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**Verner Worm and Michael Jakobsen**

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# Empathy in Global Business

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the concept of empathy in multinational organizations. In the 21st century “You need to be soft to get hard results!” as McDonald (2008) aptly stated. Based on contextual changes in both customer clienteles and among younger employees, empathy or compassion is becoming central concepts in international business. We analyse the concept of empathy in a global context describing it mainly from a phenomenological perspective, but also introduce other approaches for comparative and informative reasons. After having defined empathy as consisting of three elements i.e. know yourself, know the other and create positive communication, we focus on intentional mode of understanding involving envisaging the actions and emotions of ‘the other’. Empathy, triggered and mediated by various social encounters, assume different form and encompassing an array of possibilities for interpersonal understanding depending on the constitution of a given context. Based on this we analyze Maersk Line’s organizational culture and how employees navigate it accordingly.

**Keywords:** *Empathy, Phenomenology, Organizational cultures, Employee navigation, Maersk Line*

## **Introduction**

As the world during the 21<sup>st</sup> century is getting more globalized and therefore increasingly interconnected group projects and others form of interpersonal cooperation is becoming a way of life in the corporate world. In addition, non-manual work is increasing while manual work is diminishing meaning that the quality of interpersonal relations is becoming increasingly important. Furthermore genuine behavior is becoming increasingly important in complex and global organizations where many ethnic groups are represented. Surface acting instead of genuine interpersonal concerns (e.g. meaning smiling when you do not feel like smiling) cannot solve this challenge. It can even be costly for both employees and organizations alike, through lost productivity in the organization and poorer health for the employees (Hausknecht, Hiller & Vance, 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to introduce and clarify the concept of empathy in global business studies as the concept might bring benefits both to global companies' organizational structure and customer and employee relations. This is due to increasing pressure for a more empathic governed world from the growing middle classes in terms of a more flexible work environment. This also pertains to the work environment within companies (Rifkind, 2009). Until now empathy has mainly been practiced in social work and within the health sector in general as well as to some extent in leadership studies (Ventura, 2018), but has not as of now played a significant role in global business organizations, where cultural and structural differences will impact the perception of empathy.

Furthermore, the aim of the article is to discuss the preconditions for creating a more empathetic environment in global business organizations. It will be shown that the different aspects of increasing collaborative requirements and abilities best can be conceptualized by employing the concept of empathy so as to improve the ability to connect constructively among organizational stakeholders such as employees, customers and other vendors.

Furthermore, that the concept do carry increasing importance is shown by some universities such as Columbia University in New York that teach courses on empathy in a business as well as in a non-business context (Beam, 2018)

McDonald aptly mentioned that soft behavior is required for hard results in the business world. It requires that we redefine how we conduct business because in our professional life we have to a large extent excluded “friendship love” much to the detriment of people and profit (McDonald, 2008). This is in strong contrast to the more narcissistic traits of many leaders during the industrial revolution (Vaknin, 2010).

In the following practical implications will be illustrated in case study of the world’s biggest container transportation company Maersk Line. Due to the fact that the shipping industry in general has been considered a masculine business, where feelings was not something that was dealt with among its members, this industry is ideal as a case in the discourse on empathy in international business studies.

### **The Concept of Empathy**

The mode of creating self-images in a given context can be illustrated by what Edith Stein, in the first PhD thesis written about empathy and supervised by the phenomenologist philosopher Edmund Husserl in 1917, has labelled as iterated empathy. This means that I put myself into the other subject's situation i.e., (consciously) simulate him, expecting that he (or she) in turn puts himself into my position. In this way, I can figure out that for the other subject to be able to ascribe intentional acts to me, he must identify with me as a flesh-and-blood human being, with its egocentric viewpoint necessarily differing from one’s own. In later studies, it is not required that the counterpart is empathetic as well as will be shown in the discussion below

Empathy (understand as another) or other concepts with similar but not identical meaning, such as altruism meaning selflessness (Batson et al. 2011) or compassion, meaning feeling for another and to some extent emotional intelligence, where the point of departure is the self (Coleman,1995) as opposed to empathy which has the other as point of departure, have been used among the world’s philosophers, but only discussed in a more consistently and scientifically way over the last 50 years (Krznaric, 2018).

