

Empathy: An essential attribute of extension worker

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Empathy is a way of understanding other. It is the ability to see things of others do, their feelings, their thinking, their understandings and their point of views with same emotions. However, it does not mean that one must agree with the other persons view points. One must be careful not to condemn or to criticize other negatively because this forces the other person to defend himself rather than to reveal his real life. Empathy is the ability to participate in the experience of another person to understand the other person's internal frame of mind and reference, and accept the same to project oneself into the role of another person. When we say 'put yourself in my shoes or look to it from my point of views', we are asking a person to empathize with us. According to some psychologists, empathy is the quality of being able to enter into the field of (i) social imagination, (ii) feelings, (iii) problems of another, (iv) expectation of things in succeeding situations.

Origin of word empathy : The English word was coined in 1909 by the psychologist Edward B. Titchener in an attempt to translate the German word "Einfühlungsvermögen". It was later retranslated into the German language as "Empathic" and is still in use there.

Evolution of empathy : An increasing number of studies in animal behaviour and neuroscience claim that empathy is not restricted to humans, and is in fact as old as the mammals, or perhaps older. Examples include dolphins saving humans from drowning or from shark attacks, rodents have been shown to demonstrate empathy for cage mates (but not strangers) in pain. There is strong evidence that empathy has deep evolutionary, biochemical, and neurological underpinnings, and that even the most advanced forms of empathy in humans are built on more basic forms and remain connected to core mechanisms associated with affective communication, social attachment and parental care.

Central features of empathy : Empathy involves understanding the emotional states of other people. Emotions are taken to be centrally characterized by bodily feelings, and then grasping the bodily feelings of another will be central to empathy. The ability to imagine oneself as another person is a sophisticated imaginative process.

However, the basic capacity to recognize emotions is probably innate and may be achieved unconsciously. Empathy necessarily has a "more or less" quality. The paradigm case of an empathic interaction, however, involves a person communicating an accurate recognition of the significance of another person's ongoing intentional actions, associated emotional states, and personal characteristics in a manner that the recognized person can tolerate. Recognitions that are both accurate and tolerable are the central features of empathy. Other features of empathy are (1) Empathy occurs most easily between peoples of equal or similar position (2) Equal socio-economic status (3) Leaders have higher empathy than others (4) Empathy helps in understanding the other people.

Types of empathy : Empathy can be divided into two major components: - (1) Affective empathy : The capacity to respond with an appropriate emotion to another's mental states (2) Cognitive empathy: - the capacity to understand another's perspective or mental state. Affective empathy can be subdivided into the following scales: (a) Empathic concern : sympathy and compassion for others in response to their suffering (b) Personal distress : a self-centered feeling of discomfort and anxiety in response to another's suffering. Cognitive empathy can be subdivided into the following scales : (a) Perspective taking: - the tendency to spontaneously adopt others' psychological perspectives (b) Fantasy : the tendency to identify with fictional characters.

Difference between sympathy and empathy : An important distinction should be made between empathy and sympathy, when we express sympathy for another individual we know how that individual feels and we feel that way ourselves also. In empathy, we understand how another individual feels, but at the same time we mention our own feelings and objectivity. If a person gambles and loses all his money, you may feel empathetic and try to analyze the reason for doing so. If someone loses a loved one to a disease, you will feel sympathy for him.

Empathy as a communication skill : Empathy can be employed as a communication skill. Empathy can allow great communicators to sense the emotions of an audience

and it is the mutual understanding and inspiration communicated to the audience. A lack of empathy involves a poor sense of communication that fails to understand the perspective of the audience.

Understanding other people's feelings : When you share a feeling with someone, you will understand his feelings without difficulty. Moreover, when people exchange recognition of such a shared feelings, they feel close in spirit which is a pleasant feeling in itself. It is sometimes difficult to accept the feelings of others when those feelings are different from one's own. A shared feeling produces a sense of harmony which is effortless. An unshared feeling produces a gap that must be crossed by empathy. Empathizing is a process of reasoning by analogy, of explaining someone to yourself by finding a parallel in your own feeling response.

Skill in empathy : One quality which the leader needs is the ability in some way and to some degree to put himself in the place of followers or subordinates. This is admittedly difficult to do, if the other person is unlike. Furthermore doing this has limitations even it is successful. The principal one being that when one puts himself in another place, he may find himself excessively attracted so and influenced by the other person's thoughts and feelings. The leader must be considerate of others, but he also must take action from time to time that followers will not approve. It can be concluded that the successful leader is relatively more detached and relatively more objective than the less successful one. A leader should be able to look at things objectively and from the point of view of others. He should respect the rights of others, their beliefs and sentiments. In other words, he should equip himself to meet the challenges arising from the actions and reactions of other people. The leader should be perceptive or empathic towards his subordinates-followers so that he can distinguish their strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and can give them the attention they deserve. He should also be perspective introspectively (towards himself) so that he can know his own strengths, weaknesses and goals and can give proper consideration to subordinates-followers.

Judgment of personality : The concept of empathy is particularly useful in judgment of personality. Persons who accurately perceive themselves as well as superiors and other people have the better ability to judge the personality traits of themselves and of others. This suggests that they may have been more empathic. Some persons judge personality of others excellently whereas some persons

do it poorly. The poor judges of personality happen due to in depth analysis and depend on so much logic. The best judges in the other hand reported that they did not make a deliberate analysis of their reading and conversation, but rather tried to 'feel the other personality'; "I let myself go" was a typical comment. Therefore, the superior judges were those who made use of empathy, rather than of logic and analysis. People can best be understood by trying to feel as they do and perceive the world as they perceive it.

Empathic understanding : Empathic understanding is a characteristic of humanistic teacher. This understanding goes further than the type of information a teacher can obtain by reading students cumulative records or through informal conversation of students in the class room. Empathic understanding involves an active attempt by teachers to place themselves in students' perceptions and feelings. It is an effort to understand the unique perception of individual students. Humanistic writers believe that empathic understanding is rare and that if teachers could express even occasionally, that they will be understood and accepted by the students easily. Teachers can learn to express more respect for students' ideas and responses when interacting with the students and in such classrooms students begin to initiate more interaction.

Conclusion : Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. You place yourself in their shoes and feel what they are feeling. Empathy is known to increase prosocial (helping) behaviour. Lack of empathy is the primary cause of conflict in organizations, and a barrier to communication. The most difficult of all communication qualities to achieve is perhaps empathy. The capacity to empathize is an admired trait in society. Empathy is considered a motivating factor for unselfish, prosocial behaviour whereas a lack of empathy is related to antisocial behaviour. Proper empathic engagement helps an individual understand and anticipate the behaviour of another. An extension worker who is empathic shall be able to understand and appreciate the farmers' situations and communicate with them effectively. Similarly, an empathic farmer shall be able to communicate effectively with the extension worker to get the desired information.

"The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart." -Helen Keller