Impact of gender performance on empathic leadership of employees

Sanja Gutić Martinčić
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4683-2350
sguticm@effectus.com.hr
EFFECTUS University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract: The content of the paper is focused on compassionate, empathic leadership of employees, focusing on gender performance, specifically women as empathic leaders. The aim of the paper is to determine whether there are significant differences between female and male leaders in the acceptance and implementation of a compassionate empathic leadership style of employees. The research was conducted on a representative sample (n=120). A five-point Likert scale was used. The partial correlation coefficients used in the paper show that there is no significant difference between women and men in accepting and understanding their own emotions. Unlike men, women leaders are somewhat more inclined to develop the ability to just get rid of negative emotions and create a nursery of their own positive emotions. Much more and more often than men, they support colleagues and employees to express their emotions at work, as well as in spreading empathic values and processes of compassionate management of employees.

Keywords: leadership, style, empathy, gender

JEL Classification codes: D23, D83, D91, O15

INTRODUCTION

Human resource management is not a concept based on ordering employees what to do and watching over them as they do it. It is primarily the action of the leader in identifying the organization with its employees in directing their energy and abilities towards the realization of the organization's goals. It is also an action in the direction of each employee finding himself and his interests in the organization. People in organizations do not work in isolation, but most often as a team, a work group. When performing their jobs and tasks, they enter into various forms of psychosocial interconnections and connections. One of the key links in this is intelligence, especially emotional intelligence.

Intelligence can be defined in several ways and from several approaches. One of the more widely accepted is that it is a mental ability, or rather a set of mental abilities that allow recognition, learning, memory and the ability to think (Mayer, J.D. et al. 2008:507; Moin, M.F. et al., 2020:498). Unlike the term general intelligence, which is most often mentioned and used, the term emotional intelligence is defined through the ability to understand oneself and others with whom people are connected and adapt to the environment, in order to be more successful in solving different emotional needs in different situations (Bar- he, R. 2003:12).

The value and meaning of emotional intelligence in work is well described by Mudd, citing the Washington Business Journal from May 2005. in which the results of an extensive survey were published. According to her, the average manager in the US spends more than 40% of his total time at work dealing with conflicts between employees that are a direct result of negatively accumulated emotions (Mudd, P.A. 2006).

Emotions at work are not so easy to identify, and therefore, not to direct. Data obtained from a larger study, presented by Kannaiah and Shanthi, confirm this (Kannaiah, D. & Shanthi, R. 2015: 147). The most significant of these results are: 61.3% of employees were able to accurately identify and understand the causes of their emotions at work, and 20.0% of employees were unable to do so. 52.0% of employees control their emotions regularly and pay the necessary attention to it, 34.0% never control them, 41.3% of employees control their emotions to divert attention from them, diverting their attention to work or some other activity, 20.7 % of employees control their emotions in a natural way, without making any special efforts, nor preparations, i.e. acquired skills, etc.

It is known and proven that there are significant differences in the expression of emotions between men and women and that these differences should be known and respected during work and management of work processes. In this paper, efforts are made to try to determine whether there are gender differences in this approach by focusing on compassionate empathic management of employees. A lot of research has been published, and thus available knowledge, but there is almost no knowledge that comes from transitional societies.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional intelligence rests on the heart, mind and soul aspects of people in organizations. Regardless of whether it is unpleasant or pleasant emotions, employees with highly expressed emotions by management will identify more strongly with the organization. They will stay longer in such an organization and be more loyal to it.

These brief indications indicate that emotional intelligence is primarily a complex, integrated set of various natural and acquired abilities that include at least eight acquired abilities. (1) Ability to identify emotions. (2) The ability to understand emotions. (3) Ability to understand (decode) emotions. (4) Ability to develop emotions. (5) Ability to use emotions effectively. (6) Ability to perceive emotions. (7) Ability to integrate emotions in processes. (8) The ability to manage emotions with the aim of realizing appropriate forms and content of organizational behavior (Mayer, J.D. et al., 1999:267).

