

The Role of Empathy in Developing the Leader's Emotional Intelligence

Leonardo BADEA

„Valahia” University, Târgoviște
leobadea@yahoo.com

Nicolae Alexandru PANĂ

Ministry of Administration and Interior, Bucharest
alexandru.pana@mai.gov.ro

Abstract. *The fundamental premise from which we start in this article is that the leader counts, that the top-level people certainly affect the productivity of any organization and that awareness of empathic capacity for each leader, the discovery of the constitutive capacities of the empathic phenomenon and their involvement in particular by them proves to be necessary. The capacity to be empathic is a prerequisite to optimize the leader's relations with subordinates and a condition for effective communication.*

Keywords: self-awareness; empathy; emotion management; emotional intelligence; leader.

JEL Codes: M53, M54.

REL Codes: 14C, 14K.

Emotional Intelligence, or EQ, has become more and more noticeable in recent years, but there are a few people who realize how important it is for success in every area of life. The so-called “weak” features, but which do so much good for our success, must be saved from marginalization, must be taken into consideration by educators, business people, media and, non the less, the leaders. Emotional intelligence is the degree to which an individual is able to react to his own emotions and those of others. This capacity of being able to manage our emotions is therefore “that key factor that makes us start making lemonade, when life gave us lemons, instead of wasting ourselves in bitterness”.

People (leaders) who are managing emotionally – who know and master their feelings and who distinguish and deal effectively with the feelings of others – are in advantage in any area of life, be it sentimental and intimate relationships or compliance with unwritten rules that govern success in organizational politics. Those who have well developed emotional capacity are more likely to be happy in life, to be effective and to master the mental habits that underpin their own productivity. Those who can not control their emotional life and lead internal battles come to sabotage the ability to focus on work and on clear thinking. EQ is what allows the leader to improve his own self-understanding and the way to understand, motivate and support his people.

Simply, emotional intelligence is usually found at people that we call “witty” or having that extra sense that allows them to manage easily through difficult situations. Most problems we are confronted with are the result of faulty communication, understanding of both their own and the others behavior, as well as the inability to see things from the perspective of another person or to absorb the impact of their actions.

In 2003, Daniel Goleman said that the main task of any leader was to channel the emotions of his group in the right direction, and identified five types of relevant emotional intelligence in leadership and management:

1. Knowing their own emotions affects their leadership, feedback and resources: knowing their strengths and weaknesses, confidence in their capabilities, intuitive recognition of those personal actions that affect the others;
2. Managing emotions – self-control: mastery of their emotions and a way to act honestly and with integrity, channeling their emotions to achieve positive goals;
3. Ability to use emotions productively – motivation: emotional tendencies that lead us to personal fulfillment;
4. Empathy – perception and awareness of the emotions of others;
5. Capacity of routing (driving) interpersonal relationships – sociability: forging links with others, settling conflicts, communicating in a clear and compelling way, stimulating others to work cooperatively,

developing skills to analyze and understand the interpersonal relationships; ability to negotiate disagreements and resolve conflict; interpersonal problem-solving plan; opening (positive sense) and ease of communication; getting involved with tact (gently, carefully, politely); being pro-social and harmoniously in a group; being cooperative, participative, helpful, reliable, caring; being democratic in the way you treat others, in official relations.

Empathy is the ability to get an insight or recognize the emotions of others. Empathy does not mean that we live emotions of other people, but it means that we understand other people's emotions from our experiences. Empathy does not mean for one to identify with another thus canceling his own personality, but to get in his mind and soul to understand how he perceives reality. It is built on openness to feelings of others, on the ability to read information from nonverbal channels. We recall that, in interpersonal communication, nonverbal communication is at least 60%. Words can express relatively few of people's feelings, therefore empathy is based on the ability to intuit people's feelings, attributing the utmost attention to nonverbal information: voice tone, mimics, gestures and movements of the person, etc. It was found that 90% of the means of expressing emotional states are nonverbal. For example, a person under stress has an oscillating tone of voice and low intensity, involuntary gestures, proving irritation and anxiety.

