

## Mission Karmayogi Paradigm Shift in Civil Services Capacity Building

### Competency Based Training Module focusing on the application of competencies with HRM practices

#### Mission Karmayogi Assignment on Empathy

## 1. Introduction

Any organisation is all about people and their interrelationship and empathy is one of the most critical factors in relationship management. Success of an organisation depends on the leadership. An effective leadership in an organisation depends on multiple factors and **empathy** is a construct that is fundamental to leadership. Many leadership theories suggest the ability to have and display empathy is an important part of leadership. The present Human Resource Management (HRM) practice is putting back the human in HR and understanding and dealing with human without empathy is pointless which may not lead to success. Empathy is hardwired in human brain.

Against the above background, empathy as a trait needs demystification so that its role and contribution in the success of any organisation and leadership, be it government or private may be well appreciated.

Empathy is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference, that is, the capacity to place oneself in another's position. It is the ability to imagine how another person is feeling and so understand his/her mood. Empathy is about being able to accurately hear out and understand the thoughts, feelings and concerns of others, even when these are not made explicit.

*Understanding of empathy, which is an implicit trait, is critical to make the heterogeneous and diverse ecosystem an inclusive one. In other words, empathy enables to incorporate the heterogeneity and diversity in the main scheme of things in an organization. In other words, empathy makes it possible to work cooperatively with people who have very different experiences, preferences, styles and opinions. Thus, addressing the **heterogeneity** aspect of the organization.*

Another line of thought says that empathy is not a soft skill rather it's a business skill. It is said that HR practitioners can't be effective in their jobs if they don't know how to be empathetic. Empathy is the leadership skill most strongly and consistently linked to performance. Empathy is a versatile, multidimensional skill that can be applied to nearly every complex HR challenge. HR leaders are missing an opportunity to identify the connection points where they can translate their empathy into different HR functions in a more compelling way. It is especially useful as **a change management tool**.

## 2. Conceptual Background

Daniel Goleman, an internationally known psychologist says that our view of human intelligence is far too narrow, and that our view of human intelligence is far too narrow, and that our emotions play a far greater role in thought, decision-making and individual success than is commonly acknowledged. Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness and impulse control, persistence, zeal and motivation, empathy, and social deftness. These are the qualities that mark people who excel: whose relationship flourish, who are stars in the workplace.

Talking of empathy which is a critical HR skill and helps build and ***sustain positive workplace relationships, foster diversity, and inclusion, encourage cooperation and collaboration, and facilitate conflict management.*** Following diagram illustrates various direct and indirect outcomes associated with empathy.



**Illustration 1: Empathy as a critical leadership skill**

HR practitioners can only be effective if they commit themselves to building strong relationships at every level, based on trust, respect and empathy. HR outperformed other functional leaders in empathy-related skills like building organizational talent, coaching, developing others and leading teams.

In the emerging and developing scenario, transformational leaders should adopt empathy to show their followers that they care for their needs and achievement. Nature of leadership is shifting, placing a greater emphasis on nurturing, and maintaining relationship in the organisation. Consequently, leaders now need to lead people, collaborate with others, be able to cross organizational and cultural boundaries and need to create shared direction, alignment, and commitment between social groups with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures. It stands to reason that empathy would go a long way toward meeting these people-oriented managerial and leadership requirements.

Study establishes that empathy has an influence on a manager's job performance. The major findings substantiate that empathy is positively related to job performance and empathy is more important to job performance in some cultures than others. Therefore, empathy is the leadership skill most strongly and consistently linked to performance. Leaders who were weaker in empathy were weaker in job performance. It is also the leadership skill that most leaders struggle with. Studies have shown that only 40 percent demonstrate that effectively.

However, having empathy is not the same thing as demonstrating empathy. While talking about how subordinates are rating managers on empathy skill, following four items are worth mentioning:

- Is sensitive to signs of overwork in others.
- Shows interest in the needs, hopes and dreams of other people.
- Is willing to help an employee with personal problems.
- Conveys compassion toward them when other people disclosed a personal loss.

Empathy as a competency skill can be developed and evolved at various levels as shown in the table below:

Level 1: Understands Unspoken Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrates active listening skills (such as asking probing questions, not interrupting)</li><li>• Recognises body language, facial expression, and/or tone of voice to understand the unspoken message</li><li>• Recognises unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns, and feelings</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Picks up signals when others are not feeling comfortable and displays consideration</li> </ul>
Level 2: Has Concern for Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open to diversity of opinion</li> <li>Understands both what is being said by a person and underlying reasons for the emotional state of the person</li> <li>Understands and appreciates other's concerns and feelings</li> <li>Probes to understand people's issues, unspoken thoughts, and feelings</li> <li>Displays openness to diversity of opinion and adapts behaviour to be helpful and considerate</li> </ul>
Level 3: Expresses Concern for Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes inferences that go beyond the explicitly expressed content and emotion</li> <li>Identifies a unique characteristic or the strengths of the other person</li> <li>Is sensitive to underlying problems, and why people act or behave the way they do</li> <li>Demonstrates empathy by correctly understanding reactions or emotions of others</li> <li>Builds trust by demonstrating respect for other's point of view</li> </ul>
Level 4: Acts as a Role Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Displays an in-depth understanding of the ongoing reasons for a person's behaviour and response</li> <li>Understands the longer-term reasons for behaviour</li> <li>Makes a balanced assessment of a person's strengths and weaknesses based on a deeper understanding of the individual</li> <li>Demonstrates an astute understanding of others' views by asking the right questions at the right time</li> </ul>
Level 5: Creates and Promotes an Environment of Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates a culture of mutual trust and respect</li> <li>Encourages others to read deeper into others' emotions by providing practical tips</li> <li>Creates the systems promoting empathy</li> </ul>