The historical development of the main trends in the concept of empathy:

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition of empathy</b>	<b>The role of empathy in an organization</b>
<b>Kohut</b>	Empathy as introspection borrowed from one person's attempt to experience another person's internal life when he maintains the position of an objective observer	Empathy as a helper in collecting data on a person's world.
<b>Rogers</b>	Empathy means to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if they are conditions.	Empathy as one of three basic conditions to establish proper relations among organization's members. The remaining two conditions are congruence and acceptance.
<b>Seligman</b>	Empathy is the ability to see the good points of the other person even if they conflict with my immediate desires and needs.	To cultivate and practice empathy in conflict management to achieve a common understanding and acceptance on organization basic values and objectives.

Table 1. Own creation of the table based on Refkin 2009)

For example, in the 1950s Abercrombie observed that when medical students worked collaboratively together in small groups to diagnose patients, they could make the diagnosis more correct when assessing a patient's medical condition compared to when working alone (Cited in Rifkin, 2009). In the above study it was shown that empathy can be developed through personal development like more recent concepts such as cultural and emotional intelligence.

The German word *emföhlung* was translated into empathy. *Emföhlung* was first used in 1873 in the field of aesthetics by Vischer. Lipps introduced it into the field of social cognition and Titchener, an American psychologist, translated it into English in 1901 (Zahavi, 2014). Before that, the English language did not have a similar concept.

According to Calloway-Thomas, empathy is the moral glue that holds society as well as multinational enterprises (MNEs) together. Unless humans have reciprocal behavior that lead to empathetic behavior, society as we know it will crumble. Humans are united by the powers and possibilities of empathy (Calloway-Thomas, 2017). Calloway-Thomas see an empathetic transformation taking place during these years and talk about an empathetic civilization.

Empathy has many definitions that encompass a wide range of emotional states, including caring for other people and having a desire to help them; experiencing emotions that match another person's emotions; discerning what another person is thinking or feeling; and making less distinct differences between the self and the other.<sup>1</sup>

Decety and Jackson (2004) present a comprehensive definition of empathy that in a convincing way illustrates the complexities of empathy as presented by different academic disciplines ranging from developmental psychology to neuroscience. They see empathy as 1) shared neural representation, 2) self-awareness and 3) mental flexibility. Finally, they emphasize that regulation of emotions is the basic micro component of empathy.

Krznaric 2011 has provided the so far most simple definition of empathy, namely that empathy is the art of stepping into the shoes of other persons and seeing the world from their perspective.

## **Phenomenology and Empathy**

According to Husserl something like empathy also forms the basis of both our practical and moral evaluations and of what might with a modern concept be called intercultural understanding, meaning the construction of a "foreign world" against the background of one's own "homeworld", i.e., one's own familiar cultural heritage. Husserl studied many of these phenomena in detail that formed the background for creating the concept of empathy. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/>).

A central concept in phenomenology is intentionality, which can be defined as "the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>. Accessed 1.11.2017



and states of affairs" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentionality>). In addition, according to Husserl, intersubjective experience plays a fundamental role in our constitution of both ourselves as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects, and the objective spatio-temporal world.

Intersubjectivity comes in when we undergo acts of empathy. Intersubjective experience is empathic experience; it occurs in the course of our conscious attribution of intentional acts to other subjects, in the course of which we put ourselves into the other one's shoes. In order to study this we must bracket our belief in the existence of the respective target, and as experiencing subject ask ourselves which of our further beliefs justify that existence-belief as well as our act-ascription.

Husserl emphasized a deeper empathetic understanding of others' comportment to seek to uncover the person's motives and goals. Thereby Husserl claims that the ability is connected to our knowledge of the person's individual character. A richer understanding of another can be developed through an on-going personal relationship in which our familiarity with the other person's character is developed through empathetic perception and communicative opportunities (Jardine & Szanto, 2017).

A phenomenological understanding of empathy is a kind of intentional act whose basic form consist in perception like experience of the other. Phenomenologist emphasize a more cognitively demanding mode of empathetic understanding involving envisaging the actions of another person from their own perspective. Empathy is seen as mediated by various social contexts and therefore assume different forms. For mature human beings empathetic understanding normally employs some kind of social typification. Phenomenologists distinguish between quasi-perceptual level empathy and accomplished empathy and emphasize that empathy is a multi-layered mode of intentionality encompassing a rich array of possibilities for interpersonal or intersubjective understanding (Jardine & Szanto, 2017).

