



# LEADING WITH EMPATHY

Before the time of COVID, the shared offices of companies were the space through which belonging to the company was built. The colleagues we met there were able to influence us, to make us think about things we hadn't noticed before. We were in contact with managers from other departments through whom we made our opinion about the company, we were able to collaborate more effectively and to innovate.

I believe that nowadays the relationship "Manager - Employee" is the key relationship through which the employee also forms a relationship with the company. As we work more from home or the field and spend less time in the common areas, it is often the quality of the manager-employee relationship that creates the conditions for engagement and good performance and keeps the employee connected to the larger whole.

If this relationship is limping, it impacts not only the performance, but also the worker's motivation and willingness to really engage with the company and see the whole context of their work, rather than just the piecemeal, isolated tasks it produces.

Well, for a good relationship you need EMPATHY. Not just the ability to sympathize with people and intellectually understand what they are probably experiencing and what they need. But you also need to be able to empathize emotionally with other people and feel what they desire and fear and be able

to mirror that well so that they feel seen and heard and trust is built.



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## SO WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EMPATHY?

Empathy is the ability to understand and feel other people's emotions, feelings and perspectives. The attributes of empathy are characteristics or qualities that describe this ability and allow us to better understand what empathy involves.

Neilsen Norman Group describes the following four attributes of empathy:

- 1. Perspective-taking:** the ability to see things from another person's point of view. An empathic person tries to understand how they would feel, what they would think, and how they would perceive a particular situation

from the other person's perspective. This ability allows for a better understanding of why another person reacts the way they do.

- 2. Communicating the understanding of another person's emotions:** empathy includes the ability to effectively communicate the understanding of another person's emotions. Empathic communication involves listening without judgment, expressing compassion and empathy for the emotions the other person is experiencing. In this way, trust is established and the feeling that the other person is understood and accepted is created.
- 3. Non-judgmental:** Empathy requires openness and the ability not to judge or condemn other people's emotions or feelings. Empathic persons are able to accept another person's emotions without trying to change their mind. This allows the other person to feel freer and more secure in expressing their feelings.
- 4. Recognition of the other person's emotions:** this attribute refers to the ability to recognize and identify the emotions that the other person is experiencing. Empathic persons are sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues that indicate other people's emotions. This recognition is key to understanding how another person is feeling and showing compassion and support.

The Neilsen Norman Group perceives the spectrum of empathy in the following four stages:

- 1. PITY:** pity is a feeling of sadness or distress caused by the suffering or misfortune of others. It is a somewhat distant emotion, often associated with feelings of superiority or condescension. Pity is not necessarily a helpful emotion, as it can make the recipient feel inferior.
- 2. Sympathy:** Sympathy is the ability to understand and share another person's feelings. It is more involved than pity and involves a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Sympathy is a valuable emotional response because it fosters understanding and support.
- 3. Empathy:** Empathy goes one step further than sympathy because it includes the feelings of others as if they were your own. Empathy is a powerful tool in making deep connections because it allows us to truly put ourselves in another person's shoes and offer genuine understanding.
- 4. Compassion:** compassion combines empathy with a desire to alleviate the suffering of others. It is an active response that drives us to act and provide support. Compassion is an essential trait of leaders because it promotes caring.

This is the spectrum of empathy, and its fourth level is empathy with compassion. A kind of compassion in action

Today's world is changing and so is the way we work. Leadership always reflects the times and changes with them too. One of the fundamental changes is who is the bearer of the relationship between the employee and the employer.

where we try to reduce the suffering of a person who is going through something difficult.

That's what current managers should be like. They should be able to approach people individually, be able to respect their preferences, minimize stress, and when the going gets tough, they should be able to show empathy. 10 - 15 years ago, we would hardly have raised this topic among managers. People complain about where the world is going, but I personally experience that we are becoming more empathetic towards each other and it's not seen as a weakness.

Is empathy, in your view, an essential attribute for an individual to effectively lead others? Do you think it is a skill that can be cultivated? Historically, empathy has not been among the widely embraced corporate values. Today, on the contrary, I encounter it more and more. And surprisingly, it is a trait that can be developed.

Personally, I believe that the growing prevalence of AI is likely to make empathy scarcer for us.

## ■ Four Attributes of Empathy

- 1** Perspective taking
- 2** Communicating the understanding of another person's emotions
- 3** Recognizing emotion in other person
- 4** Staying out of judgment