### 3. Discussion

Present day HR requires not only training but transformation also. Human centered approach to leadership development delivers results that matter and change that lasts. State of Workplace Empathy study (2018) found that 96% of employees find it important for employers to show empathy, and 92% consider this trait is underrated in their workplaces.

In the working environment, having empathy demonstrates a deep respect for co-workers and shows them you care, in contrast to exclusively following rules and guidelines. An empathic leader makes everyone feel like they have a place in the team and boost productivity, enthusiasm and allegiance. Improving work culture starts by enhancing relations between the people involved. Employees want to have a sense of belonging and connection at work, which can be achieved through mutual understanding.

Additionally, since empathy is an implicit trait, it is difficult to measure. Employees' morale can be evaluated through questionnaire and one-on-one conversations, but the direct influence and significance of empathy on the bottom line is problematic to track.

*One of the challenges of working in HR is the dual responsibility of enforcing policy and law along with being empathetic.* Ultimately, empathic employees can sometimes be taken advantage of by their co-workers when it comes to time management and expectations. In your attempt to make yourself more accessible, some might try to send more and more of their problems your way. Being an empathetic person does not automatically mean that he/she is weak, but he/she should still set some limits to protect his/her mental and workplace wellbeing.

**HR values compliance but lacks empathy. Oprah Winfrey, the renowned talk show host agrees that “Leadership is about empathy”**

Rita Gunther McGrath, Wharton Professor in her writing in the Harvard Business Review (2014) suggested that “we’ve seen three “ages” of management since the industrial revolution, with each putting the emphasis on a different theme namely **execution, expertise, and empathy.**” Whether or not we have formally arrived at the age of empathy, what we do know is that more and more people are talking about the importance of empathy, especially for HR.

Various empirical studies suggests that empathy is a critical leadership skill and argued that empathic leaders are more effective.

Each year, Buisnessolvers conduct a survey on empathy in the workplace. In 2018, 87% of CEO’s agreed that there is a connection between performance and empathy. (State of Workplace Empathy, Buisnessolvers, 2018)

In other industry studies, empathy is seen as the leadership skill “*most strongly and consistently linked with performance.*” (DDI World Report, 2018). Beyond performance, research by Dr Helen Reiss at Harvard Medical School, found that “*empathy promotes prosocial behaviour.*”

At the same time, it is observed that while our appreciation of the value of empathy is growing, our ability to be empathic may be lagging.

Barak Obama noted this when he said, “*I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit-our ability to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, to see the world through those that are different from us.*” Barak Obama’s concern about

our ability to be empathic is confirmed by the statistic from DDI World which says that **“Only 40% of leaders are able to demonstrate empathy effectively.”**

**1-2-3 sequence of empathy:** Many managers/leaders would struggle defining at a practical level what they and their organization can do to be more empathic. Thought leaders, Paul Ekman and Daniel Goleman suggest that empathy involves a 1-2-3 sequence:

*“In **cognitive** empathy we recognize what another person is feeling. In **emotional** empathy we actually feel what that person is feeling, and in **compassionate** empathy we want to help the other person deal with his situation and his emotions.”* Paul Ekman, Emotions Revealed, 2003.

*“In today’s psychology, the word ‘empathy’ is used in three distinct senses: Knowing another person’s feelings; feeling what that person feels; and responding compassionately to another’s distress. These three varieties of empathy seem to describe a 1-2-3 sequence: I notice you. I feel with you, and so I act to help you.”* Daniel Goleman, Social Intelligence, 2006.

In a nutshell, it’s not enough to just sense the other emotionally and understand their point of view cognitively: there is an expectation that we will act with compassion.

We see this sequence expressed in Roman Krznaric’s definition: *“Empathy is the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, **and using that understanding to guide your actions.**”* (Roman Krznaric, Empathy, 2014)

Businessolver’s State of Empathy Report found that *“90% of employees, HR professionals and CEO’s view face to face conversations and team meetings as the most empathic ways to communicate.”*

It’s not just meeting face to face, it’s how we conduct the meetings with empathy that matters. Empathic leaders are good communicators who listen well. They are attuned to the feelings and needs of their employees with whom they maintain positive relationships.