To sum up phenologist use the three elements of empathy i.e. know yourself, know the other and communication possibilities to add up with the intentional intersubjective understanding founded in a contextual or multi-contextual mode.

## **Other Definitions of Empathy**

Krznaric's definition of empathy stresses the point that it is important to understand where someone is coming from to be able to sense the feelings, beliefs, hopes and experiences that make up their view of the world.

Vaknin (2007) add a distinction between cold and warm empathy: Cold empathy refers to an intersubjective agreement as to the mental content (especially emotions) between two or more human subjects. Warm empathy, on the other hand refers to the emotional response to Cold empathy. Cold empathy is thus an act of taxonomy and an attempt to overcome the barriers posed by the inaccessibility of the private languages of the empathies and the metaphor. It entails a comparison of the mental states of the subjects, based on introspection and the classification of said mental states within agreed linguistic and cultural frameworks, vocabularies, and contexts. This distinction is like the distinction between cognitive and affective empathy.

Cognitive empathy building generally refers to Piaget' s studies of children as young as three years old who reacted on other children's experiences such as by crying or laughing or by doing the same (Piaget,1950). This refers to that people are social animals (Borke, 1971). This study has been used in the literature to prove that people are empathetic, but it is a different kind of empathy than among children above around eight years, where they begin to differentiate themselves from other.

The affective aspects of life are about similar feelings. If one person has anguish the other also feel anguish. The focus of affective empathy is on feelings and in most cases similar feeling.

Despite that there is no consensus about the definition of empathy, most will agree to the following definition; "Empathy is the ability to interpret other's feelings and re-experience them oneself and depicts an important concept central to emotionally intelligent behavior" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, pp. 194-195).

As mentioned above, a similar but less academic definition of 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 in an intercommunicative way (Krznaric, 2015). The above definitions focus on an active attempt by one to get inside another or to reach out through a deliberate intellectual effort compared to other definitions of empathy that do not comprise the action reach out part according to Davis (1996).

Furthermore, empathy is close to emotional intelligence (EI) which Coleman define as; “1) knowing one’s emotions, 2) managing emotions, 3) motivating oneself, 4) recognizing emotions in others, 5) handling relationships” (Coleman 1995, p.46-47). The difference is that empathy has a stronger focus on the other party than EI.

We need to clarify the difference between two other somewhat similar concepts, namely empathy and sympathy. If you see a homeless person living under a bridge you may feel sorry for him and give him some money as you pass by. That is sympathy, not empathy. On the other hand, if you try to look at the world through his eyes, to consider what life is really like for him, and perhaps have a conversation that transforms him from a faceless stranger into a unique individual, then you are empathizing.

Finally, empathy and compassion are sometimes thought of as covering the same areas. Dutton and Workman (2011) write that compassion is generative force. According to them, compassion as an idea opens to new resources thus creating new insights. Other researchers emphasize that compassion means to “suffer with others” (Krznaric, 2015, p 12). Empathy encompasses sharing both positive and negative feelings whereas compassion does usually not include making a cognitive leap to understand how the other’s beliefs and experiences might be different from our own. Some studies in the USA use compassion and empathy interchangeable (Simpson et al., 2018)

Empathy has been criticized by Bloom who argue that empathy “guides us to treat others as we treat ourselves and hence expand our selfish concerns to encompass other people” Bloom 2016, p.21). Bloom’s definition of empathy is” the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does” (P. 16). According to Bloom we should use reasons instead of feelings. Bloom misunderstand the relation between reason and empathy. The explanation for

why we believe all humans should be treated and valued equally and why we enshrine such ideals is because empathy has made us care about the plight of strangers outside our local community (Krznicaric, 2015).

### **Cross-Cultural and Ethno-Cultural Empathy in International Business**

Cross-cultural empathy is a key ability to have when working in a global organization with several subsidiaries around the globe that employ many different ethnic employees working in teams

Cross-cultural empathy refers to the understanding of feelings of individuals that are ethnically and/or culturally different from oneself. This concept casts doubts on global empathy, which assumes that empathy is feeling in oneself, which is like sensing the feelings of others, and is not specifically targeting any one group (e.g. age, gender, and ethnicity) or context. Ethnocentric empathy, on the other hand, assumes that empathy toward others probably increases if the other is like oneself in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, or cultural background although it does not mean that it is impossible to be empathetic towards other ethnic groups, but more difficult.

