

Chapter 2

Empathy, Communication Skills, and Emotions: A Reflection Through the Organizational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The ability to understand and communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds and perspectives has become a competitive advantage, especially in the increasingly dynamic and interconnected business landscape of the 21st century. In this sense, empathy and communication skills play an important role in the business world. As companies continue to evolve in response to the complexities of the global environment, the emphasis on human connection through organizations, customers, suppliers, and employees has never been more crucial. This chapter reflects on the deep interconnection between empathy and communication skills, highlighting how these skills not only promote solid relationships but also how they can drive organizational success. It is therefore essential to understand how empathy and communication intertwine to create more effective leaders and managers and more successful organizations in a world where empathy is more than a virtue - it is an indispensable business strategy that makes it possible to go beyond traditional strategies and financial metrics.

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is a human quality that plays a vital role in our personal and professional lives, influencing the way we relate to others and how we understand ourselves (Bird & Viding, 2014). However, when looking at what the literature has produced on empathy, there are multiple approaches related to the topic, demonstrating a fragmented nature and the need to implement a more integrative approach to the concept. However, despite the diversity of research approaches on the topic, what is certain is that from the point of view of organizations, this is a topic absolutely neglected in the literature. In fact, studies

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that focus on the concept in an organizational context (including companies and the business world in general) are scarce, hence the relevance of this type of study for management. From this perspective and considering the specific nature of the concept of empathy and its relationship with communication and the relevance of the nature of emotions in an organizational context, we sought to develop an approach that provides research avenues for researchers who wish to delve a little deeper knowledge on this topic.

Therefore, given the above, the objective of this study is to contribute to clarifying the relevance of the concept for management, identifying the main lines of investigation that appear in the literature around the concept of empathy. This study will reflect on the profound relationship between empathy, communication, and emotion management, highlighting how empathy is the link that unites these two crucial spheres. In fact, empathy not only enriches the ability to communicate effectively but also plays an essential role in promoting emotional intelligence and building solid interpersonal relationships. Developing empathy can positively impact the way you communicate and manage emotions, making leaders more effective, employees more understanding, and, ultimately, human beings more connected and compassionate.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways: i) it presents a structured view of the concept of empathy and its relationship with communication and emotions in an organizational context; ii) allows aligning future research on empathy in an organizational context; iii) proposes a theoretical approach to the topic, different from what has been presented in the literature; iv) contributes to the dissemination of the concept in the management lexicon, similar to other studies with identical intentions (Andrade, Franco, & Mendes, 2022).

This chapter has the following structure: a first part dedicated to the literature review, analyzing the nature of empathy, the importance of its relationship with communication and the management of emotions; a second part dedicated to the methodology that allowed identifying the main lines of investigation in the literature regarding the concept of empathy and finally, a third part dedicated to conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Distinctive Nature of Empathy

In the real world of organizations, the concept of empathy is not part of the normal lexicon of management and business. This is a concept that is not as prominent as other traditional management concepts, such as efficiency, profitability, productivity, among others. In fact, there are several reasons for this, such as the history of management itself, linked to the principles of mass production control, typical of Taylorism, ignoring the human side of workers and their emotions, above all centered on the logic of measuring results (Tweedie, Wild, Rhodes, & Martinov-Bennie, 2019). Research has sought to describe the psychological mechanisms associated with empathy, mainly through knowledge of the way in which affective experiences are triggered (Singer & Tusche, 2013) and which lie at the basis of complex social interactions (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). The study of empathy takes us into the field of neuroscience and behavior, underpinning studies on different behavioral conditions related to autism spectrum disorders or alexithymia (Bird & Viding, 2014).

The literature has shown that human interaction is based on a set of affective responses (Singer & Tusche, 2013). This psychological ability to understand what another person feels in a similar situation

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