As a leader, by means of empathy we have the possibility to better understand our subordinates, to intuit their thoughts and feelings, to anticipate their behavior and even to act on it accordingly. Empathy appears as a specific human need being based on a validated social experience that allows nearings or rejections as a reflex of the possible penetration of the psychology of the other. Goleman pays particular attention to both empathy and ability to manage, lead and handle interpersonal relations, subsumed under the concept of "interpersonal power". Empathy is seen as a capacity of transposition that is imaginative-conceptual, but also emotional, with functions of knowledge, foresight, communication, and performance inclined contagion. Interpersonal power could be defined as a higher self-control state, the ability to overcome anxiety and stress.

Having concluded on the definitions of empathy, S. Marcus believes that the focal point on the empathic concept is the conduct of mentally reproducing the states, thoughts, actions of the other and placing yourself in his position. Empathy is achieved by imaginative-conceptual transposition in the reference system of another – assumption of the way of thinking and achieving the social role – and emotional transposition, the action of activating an experience, substituting in the mentioned experiences by identifying the partner's emotional status, in other words taking over his state of mind.

Empathy, the prerogative of the leader

With regard to leadership, Goleman argues that emotions are contagious, especially the positive ones. Therefore we are open/vulnerable to emotional influences of others, and this can be used by leaders in two ways:

1. Leaders can positively influence the emotional climate of the organization by creating a situation of resonance, in which the organization's members work at maximum efficiency,

2. Leaders may adversely affect the emotional climate of the organization by creating a situation of dissonance, in which members of the organization will feel frustrated and fail to operate at maximum efficiency.

People "emotionally empowered" have the ability to unconsciously imitate the emotions seen in others, having the same mimicry, gestures, tone of voice and other nonverbal aspects. It is a recognition in his/her own way of the other person's feelings. When two people interact, the affection is transferred from the person that expresses the feelings stronger to the one that is more passive. Strong emotional relationships lead to "sentimental synchronicity". Emotional contagion, the power to synchronize emotionally, is encountered at individual leaders, allowing them to organize the group, negotiate solutions, to set multiple personal connections, to determine the cause of negative feelings and personal worries.

When acquiring authority, empathy and interpersonal skills play a special role, but also the participation in exchanging emotional messages, often at imperceptible levels (subliminal) – with a power of contagion and increased influence leading to "synchronicity of feelings". This emotional contagion allows groups to organize, the negotiation of solutions, setting of multiple personal connections, determining the causes of negative feelings and personal anxiety, self-motivation and motivating others etc.

To expect the personal influence to be bracing, beneficial and constructive, a leader must himself be self-controlled. Leaders with increased EQ know how to detect signs of increased anxiety, to determine the stimuli to calm the anxiety arising in the team and to direct others towards an optimistic and enthusiastic state that facilitates solving with the maximum yield various difficult problems.

In any human group the leader is the one who has the full capacity to influence the emotions of all. These emotions lead to performance if they are channeled by the enthusiasm and a low yield if people feel hatred, resentment or anxiety. Subordinates expect from a leader an encouraging emotional connection, they expect empathy. Any management includes this basic rule, for better or for worse. When leaders channel emotions in a positive direction they get what is best from people – this is the effect of resonance. When leaders channel emotions in a negative direction, this produces dissonance, thereby undermining the

emotional foundations that allow people to give their best with maximum efficiency. The efficiency of the leader in covering this basic emotional dimension chiefly determines decay or prosperity for an organization.

The empathic ability has a particular importance in leadership. Capacity to be empathic is a prerequisite to optimize the leader's relations with subordinates and for effective communication. Leader's empathy is a spontaneous and rapid way of entering the mood of the subordinate. Understanding the intentions, feelings and thoughts of others, of course with the approximation permitted by such knowledge, we can have relatively accurate expectations of the partner's behavior, which is extremely important in establishing desirable interpersonal relations and therefore allowing us to create a behavioral strategy towards them. Important is that the leader can correctly evaluate what his subordinate feels, lives, thinks, he can implement his psychological situation and, through effective communication, can create appropriate conditions for influence. Like any ability, empathic ability is an innate psycho-physiological potential but is performed and developed through interpersonal process knowledge, and, if the subject wants it, through self-training.