For example, Chinese philosophy's emphasis on harmonious balances of forces underline that human behavior in Asian countries requires an understanding of relational units as an alternative to the individualistic assumptions of western psychological theories. To develop an inclusive cultural empathy, require the importance of balance in relationships. The motion of balance is familiar in Asian culture such as the harmonious tension between yin and yang (Pedersen & Pope, 2010). According to this, the western concept of individualistic empathy must be adapted to Chinese network culture to obtain an inclusive cultural empathy. Kameda quote studies indicating that collectivists are less empathetic than individualist (Kameda, 1977) but as indicated it depends on the situation and the context.

There is still a lot of research to be done regarding the cross-cultural aspects of empathy. The same can be said about other similar concepts. For example, recently Horak (2018) has shown that there are differences in the perception of 'fairness' between Germans and Koreans. This is a key area in cross-cultural

empathy that we think we understand the other, but we do not. I suggest that this is an area, where future cross-cultural studies should focus.

To date, the Scale of Ethno-Cultural Empathy (SEE) (Wang et al. 2003) is the only formally published measurement of ethno-cultural empathy. SEE is composed of three instrumental aspects: intellectual empathy, empathic emotions, and the communication of those two. The three elements will be briefly introduced below:

Intellectual empathy is the ability to understand a racially or ethnically different person's thinking and/or feeling. It is also the ability to perceive the world as the other person does; that is, this person's racial or ethnic perspective taking.

The empathic emotions component of ethno-cultural empathy is attention to the feeling of a person or persons from another ethno-cultural group to the degree that one can feel the other's emotional condition from the point of view of that person's racial or ethnic culture. In addition, it refers to a person's emotional response to the emotional display of a person or persons from another ethno-cultural group.

The communicative empathy component is the expression of ethno-cultural empathic thoughts (cognitive empathy) and feelings (empathic emotions) toward members of racial and ethnic groups different from one's own. This component can be expressed through words or actions.

### **Dimensions of Empathy as Described in the Literature**

More generally, organizational studies have developed in a way where organizational compassion scholar define organizational compassion as a sequential process noticing, empathizing, assessing and responding, the so-called NEAR model (Simpson et al, 2018). These scholars have empathy as an element of compassion, but not as the first element, as empathy scholars has.

Empathy has for analytical purposes been split up into different dimensional outcomes such as cognitive, affective, motivational and interpersonal outcomes. Each of these will be discussed below:

Cognitive outcomes are primarily the recognition and precise assessment of the thoughts and emotions of another person. When I feel empathy for another

person, I can understand and assess the other person's ways of thinking and feelings. When a person takes another person's point of view, the result is frequently that the other person's goals represent that person's goals. There is correspondence in the mental representations between one person and the other person. A common basis can be found with the Full Range Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994) with a transformational leader displaying a behavior pattern of intellectual challenge. This leader acts out of the attempt to see a problem from several possible viewpoints. This leader sees the worker who thinks differently to be an opportunity and a source of openness, innovation, and creativity. More general transformational leadership is defined as a situation in which the leader identifies needed change, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group.<sup>2</sup>

Affective outcomes are emotional experiences of identification and emotional distress. A person has emotional experiences and the other person feels identification or acts from an emotional experience he receives from the person. The range of emotions may include the person feeling excitement following the emotion he receives from another person. However, it is possible that the person will feel emotional distress from the feeling of empathy he receives from the other person. It is possible to find a common basis with the Full Range Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The transformational leader with a pattern of behavior employing the model of imitation and identification is characterized by power, self-confidence, and perseverance in the task. The followers feel a sense of identification with the leader and aspire to imitate his ways of acting.

Motivational outcomes are the result of affective outcomes. In this category, the person acts in another way and even understands the other person out of the desire to continue to cooperate. A person's motivation is to understand the other person. Davis (1983) believed that at the basis of this category is the feeling of forgiveness, which is what leads the person to attempt to understand the other and sometimes to act and bring about a change from the same

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/transformational-leadership.html>

feeling. We disagree with the statement as 'forgiveness' assume that one has done something wrong, which is not the case.