The art of mastering these abilities indicates the degree and quality of implementation of emotional intelligence in human resources management in organizations. Unlike Mayer and colleagues, Bar-on defined emotional intelligence, developing it through five dimensions, which in total contain 15 scales used to measure the emotional intelligence quotient. Bar-on is credited with introducing the emotional intelligence quotient. The emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) can be defined as a measure of a person's ability to recognize, develop and manage their own emotions, in order to be ready to manage the emotions of others (Bar-on, R. 2003:12). Leading people through emotionally developed intelligence leads to success, as many authors have pointed out so far. Leaders' emotional expressions carry more weight than their actual messages to their employees (Newcombe, M.J. and Ashkanasy, N.M., 2002: 601; Jonsdottir, I. J. & Kristinsson, K., 2020:137). Leaders who show excitement, enthusiasm and energy direct their followers in the direction of developing these emotions and identifying with them (Humphrey, R.H., 2002: 493), (Dasborough, M.T. & Ashkanasy, N.M., 2002: 615; Aftab, J. et al., 2021:54). Leaders, on the other hand, who show sad emotional expressions make them less effective, and followers feel less enthusiasm and more fatigue (Glaso, L. et al., 2006:136; Clarkson, B. G. et al., 2020:61). Emotions of anger in leaders can lead subordinates to feel that these are privileged emotions that come from their status as leaders. However, it is believed that when leaders show emotions of anger, they are much more effective than when they show emotions of sadness or when they do not show their emotions at all. (Tridens, L.Z., 2000: 71; Kim, W. et al., 2020:36). The expression of negative emotions of the leader does not have the same meaning and impact on all team members. There are situations where emotions reduce uncertainty among team members (Morris, J.A. & Feldman, D.C., 1997: 257;

Guthridge, M. & Giummarra, M. J., 2021:5). Emotional intelligence can positively influence team leadership. Especially in stressful and conflict situations (Hur, Y. et al. 2011:591), (Hong, Y. et al. 2011: 320). Leaders with a high coefficient of emotional intelligence are considered better leaders compared to those with a lower coefficient (Thiel, C.E. et al., 2012: 517), (Madera, J.M. & Smith, D.B., 2009:103). Leader emotions are positively related to good and desirable human leadership attributes such as: leader effectiveness, positive effect of emotional contagion, less emotional burnout, etc. (Cross, B. & Travaglione, A., 2003:221). As many as 2/3 of the competencies required for effective functioning in the workplace are of emotional significance. Good leadership is not only focused on controlling one's own emotions, but also on understanding the emotional states of one's followers and helping them resolve emotional difficulties (Goleman, D., 2001; Arghode, V. et al., 2022:239).

There are quite clear differences in the empathetic management of employees between women and men. Women experience their emotions more intensely and more frequently than men (Brody, L.R. & Hull, J.A. 2000:325). They express their emotions more often than men and these emotions are often related to the status and role of women in organizations (Fischer, A.H. 2000). The status of women comes from the personal perception of power, dominance and interpersonal relations in the organization (Tridens, L.R. 2000: 561). Men in organizations, who are more inclined to express emotions of anger, reach higher status more often than women, who are more susceptible to emotions of sadness (Fischer, A.H., 2000). With people who have more power in the organization, this power is simultaneously accompanied by greater freedom in expressing their negative emotions such as anger and rage (Overbeck, et al., 2010: 126). Men, who more often have a higher status in the organization than women, show more significant than women the emotions that accompany this power, such as trust, pride, etc. (Lovaglia, M. & Houser, J.A. 1996: 864). Women smile more than men and these emotions are more characteristic of them (LaFrance, M. et al. 2003: 305). Also, they tend to express less emotions of grief and anger than men (Plant, E.A. et al., 2000: 81). For them, the emotions of anger are associated with influence in organizations, and the emotions of sadness with a lack of self-confidence and status in the organization (Fischer, A.H. 2000). Men, on the other hand, are more inclined than women to control and suppress their emotions at work (Shields, S.A. 2005: 3).