The primary responsibility of leaders is to induce positive feelings to the people they lead. This happens when that leader creates resonance – a reservoir of positive elements which releases all the best in subordinates. The idea expressed determines us to conclude that the basic role of leadership is strictly related to showing emotions. From this point of view this basic dimension of business management, although often invisible or ignored completely, determines how well all the other things started by the leader will perform. This is why emotional intelligence is so important in the equation of obtaining success in leadership.

The management based on emotional intelligence and then the ability to show empathy is constructed from connections with neurology. Revolutionary discoveries in the field of brain research shows that mood and actions of leaders have a decisive impact on those he directs, and casts a new light on the power that has a leadership based on emotional intelligence and then leader's empathic ability, namely the power to inspire and stimulate passion and enthusiasm, motivation and dedication, to support people, to give confidence and to show understanding for people who leaders work with.

We believe that the primary responsibilities of a leader are to induce enthusiasm, optimism, passion, to have confidence in his subordinates for conducted activities and to create an atmosphere of cooperation in the organizational environment. Each of the emotional intelligence domains, in the form provided by Daniel Goleman, contributes to resonant leadership with a set of essential skills.

Raised areas are closely interlinked with each other in a dynamic relationship. For example a leader can not adequately master emotions if he is not aware of them. And if the leader's emotions are out of control, then his ability to manage relationships suffers. Self-knowledge is the one that facilitates both empathy and self-control, but these two combined allow a better management of relations. To conclude, self-knowledge is the base of emotional leadership. If we can not detect our own emotions we will never know how to handle them. A leader without having developed empathic capacity could never understand the actions of people that work with him, actions largely determined by their emotions. Leaders who demonstrate empathy are connected to their inner signals. They notice how they are influenced by their own feelings and how they affect their professional performance. Leaders who lack a certain empathic capacity in relations with other people may lose patience in response to their actions. Self-knowledge plays a critical role when it comes to a leader's empathy – to understand how somebody else perceives the situation; if one always ignores his own feelings he will not be able to notice the feelings or emotions of others.

Empathy provides the step to the basic responsibility of the leader – to generate resonance. If he is aware of the feelings of others and demonstrates understanding of their feelings and emotions, the leader may say and act in the best way, whether to settle fears, to calm the anger, to join the fun or to cultivate an atmosphere of cooperation and trust. Under these conditions harmonization allows the leader to understand the values and common priorities by which to guide the group.

A leader without the ability to empathize will respond without noticing a wrong tone of his voice, his words and deeds thus creating negative reactions within the group. Empathy, which also means to listen to others and to understand their views and behavior, allows leaders to connect the emotional channels between subordinates.

One of the main characteristics of empathic ability in leadership is that it enhances and prolongs the emotional impact of the leader. Leader's empathic ability level is what determines the efficiency with which they identify, manage and channel the feelings of those whom they relate, thereby helping the group reach its preset objectives. Under an empathetic leader, people enjoy a common level of understanding, share ideas, learn from others, make decisions together and complete the actions. This creates an emotional bond between group members, allowing them to maintain their focus even in the midst of change and profound uncertainty. Without emotional involvement, the alleged leader can only manage the situation – but it does not belong to him – and that is not full leadership.

What would the working implications be for a team when leader is unable to handle his emotions and anger caused by misunderstanding his subordinates' feelings (lack of empathy)? In this case we consider the effects on thought would be disastrous: when someone is upset or angry, he can not remember, learn and even less make a decision.