Interpersonal outcomes. These outcomes can be subsumed by three categories: helping behavior, aggression, and a more general category of social behavior. This stage is characterized by an overt behavioral act by the empathizing individual. Helping behavior is one straightforward way that an empathically created affect can lead to helping. If seeing another in distress leads observers to experience a parallel effect and if that effect is experienced as unpleasant, then helping might result in simply reducing this undesirable stage. The role of empathy in reducing aggressive behavior has not received the same degree of attention as the empathy-helping link, but has been shown, nonetheless, to regulate systematic hostile or aggressive behaviors. Empathy can regulate hostile or aggressive behaviors by one primary mechanisms. This is the observers' emotional responses to the distress of others lessening their likelihood of aggressing against those others.

Social behavior based on the idea that social intercourse is significantly influenced by empathy is certainly not new. Other people commonly have needs, desires, and goals that differ from our own and because the attainment of their goals is frequently incompatible with ours, a powerful tendency toward conflict is inherent in all social life resulting in high levels of conflict and disagreement. Empathic concern is positively related to a considerate style and personal distress is negatively associated with such a style.

### **Is it Possible to Measure Empathy?**

The early research conducted by Rogers on the importance of empathy in building trust in psychotherapeutic as well as in other interpersonal relationships, has even set the stage for development of self-report inventories designed to measure one's empathy quotient along the same line as cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence (Roger, 1969).

Empathy is partly something we are born with and partly training as mentioned earlier. Several scales measure empathy quantitatively. Medicine research use Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) a 28-item scale containing an item like "I

would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person". The Empathy Construct Rating Scale (ECRS) is a 100-item test on a 6-point scale. A sample item is "Seems to understand another person's state of mind". The Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) is 30 items test with a 9 points scale. A sample item is: "I cannot feel much sorrow for those who are responsible for their own misery." Other measurements used trained observers to assess empathy using tools such as the Accurate Empathy Scale (AES). A sample situation here is, "Therapist accurately responds to all of the client's more readily discernable feelings. He also shows awareness of many less evident feelings and experiences, but he tends to be somewhat inaccurate in his understanding of these..." These scale measurements are not specific for medicine but can be used in other contexts (Stepien, 2006). Except for the AES scale, the other scales build on written self-evaluation, which is subjective and probably overrate respondents' empathy quotient and thus useless. AES is built as shown on assessment of interaction with professional observers and therefore probably have a higher reliability.

As indicated in the sub-headline one can raise the question whether it is possible to measure empathy in such a quantitative way or rather whether the numbered outcome give any meaning? The authors of this article are not convinced.

### **Can Empathy be Developed Through Learning**

In the social sciences, it has been discussed at length whether people were empathetic ultimately for their own sake (for an overview see Batson et al., 2009). It is a difficult question, as people might feel better if they support poorer people, which make the concept similar to sympathy. Recent studies suggest that people can be empathetic without considering self-interest. Paliavin and Charng (1990) conclude: "There appears to be a 'paradigm shift' away from the earlier position that behavior that appears to be empathetic must under closer scrutiny, be revealed as reflecting egoistic motives. Rather, theory and data now being advanced are more compatible with the view that true empathy – acting with the goal of benefiting another – does exist and is part of human nature."



Based on a re-reading of Piaget's studies from the 1950s, neuroscientists have discovered that 98% of us have some empathy wired into our brains. The old story that we deep down are selfish and self-interested creatures has been debunked. Our selfish inner drives exist side by side with our empathic other half. We are at least conditionally *homo empathicus* (Davis, 1996).

Although we are wired for empathy meaning that most people feel some empathy towards others, few of us have fulfilled our full empathic potential. The good news is that we can get better at it: empathy can be developed like riding a bike or driving a car. One simple way to improve one's empathy is simply to focus intently on trying to understand other people's feelings and needs – doing so can expand our care and concern and spur us to act on the counterpart's behavior. We can also nurture our curiosity about strangers, having conversations that go beyond superficial talk as a way of challenging our (often mistaken) assumptions about others. Increase of listening ability is at core in this context.

Many popular suggestions exist about how to improve a person's empathy. Below you will find a summary of the most common suggestions.

1) *Actively listen (listening with all senses and listen more than you speak.)*. There are five steps you can take to become a better listener. One of them is to, 'commit your undivided attention to the conversation'. Communicate this undivided attention by maintaining steady eye contact. Give the speakers the time they need to finish their thoughts and avoid interrupting them. Summarize your understanding. Once the speaker has finished talking, summarize your understanding back to them. Then ask, "Have I understood this correctly?" Ask insightful, relevant questions. Tap into your natural curiosity and ask nonjudgmental questions to better understand the other person's perspectives, thoughts, and feelings.

