2024).

FIGURE 3
THE IMPOSTOR CYCLE



Booth, 2024

Defeating Impostor Syndrome

It is important to recognize that impostor syndrome may affect us once or twice during our lifetime and in different situations. You might also have an employee or employees with impostor syndrome as an executive or manager. Albers (2022) offers several ways below to address impostor syndrome.

- **Separate feelings from facts**-Most of us experience impostor syndrome at some point in our lives. Be aware that impostor syndrome may affect you, but just because you experience that feeling does not necessarily mean it is true. Make the effort to remember that you know what you are talking about and that you are capable of learning and gaining experience.
- **Take note of your accomplishments** -You may already keep letters from grateful customers, notes or emails from your manager complimenting you for work well done, or awards from your profession. These tangible compliments are also everyday reminders of your accomplishments and abilities.
- **Stop comparing yourself to others**-This can be especially difficult today as many social media sites highlight professional success. However, the aim is to improve and achieve goals appropriate and specific to you, not to outdo everyone else.
- **Talking to others**-Friends and colleagues should help jog your memory that your impostor feelings are not uncommon and seldom rational.
- **Talking to a therapist**-Speaking with a therapist might help you recognize impostor syndrome and help you develop new behaviors to get past them. Self-doubt can be paralyzing and prevent you from moving forward in important aspects of your life.

Source: Susan Albers, PsyD, (2022) Impostor Syndrome: What It Is and How to Overcome It

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper describes two common workplace behaviors managers and employees might present. These behaviors are typical and can be addressed to aid managers in their professional development, better the organizational climate, and increase company performance.

DKM will be the most challenging manager to mentor as they believe they can do no wrong. Therefore, working with the DKM manager may take extra coaching and more time.

There is a good reason to expect that the IM manager will be easier to work with as they already perform well as a manager. The CEO or senior manager must use some of the methods provided in Alber's recommendations listed above. In conclusion, the role of the senior executive is to remember that the primary role of leaders is to develop leadership in others.

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