

Influence of Empathetic Leadership on Employee Behaviour: An Exploration

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Abstract-

Business operations have become extremely challenging in the present VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world. Effective leadership can lead business organizations to operate successfully in complex and challenging business scenarios. The traditional command and control approach is inadequate to deal with the constant changes within and outside the organization especially in emerging start-ups which deal with innovative business model. The contemporary business operations demand a more sensitive, resilient, and responsive leadership approach to manage dynamic and complex organizational Issues. Employees are highly influenced by the leadership; hence empathetic leadership might be an effective approach to developing productive and engaging employees in such organizations. An empathetic leader is aware of and understands the need of the employees and is responsive towards the constraints and challenges her/his team members face. Empathetic leadership develops positive workplace culture, which fosters better collaboration, innovation, and high engagement levels, better work-life balance, which transform them into highly satisfied and productive employees. Empathetic leaders nurture better communication, develop trust that help motivate employees towards achieving organizational objectives. This article explores how empathetic leadership develops satisfied and productive employees in contemporary start-ups.

Keywords- Empathetic Leadership, Productive Employees, Motivation, Workplace Culture, Job Satisfaction

Introduction- The viability of an organisation largely depends on competent leadership. Influential leaders contribute to professional and personal leadership behaviours, including developing plans and aligning processes and procedures for accomplishing objectives. Leadership behaviour comes from analysing how employees interact with their superiors (Mastrangelo, Eddy, Lorenzet, 2004). A common trait of traditional leadership is a desire to keep the status quo and a resistance to innovation and change. It can restrict the team's ability to respond to changing circumstances or fulfil market demands. Also, the focus is typically on individual success and achievement rather than teamwork and cooperation. An environment of competition and conflict, rather than cooperation and collaboration, can result from this. Traditional leaders use hierarchy and authority to control. They may utilise terror to control followers, establishing an unpleasant environment. Also, the conventional leadership approaches are not suitable for managing the complex organisational issues of the twenty-first century, such as technology, globalisation, etc. On the other hand, creating personal relationships and being empathetic for the sake of being a decent person, empathy is essential in workplace leadership because it fosters trust, communication, and a sense of worth for team members. According to top firms across industries, the most crucial leadership trait is empathy.

Empathetic Leadership- a theoretical framework

Empathy is the capability to identify and connect to others feelings, emotions and experience. Empathetic leaders try to apprehend situations from others perspectives and reply compassionately. A true empathetic approach enhances relationships and performance in the workplace (<https://www.ccl.org>). Empathetic leadership helps builds faith. It helps comprehend others' emotions and reactions. Empathy sharpens senses and intuition to guide decision-making (Dascal).

Empathetic Communication

Empathetic communication acts as a catalyst to connect leaders emotionally with their team members. Poor communication from the organizational leadership results in creating problems, instead, direct communication from the supervisors has become more significant and is most sought by the employees nowadays and it also enhances ethical decision making, fostering highly engaging, innovative and creative teams. A polite and respectful approach in communication with employees, taking accountability of an employee's job satisfaction, praising the employees in success and being an anchor of hope in failures are the essential components of an empathetic communication. (Yue, Thelen, and Walden, (2022)

Innovation

Empathetic leadership has a positive influence on job satisfaction which is a necessary component for innovation. The innovation may not always need to be at the strategic level which deals with making a breakthrough in technology or process, but job satisfaction resulting from empathetic leadership can enhance everyday innovation in terms of intriguing a person to work outside his designated duties and responsibilities and also bring creativity and urge for continuous improvement in his team. Empathetic leadership can make an employee feel safe about exploring and testing new ways of accomplishing his job. (Kock et al, 2019)

Higher Retention

Understanding the emotional state of their followers is very important to empathetic leaders, and they are also willing to care about them, communicate effectively with them, and act in their followers' best interests. Having leaders like these makes the employees feel more at ease at work, which lowers their desire to resign in companies where the atmosphere is dynamic and has high levels of unpredictability, as is the case in start-up firms. It should be noted that when an employee leaves, it is a loss for the company as the investment that the company had made for education, training and development for the employee is wasted. It affects the morale of the existing employee negatively. Employee retention is a key to save the human resource expenses of a company. Empathetic Leadership therefore helps the employees to deal with situations which are difficult and full of stress. It helps employees in return to come out of their thought of quitting their job. (Wibowo & Paramita 2022)

Work Life Balance

Work-life balance is a subject that is being researched more and more, especially in light of changing leadership paradigms of the present-day world. For employees to achieve work-life balance; management support, communication, and understanding among employees is very essential. The most increasingly detrimental impact on work-life balance is caused by a rigid and insensitive manager who also makes the entire organization appear to be insensitive. One of the best indicators of work-life issues is the supervisor-subordinate relationship. (Westman, Brough, & Kalliath 2009)