When someone is having troubles of some kind, they may be emotionally flustered. That is okay. Give them the space to feel that. Let them talk from their heart and share how they feel. Often, this will lead to them discovering their own solutions.

2) *Express your perspective.* After you have heard the other person, you are in an excellent position to express empathy by voicing how you would feel in that same situation. For example, “It’s hard for me to hear what you just said because the whole situation just makes me feel so angry.” These comments are all ways to show how you understand how the other person is feeling. The catch is that these statements must be genuine.

3) *Be vulnerable.* Brown says that vulnerability helps us connect with others, because it communicates that we are human, complete with our own weaknesses, hurts, and fears. This creates a feeling of “sameness” that gives the other person something to connect to.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help shows vulnerability, and vulnerability often leads to a greater sense of connection and relation. Here are three steps to practice being more vulnerable in your professional interactions: After you have carefully listened to the other person, try to think of when you have been in a similar situation. For example, you may have encountered a problem with a project falling apart due to problems within your team. Think about what you felt in that situation. Maybe you did not handle the confrontations well, so you felt apprehensive and concerned. Express those feelings to the other person followed up by sharing what you learned during the process. By sharing our own insecurities and mistakes, we connect through our common humanity

4) *Do not make assumptions.* Assumptions are counterproductive to that of empathy. Assumptions or the understanding you draw from a certain problem is rarely a good match to the problem this person is facing. As a result, the connection you try to make feels forced and unnatural.

5) *Use your imagination.* You need to imagine some form of connection and understanding of the other person. You are not going to be able to relate to every single experience from every single person you encounter. To be truly empathize, however, you still need some form of connection and understanding. The ability to imagine what someone else is feeling is critical to empathy. One important way to develop this skill is to develop your imagination.

If you enjoy reading, pick up a book and focus on the character's actions and feelings to enhance empathy.<sup>3</sup> There are many other similar suggestions on the internet.

One of the online training websites ('<http://www.improveyoursocialskills.com/empathy>') provides such empathy training. The most used training website is dividing empathy into three aspects 1) Understanding yourself. If you want to understand the emotions of others, you must learn to empathize with yourself. 2. Understanding Others. Through practice and a commitment to thoughtfulness, anyone can learn to understand how others are thinking and feeling. 3) Nonverbal Empathy. When you understand what someone else is thinking or feeling, it becomes easier to interact with them. Finally, one could argue that it can also go the other way. To understand yourself you need to understand other (Ventura, 2018). An example could be that if you offend quarrel with your spouse (a person you have known many years), you do not understand how you should treat the spouse indicating your limited self-awareness or perspective taking ability. When you realize how to treat the spouse you have learned something about yourself and your cognition has been enhanced.

At the personal level empathy can be develop at courses primarily by improving a person's listening skills. For example, when working in groups, participant tell stories one by one and the other are asked to give empathetic responses on them from the other participants (<http://www.improveyoursocialskills.com/empathy>).

### **Empathy in Business and Management**

We mentioned in the introduction that the business world is currently undergoing unseen rapid changes both externally and internally due to technological advances and market developments. Externally, the customers require transparency in relation to full-package services and more focus on people orientation as well as increasing flexibility at the same time. Internally, the employees require a good work environment and an appropriate work – life

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<sup>3</sup> [www.mindmaven.com/blog/5-tips-to-become-more-empathetic/](http://www.mindmaven.com/blog/5-tips-to-become-more-empathetic/)

balance to avoid stress, and burnouts, which is currently some of the costliest issues for global enterprises. Another important issue concerns that managers have more people referring to them. It requires higher degree of empathetic skills to influence with more people who are all different, in a productive way as correctly observed by Jepsen (2017). The more employees you need to coordinate the more empathetic skills are required.