Employee’s also want their employers to know what is important to them and take compassionate action, showing they care in tangible ways.

The following 7 practices are identified in the State of Workplace Empathy Report (2018) for their potential to build empathy:

- i. Time off for family/medical issues
- ii. Offering flexible working hours
- iii. Recognizing employee milestones
- iv. Paid maternity/paternity leave
- v. Health insurance, and 401(k) contributions
- vi. Embrace Diversity
- vii. Use smart technology

HR leaders can integrate more empathy into the work environment by implementing following methods:

- Incorporate active listening. HR leaders can exemplify empathy and infuse the company culture from the top-down. Active listening and validation of others' perspectives let employees to feel valued and understood. HR leaders can educate managers about the importance of setting aside preconceived notions and sharing their ideas after they have actively listened to their employees.
- Connect with employees. HR leaders can meet individually with each employee over some time to get to know them. This allows HR leaders to be aware of employees' needs, and for employees to feel that they matter.
- Provide mentorship for employees. HR can connect employees with a "buddy" to coach them, offer advice, and understanding. This can help build mutually beneficial relationships between colleagues.
- Practice. Developing empathy is a skill. It takes time and commitment. HR leaders and employees can consciously commit to incorporating empathy into their relationships.

#### 4. Take away points

Knowing how to be empathic at a practical level, and what actions are viewed as empathic, *is the key to organizational effectiveness!* So that HR can be trusted to uphold policy and law fairly, and seen to be empathic, your success will depend on your ability to balance the important, but contradictory roles of compliance and empathy. You must do this in a manner that will leave you with peace of mind and a sense of pride for your work and profession.

Empathy makes it possible for understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of each employee in the workplace. It's a key component of functional, positive relationships. The more that leaders and employees practice this skill in the workplace, the more cohesive, diverse, and harmonious the company culture can become.

HR practitioners who choose *not* to be empathetic won't be relevant. HR is still about people, without people, there is no organisation. There are following five ways an organisation can encourage empathy in its workplace:

- i. Talk about empathy
- ii. Teach listening skills
- iii. Encourage genuine perspective taking
- iv. Cultivate compassion
- v. Support global managers

i. Talk about empathy in the workplace to signal its value.

Let leaders know that empathy matters. Many managers consider task-oriented skills such as monitoring and planning to be more important in controlling the performance of their team members. But research shows that understanding, caring, and developing others is just as important, if not *more* important, particularly in today's workforce.

Explain that giving time and attention to others fosters empathy, which in turn enhances your performance and improves your perceived effectiveness.

ii. Teach listening skills.

To understand others and sense what they're feeling, managers must be good listeners, skilled in active listening techniques, who let others know that they're being heard and express understanding of concerns and problems.

When a manager is a good listener, people feel respected, and critical trust on the team can grow. To show the highest levels of empathy in the workplace, managers should focus on listening to hear the meaning *behind* what others are saying by paying attention to not only the words being said, but also the feelings and values being shown, through nonverbal cues such as tone, pace of speech, facial expressions, and gestures.

iii. Encourage genuine perspective-taking.

Managers should consistently put themselves in the other person's place. For managers, this includes taking into account the personal lived experiences or perspectives of their employees. It also can be applied to solving problems, managing conflicts, or driving innovation. It's very helpful to understand the role social identity plays for both yourself and others. Empathy is particularly an imperative for effective organizational diversity initiatives.

iv. Cultivate compassion.

Support managers who care about how others feel and consider the effects that business decisions have on employees, customers, and communities. Go beyond the standard-issue values statement and allow time for compassionate reflection and response. Remember, your employees care about social responsibility; your organization should too.

v. Support global managers.

The ability to be empathetic leaders who can collaborate across boundaries is especially important for those working in global or cross-cultural organizations. Leading a multicultural team requires cultural intelligence and the ability to understand people who have very different perspectives and experiences.



And as the data we shared above shows, when managers hone their empathetic leadership skills, they improve their effectiveness and increase their chances of success in the job. Empathetic leaders are assets to organizations, in part because they are able to effectively build and maintain relationships — a critical part of leading organizations anywhere in the world.

Broadly speaking **Creating a More Empathetic Culture in the workplace and learning to be More Empathetic should be** the major take away from above discussion.

## 5. Conclusions

A very basic human emotion that has been lost in the shuffle i.e., empathy. HR is a service-based function, and while that service is often provided to the company, it shouldn't be at the expense of its employees' needs. Empathy is core to interacting with others, be it customers or employees. developing empathy comes from putting yourself in another's shoes. So first and foremost, it's time to put the 'human' back in Human Resources.

Bringing empathy into day-to-day job is one of the most important ways the HR professionals can turn around any negative emotions the employees have about their jobs. The ability to be compassionate and connect with others is critical to our lives, both personally and professionally. Demonstrating empathy in the workplace — a key part of emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness — also improves human interactions in general and can lead to more effective communication and positive outcomes, in both work and home settings.

## 6. Reference

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