Another raised feature of the empathic capacity is that empathy is the label we put to the interpretation on the motivational forces that we work with as well as to those that work on ourselves. Emotional motivation concerns strictly the human dimension of the individual. This envisages for the individual to feel as good as possible within the organization, to be appreciated and liked by colleagues, bosses or subordinates, to enjoy prestige, but also be in the consent of the leader. And the leader must inspire to him this only through empathic events because of personal reasons. The motivation is centered on satisfying the emotional expectations, with a major energizing role in each person's work. Giving evidence of trust and understanding for people working with a leader, they may feel slightly motivated by the fact that the one who leads them understands their feelings and emotions gives them tasks and assigns them to assume their roles. When a relationship is an effective collaboration, we increase our ability to get what we want or what we need from the other side. Nobody will give us what we want if they feel misunderstood or attacked. In this case we would be looked at with suspicion or anger. By contrast, whenever the others feel they are in "agreement" with them, they feel motivated. The power of empathy means that if a leader is able to perceive what another person thinks and feels – even if they differ greatly from its own perspective – and his own intuition may be expressed in words, that person feels understood. This is likely to weaken any tension that exists in the working atmosphere and to shape the close collaboration that helps a leader to get what he wants and also contribute to creating new interpersonal relationships.

Empathic capacity evaluation should seek at greater rate attitudes toward achievement, the joys of others and the degree of emotional involvement as well as the satisfaction towards the achievements of our peers. Theoretically, such a thing would seem utopist, but a minimum wisdom will reveal that sincerely enjoying the positive emotions of others, we will be happier, both in intensity and the duration in time. Certainly an empathic attitude ensures the adoption of proper methods of psycho-social interaction, the establishment of effective and productive relationships, a behavior based on skills or interpersonal skills. Motivation takes an important place in all of these issues, given the fact that the lack of it makes difficult, if not impossible, any human action.

One of the most important factors in maximizing the results of an organization is the degree to which its leader is able to create a harmony between members, able to help them reap the full talent of group members.

The empathic ability of the leader, in terms of its strength of coverage, is a feature that contributes to optimize its relations with subordinates. The power of understanding the other, in the act of leadership, becomes the premise for authentic relationships and an appropriate strategy, because in the art of leadership knowledge occupies a special place for those who are ruled. The subordinate, beyond age and function, is, like any man, a living reality, not an abstract notion, he is not only intelligence, but emotion, he is not only reason, but also desire and impulse. Through the medium of empathy a leader can better understand the subordinate; he can have an insight of his thoughts, feelings, behavior and ways to influence it accordingly. Empathy appears as a specific human need, being based on a validated social experience that allows nearings or rejections as a reflex of the possible penetration of the psychology of the other. The need for empathy is corroborated with the need for dialogue, with changing one's perspective with the others. It is the ability to understand the state of feeling of another person (subordinate). Empathy demonstrated by a leader allows him to understand and anticipate the behavior of others. Often, empathic communication appears as a relationship that is nonverbal, default, with a content that is ideational but especially emotional, which allows the leader to easily adapt to the psychology of his subordinates.

An effective leader uses empathy to achieve interpersonal knowledge. The role of empathy in interpersonal knowledge is at least as important as the intellectual factors and manifested in a favorable style (S. Marcus). Defining features of this empathic personality style consists of transposition capacity in the external psychology model (another person) or attitude-emotional projection combined with the perception of reality through the perspective of the external model, just like being the other person. Leaders with a high level of empathy combine emotional experience that is rich and nuanced with its flexibility in terms of cognitive, by using and applying different criteria adjusted to the situation. Regarding knowledge on the team as a whole, varied work, the solution required by individual differences requires empathic knowledge of subordinates.

There are some studies suggesting that empathy plays a critical role in the effectiveness and emergence of leadership. Pescosolido (2002) argues that group members who have greater empathic capacities have a higher chance to emerge as informal leaders in working groups. In a qualitative field study of 20 groups, Pescosolido also found that members with high empathy understood emotional reactions at events of work better and then were able to easily and accurately display an appropriate emotional response to the event – this is the importance of empathy as the ability of leaders. Recognizing the emotional uncertainties of the group members and the role of an appropriate response model, empathic leaders in his study were able to increase satisfaction and performance across the whole group.