Another current change in the western corporate world is that the employees need to be better educated as low skilled work has been outsourced to emergent markets around the world. In addition, there is an increasing understanding that human beings cannot be split up into different roles as they used to be the understanding in the field of human resources management (Bolander and Snell. 2013). The climate and atmosphere at the workplace will also influence employees' private life and vice versa. Employees have to be seen in a more holistic way which require a good workplace to retain these competent and capable employees who are not as closely attached to their global company as they use to be (Jakobsen and Worm, 2018)

In the book "Wired to Care", Patnaik (2009) argues that a major flaw in contemporary business practice is a lack of empathy in particular inside large and often older corporations. He states that lacking any sense of empathy, people inside companies struggle to make intuitive decisions and often fooled into believing they understand their business if they have quantitative research to rely upon. Patnaik claims that the real opportunity for companies doing business in the 21st century is to create a widely held sense of empathy for customers, pointing to Nike, Harley-Davidson, and IBM as examples of "Open Empathy Organizations". Such institutions, he claims, see new opportunities more quickly than their competitors do, adapt to change more easily, and create workplaces that offer employees a greater sense of mission in their jobs. In 2011, Miyashiro similarly argued the value of bringing empathy to the workplace, and offers *Nonviolent Communication* meaning positive and constructive communication as an effective mechanism for achieving empathy and thereby better organizational results (Miyashiro, 2011).

Empirically it seems that business students are more empathetic than students of finance (Brown et al 2010) Brown et al (2010) mentioned that it might be because people who choose finance do not feel good at communicating with other people but are more narcissistic which is as mentioned above the opposite of empathy. This possible reason is a hypothetical assumption that has not been proven or disproven yet.

### **Relationships between Leader and Empathy**

There is a huge amount of literature on empathy and how it relates to different kind of leadership types. Studies of transformational leadership has already been touched upon, but other important studies also need to be mentioned.

Back in 1969 Roger discussed three essential condition of leadership; 1) congruence 2) acceptance and 3) empathy understanding i.e. the attempt to understand the other person's worldview without prejudices. By understanding the other person, it is possible to change. The person may change, and this change threatens the person's identity, which can only effectively be dealt with by an empathic understanding (Roger, 1969).

In studies by the Management Research Group, empathy was found to be the strongest predictor of ethical leadership behavior out of 22 competencies in its management model, and empathy was one of the three strongest predictors of senior executive effectiveness (Dowden, 2013).

West-Burnham (2002) explains that leadership involves significant emotional processes that constitute a part of the social influence that the leader has on the members of the group following him. These processes are based on the leader's personality traits, such as honesty, trustworthiness, sensitivity, and empathy. Because of these traits with a focus on empathy, the leader can motivate others to act. It is possible to identify and assess other people in the employee-manager relations.

Reinforcement of interpersonal intelligence (one of the types of intelligence defined by Gardener 1983) can be found in studies that have examined leadership in recent years. This research concluded that the followers ascribe

considerable importance to three main factors in the leader: self-confidence, optimism about the future, and the leader's ability to display personal references and to develop and cultivate the followers (Amit et al., 2006). Therefore, it is possible to see that beyond administrative abilities, the employee wants to meet a leader in an organization who sees a person with compassion and needs and a partner for success, a leader that presents an organizational vision in which every individual has a part.

Goleman (2008), in his book 'Emotional Intelligence', explains the importance of first, social intelligence, which is composed of social awareness, including empathy and attention. Second, social skills, including the ability to hold interactions even without the verbal element, that is, the ability to present ourselves in the best way, and the ability to convince true concern for the needs of others and to act accordingly. The innovation in this approach is that emotional intelligence can be learned and practiced through emphasizing the importance of the improvement of social skills. This can help ensure the existence of a more tolerant and better environment.

When the relations in the organization are effective, the leader is perceived as a good leader, who can positively influence his followers (Argabright et al., 2013). In his research, the influence of leadership is examined through a program that strengthens and develops emotional intelligence. The study found a relationship between the development of emotional intelligence and the improvement of leadership abilities. Another study, conducted over three years on the connection between leadership and empathy, found that the integration of empathy in leadership is crucial (Holt & Marques 2012). Where EI focus on the self, empathy focus as a point of departure on the "other". In addition, the study found that although empathy is based on cognitive structures, it is possible and even desirable to teach it and to practice it, even within the framework of business education. It is crucial that students learn to listen and are able to communicate in a positive way

The manager who learns and internalizes the meaning of empathy may develop and use empathy through the construction of personal relationships in his organization. In the attempt to find common ground between leadership and

empathy, we can find a common denominator in transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which by nature shapes and creates commitment and leads employees' self-fulfillment. The transformational leader with a pattern of behavior employing a model of imitation and identification creates a value-based and moral vision shared by the entire organization. The leader and his group create a language that establishes the organizational culture built on the basic assumptions or values of the organization (Schein, 2017).

Another study by Singh et al (2016) suggests that empathy of the leader in Indian IT companies is significantly related to the development of authentic leadership to foster positive organizational outcomes.