Employee Productivity

Productivity is a philosophy that defines a comparative growth. It is the connection between quality created and the amount of work done to achieve these results. Productivity is an effort to efficiently use all resources needed to attain certain results or objectives. Productivity is the universal idea of providing more goods, services, and people with fewer resources. Productivity is an interdisciplinary approach to setting goals, planning, and production methods to use resources effectively while keeping quality. Workforce productivity is measured by performance. Employee productivity is not only limited to performance but it includes various important components like team spirit, punctuality, dedication, commitment, responsibility, loyalty, discipline, good attitude, sensitivity etc. (Prasetyo et al. 2021). Stress at work, emotional anxiety, psychological worries, and mental tension are the most frequently noted issues relating to the human mind of employees at work. The aforementioned issues have an impact on the employee's performance and conduct, which in turn affects their productivity (Santhosh & Anisha 2023).

Methodology

A literature review exhibited that Empathetic Leadership is an evolving and essential leadership style, and in many cases, it became crucial to treat employees empathetically. Detail study and review of relevant literature help identify essential components and drivers that activate empathetic leadership. A flowchart was developed during the study which describes the conceptual framework of empathetic leadership in the organization and how it influences the employee behaviour towards productivity. Also a structured questionnaire was developed during the study based on the identified variable from existing literature. The questionnaire was sent to the entrepreneurs and executives of start-ups for data collection. Responses of the respondents were then fed into SPSS for analysis and interpretation. A 5-point Likert type scale which comprises 1 for *Strongly Disagree*, 2 for *Disagree*, 3 for *Neither Agree Nor Disagree*, 4 for *Agree* and 5 for *Strongly Agree* has been used to record the agreement level of the respondents towards enquiry. The structured questionnaire was circulated among the respondents through Google form. SPSS was used to analyse the data collected from the respondents through questionnaire.

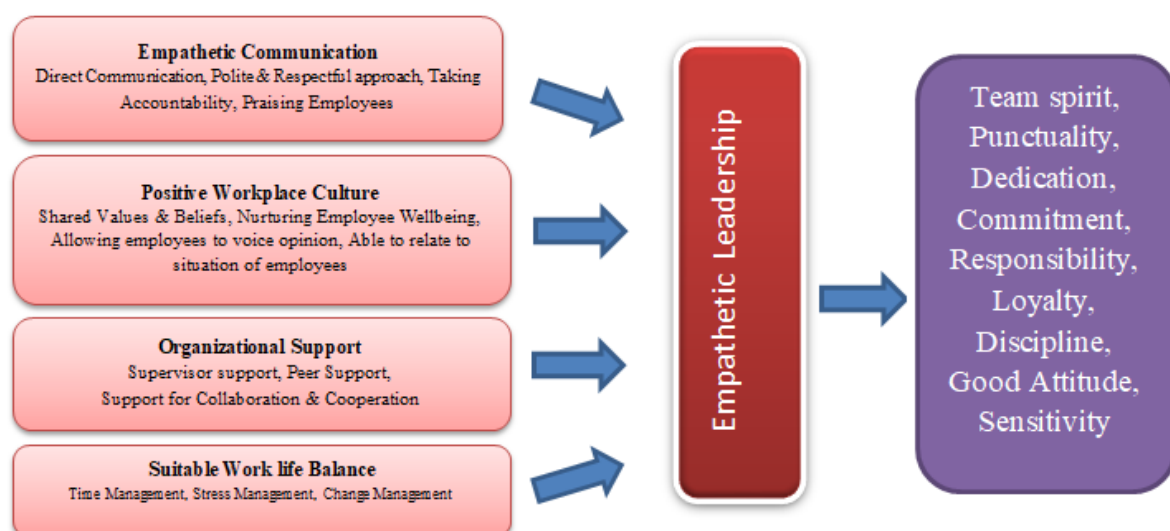


Fig-1 Source -Authors

Discussion on the Conceptual Framework

Empathetic leadership is the ability to understand the need of others and it enables the leaders to become aware of taking care and concern for their team members or employees (Dewey 2020). Empathetic leadership influences job performance positively (Gentry, Weber, Sadri 2007). The above flowchart (Fig-1) describes how some critical workplace factors and practices contribute to the development of empathetic leadership and finally it improves employee productivity and contributes towards organizational success. Empathetic communication which includes crucial elements like Direct Communication, Polite & Respectful approach, Taking Accountability, Praising Employees can help develops empathy in the workplace. Also, Positive Workplace Culture which comprises Shared Values & Beliefs, Nurturing Employee Wellbeing, Allowing employees to voice opinion, Able to relate to situation of employees contribute towards enhanced employee productivity. Similarly, Organizational Support Supervisor support, Peer Support, Support for Collaboration & Cooperation and Suitable Work life Balance which contains the components like Time Management, Stress Management, Change Management contribute towards the development of various employee attributes in the organization like Team spirit, Punctuality, Dedication, Commitment, Responsibility, Loyalty, Discipline, Good Attitude, Sensitivity which are some of the important visible factors of employee productivity.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha(α)	N of Items
.922	27