“Empathy is one of the most important factors if an authentic leader wants to integrate in a group”. This is a claim of Kellet, Humphrey, and Sleeth (2002) representing the conclusion of their study on the relationship between empathy and leadership. They found that empathy was one of two paths to success in leadership: a way for the execution of complex tasks and the second through empathic events. Although few studies have examined the way to leadership through empathic events, the coefficient obtained suggests that empathy should not be a neglected variable.

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee argue that empathy is the fundamental power of social consciousness, of social efficiency in daily work. They define empathy as “feeling the emotions of others, understanding their perspectives and active communication and in their areas of concern” and argue that empathy means to transform people’s beliefs that work with the leader into sincere appreciation and then to take smart decisions that transform belief in response, and, most importantly, that empathy makes resonance possible; leaders who are deprived of this empathic ability act only in ways that give rise to dissonance.

Researchers have often noted the importance that transformational leaders have good empathic capacity, being very receptive to the emotions of others (Bass, Avolio, 1994). Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) discuss the differences between true transformational leaders and the pseudo-transformational ones. Those who make changes to benefit the organization as a whole are the true transformational leaders, while those looking to make changes for their own benefits are the pseudo-transformational ones. The same two authors argue that leaders try to show emotions to influence their subordinates’ perceptions about themselves. Successful pseudo-transformational leaders are able to perceive emotions and experiences of their followers and to use them only to manipulate. In contrast, the real leaders, the transformational, show their true emotions and create an emotional connection with their followers and subordinates and use those emotions and feelings to add the activity.

Concluding on leadership with a high level of empathy ability, we can say that they are worthy of the following characterization:

1. They are able to create stronger interpersonal relationships
2. They are better at self-motivation
3. They easily motivate the subordinates
4. They perform better as leaders
5. They adapt easier to changes
6. They create a climate of cooperation
7. They are more reconciled with themselves
8. They are trusted by subordinates

9. They create an emotional connection between members of the organization

10. They create resonance.

Unfortunately, empathy, contrary to the importance proven, is often left unused by some of the leaders because when they need it most, they are the least open to it – that is when they are subjected (as leaders) to stress, misunderstanding or discomfort, they are irritated they defend. In such moments their comments automatically reflect their perspective. They hasten to defend their position; they argue their behavior and attack the attitude of others (subordinates), which creates a hostile attitude, stressful in organizational climate. The result is an emotional escalation that ultimately is counterproductive for all involved. Example: “imagine that one day a subordinate arrives at work upset and nervous and speaks in a disrespectful tone – the overall behavior generated by mishaps occurring in his family”. The leader has the momentary temptation to respond in kind, which may be likely to fuel a conflict that at the first spark may explode. Rather than respond directly the leader would have to think for a moment that the purpose of the behavior described above is not to offend others or lead the objectives of the organization to failure. In this case, the smart way for a leader to give response to the situation is to change the registry. Something makes him angry and it is very important for a leader to keep his temper until understanding what is happening, and show understanding. In the case of a true leader we are dealing with a double challenge: to use self-consciousness to calm his growing irritation state, to retain his impulses and to act reasonably towards the instigations, and to seek empathy to understand the other person’s position and in turn, the subordinate would feel liberated and understood.

References

- Covey, S.R. (1989). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Free Press, New York
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., McKee, A. (2005). *Inteligența emoțională în leadership*, Editura Curtea Veche, București
- Ketz de Vries, M.(2003). *Arta și măiestria de a conduce*, Editura Codecs, București
- Marcus, S. (1997). *Empatie și personalitate*, Editura ATOS, București
- Sfârlog, B. (2005). *Dicționar despre și pentru lider*, Editura Centrul de Studii Sociale Procesual-Organice, București
- Stein, S.J., Book, H. E. (2003). *Forța inteligenței emoționale. Inteligența emoțională și succesul vostru*, Editura Alfa, București
- Zlate, M. (2004). *Leadership și management*, Editura Polirom, Iași