Shalev (2010) shows along similar lines that an empathetic leader will succeed in strengthening organizational belonging because the employees feel the empathy towards them. Furthermore, the leader is helped by empathy in creating transformational leadership meaning that the employees work hard for a goal that deviate from the personal interest and search for an answer to higher need. In the next section, we apply the notion of empathy on an actual company case in order to see how it works out in practice.

### **The Case of Maersk Line**

After having discussed various definitions and ramifications of empathy, it is important to specify what we mean by empathy seen from a phenomenological perspective. We understand empathy to consist of three key elements, i.e., know yourself, know the other and communication possibilities. It implies intentional (motivational) mode of understanding involving envisaging the actions and emotions of 'the other'. Furthermore, we believe empathy, triggered and mediated by various social encounters assumes different forms and encompassing an array of possibilities for interpersonal understanding depending on the constitution of a given context.

From our interviews in the Danish shipping company Maersk Line (APMM), we know that all young employees want to keep a decent work-life balance and a more flexible approach to their business. It is probably somewhat difficult for older companies, like Maersk Line, with a well established competitive corporate

culture to become more people oriented or empathetic than competitive. Interestingly, empathy and competitiveness is not necessarily contradictory per se. Many interviewees mentioned that they were competitive, but not against each other. Both competitiveness and empathy do thus exist simultaneously. Maersk Line is currently undergoing a transformation according to the inclusion and diversity manager Rachel Osikoya. According to her, interviewees said that empathy is not something that has been considered in Maersk. However, one of the interviewees said that it might be a good idea to do just that. In another interview, the importance of constructive communication is becoming increasingly more important in Maersk, thus constituting a “window” for developing empathy as an integrated part of the global corporate culture of the organizations.

One retired manager contended that empathy has always been important, although not mentioned or nurtured in the organisation. Furthermore, as mentioned above more employees are now than earlier referring to the same manager, which increases the importance of empathetic abilities. We believe that a more empathetic approach in one of the more masculine businesses in the world, the marine business, is already beginning to show off and little by little management will see that competitiveness and empathy are not contradictory. However, such a perception is still a long way from being part of the organizational practice, as the top management team is currently pressed by poor economic results, which somewhat contradictorily postpone a more empathetic approach in governing the organisation. Maersk Line needs to be able to integrate competitiveness and empathy. The two are each other's precondition in a world, where young well-educated people have plenty of opportunities. As McDonald stated in the beginning of this article “it is necessary to be soft to achieve hard results” (McDonald, 2008).

## **Conclusion and Further Studies**

In conclusion, we have analyzed the concept of empathy and focused on cross-cultural aspects as well as the existing measuring tools and their limitations in relation to the concept. Instead of the self-reporting tests, we use a



phenomenological inspired approach. As stated above, a phenomenological approach to empathy includes three key aspects; know yourself, know your counterpart and communicate possibilities. It implies intentional modes of understanding involving envisaging the action of another seen from their own perspective. Empathy is mediated by social contexts and therefore assumes different forms and encompassing an array of possibilities for interpersonal understanding.

One of the key points in the article suggest that empathy can be learned and improved through training even though most people are equipped with some level of empathetic feelings. One way of improving empathy is through active listening followed by expressing your perspective and be vulnerable, which help us connect to each other. In addition, as discussed in extant literature it is important not to make assumptions but use your imagination. In this article, we have initiated a preliminary discussion and analysis of the impact of empathy of culture and organizations (see p.9). This was followed by a discussion of the relationship between leadership and empathy. Most these studies are built on Coleman's notion of emotional intelligence. In this context, empathy was found to be the strongest predictor of ethical leadership. Finally, in the short case study of Maersk Line we discussed how the organization are gradually changing from a predominantly masculine organization towards a more empathetic organization. Furthermore, we shortly discussed how the signifiers of this change is produced by the younger employees, who navigate in the company in a rather short-term way, which is different from previous generations where employees was hired on a long term contract.

A recent popular concept in some corners of management studies is 'collaboration overload' (Polzer et al, 2018). Collaboration overload means that you spent too much effort on collaborating with peers. It is important to investigate to what extend empathy can result in collaboration overload and how one can avoid such an overload while still increasing the level on empathy per se. Further studies might be able to show or perhaps better to clarify the relation between empathy and collaboration overload.

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