The structured questionnaire was distributed for collecting data on empathetic leadership from the respondents mostly from the start-ups. SPSS was used for analysis of the data collected from the respondents. Data from the respondents was fed to SPSS for analysis. At the beginning the Cronbach's Alpha was calculated or checking the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha .922 shows that the questionnaire is significantly reliable. Next, the components of each cluster (Fig-1) were computed in SPSS and new variable was developed such as the components of *Empathetic Communication* was computed to a new variable named 'EC', similarly components of *Positive Workplace Culture* were computed to 'PWC', components of *Organizational Support* were computed to OS, and the components of Work life Balance was computed to WLB. Also, the components of employee productivity (Dependant Variable) were computed to Productivity.

Table 2

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	252.103	4	63.026	3.095	.058 ^b
Residual	244.368	12	20.364		
Total	496.471	16			

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity, b. Predictors: (Constant), OS, EC, WLB, PWC

Table 2 describes a significant portion of the total variation in the dependent variable. The predictors (OS, EC, WLB, PWC) collectively account for a sum of squares of 252.103, with 4 degrees of freedom. The mean square for the regression component is 63.026, indicating the average amount of variation explained by each predictor. The regression model shows some indication of significance, suggesting a potential relationship between the predictors (OS, EC, WLB, PWC) and the dependent variable (Productivity).

Table 3

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.713 ^a	.508	.344	4.51264	1.561

a. Predictors: (Constant), OS, EC, WLB, PWC b. Dependent Variable: Productivity

R value is 0.713 in the table 3, indicating a moderately strong positive correlation between the dependent variable (Productivity) and the independent variables (OS, EC, WLB, PWC) collectively, and the R Square value is 0.508, describes that approximately 50.8% of the variance in Productivity can be explained by the independent variables. Table 3 also shows an adjusted R Square of 0.344 which proposes that around 34.4% of the variance in Productivity can be explained by the independent variables i.e. OS, EC, WLB, PWC. The standard error which estimates is 4.51264 and the Durbin-Watson statistic value which is 1.561, indicating that there is some positive autocorrelation present in the residuals.

Overall, the model suggests that the independent variables (OS, EC, WLB, PWC) collectively have a moderately strong positive relationship with the dependent variable (Productivity)

Table 4

Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
B	Std. Error				
(Constant)	10.188	14.462		.704	.495
EC	3.189	1.144	.743	2.787	.016
PWC	.788	.801	.270	.984	.345
WLB	.607	.493	.322	1.230	.242
OS	.797	.439	.479	1.813	.095

The Standardized Coefficient Beta in the Table 4 explains that the independent variables such as EC, PWC, WLB, and OS significantly influence employee productivity (Dependant Variable). Also, it illustrates that the impact of EC (*Empathetic Communication*) is highest among the variable followed by OS (*Organizational Support*), WLB (Work life Balance), PWC (*Positive Workplace Culture*) respectively. Both theoretical and analytical framework signifies the impact of empathetic leadership on the productivity of the employees in the organization.

Limitation

Following the mind-based approach to empathy, empirical studies frequently interpret leaders' empathy as something completely formed in their minds or as a personal trait, i.e., as a manifestation of their internally constructed ideas and feelings to their followers. Existing research on leadership and empathy is evidently hampered by a unidirectional perspective that views leaders as the empathizer and members as the empathised. Such a strategy overlooks the more nuanced function that empathy plays in the interpersonal relationship between leaders and their subordinates. Members being in a passive position helps to perpetuate the heroic, idealised perception of leadership. This one-sided approach ignores the possibility of empathising with leaders as well as the results of the reciprocal production and flow of empathy among leadership actors. (Jian,2022)

Conclusion

The modern business operation demands innovative approach to combat with the complexity in the market. It ranges from technological advancement to leadership style. Empathetic leadership style is better than the conventional and traditional leadership style. Empathetic leadership style is more sensible and approachable towards the development of employee productivity. Also, it leads to job

satisfaction and employee happiness. Empathetic leadership offer emotional support that generate highly engaging and satisfied employees for the organization which combat complex challenges within and outside the organization.

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