2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the paper is to determine whether there are significant differences between the genders of managers in the acceptance of empathic empathetic management style of employees. From this goal, four hypotheses are established:

H1 - female leaders are more inclined to accept and understand their own emotions than men.

H2 - female leaders are more inclined than men to develop the ability to release themselves from negative emotions and create their own positive emotions.

H3 – female managers are more likely than male managers to support employees in expressing their emotions at work.

H4 - female managers are more inclined than male managers to spread empathic values and processes of compassionate management of employees.

The primary data for this research was collected through an online survey on a sample size of n=120. The respondents were managers in 16 medium-sized and small companies from various industries from the area of three counties in northwestern Croatia: Zagrebačka, Krapinsko-Zagorska and Varaždinska. The choice of companies was random. The sample size and sampling technique are based on stratified random sampling as presented by Cooper and Schindler in a situation where the population is not homogeneous (Cooper & Schindler, 2008:137). Of the sent questionnaires, 96 respondents responded with correctly and completely filled questionnaires, which can be considered an acceptable selection considering

the type of survey. The survey was conducted in the second half of 2022. It was completely anonymous and the respondents were informed of this before participating in the survey. They were also informed about the purpose of the survey.

Tab. 1. Demographic map of respondents

No.	Demographic characteristic	Number of respondents	Percentage	Cumulative
A.	Gender structure:			
	Men	31	32,68	32,68
	Women	65	67,32	100,00
B.	Age structure (years):			
	Until the 25	17	17,71	17,71
	26-40	34	35,42	53,13
	41-60	37	38,54	91,68
	61 and over	8	8,33	100,00
C.	Structure by professional training:			
	Secondary vocational education	67	69,79	69,79
	High vocational education	29	30,21	100,00
D.	Size of the company from which they come (total number of employees):			
	Until the 10	14	14,58	14,58
	11-30	28	29,17	43,75
	31-50	35	36,45	80,20
	51 and over	19	19,80	100,00

Source: author's research

The most frequently represented respondent was female (67.32%), between the ages of 41 and 60 (38.54%), had a secondary vocational education (69.79%) and came from a company with between 31 and 50 employees (36 ,45%).

Secondary data were collected from databases: Scopus, EBSCO, PsycARTICLES and ScienceDirect. Starting from Mayer's concept of emotional intelligence, the author defined four segments for the needs of empathic leadership. They are: (1) the ability to accept and understand one's own emotions and express emotions, (2) the ability to just get rid of negative emotions and create one's own positive emotions; (3) the ability to understand, accept and support the expression of positive emotions to employees and release them from negative emotions; (4) the ability to create emotional temperature and emotional contagion in the organization as a basis for empathic values and processes of compassionate leadership of employees. For this purpose, 16 statements were created (four for each empathetic level) that were used in the construction of the Likert scale. They are presented in Table 2.

Tab. 2. Statements for the construction of the Likert scale

Empathic level	Assertion	Source
1.	1. I think it's appropriate, useful and pleasant when people express their emotions freely at work	Baezinger, T. et al., 2009
	2. My feelings are not just my business and they reflect on how others feel	Brief, A.P. & Weiss, H.M. 2002
	3. I try to cry often, laugh and show all my other feelings, be they sad or happy	Baezinger, T. et al., 2009

	4. If someone I'm talking to starts crying or laughing, I'll start crying or laughing too	Doherty, R.W. 1997
2.	5. I try to fill every working day with good emotions and discard the bad ones	Matsumoto, D. &Hwang, H.S. 2011
	6. I get upset when I see employees suffering because of some difficult or sad news	Baezinger, T. et al., 2009
	7. I avoid meeting people who spread negative feelings and I like to hang out with people who have positive feelings	Doherty, R.W. 1997
	8. I learned how to adopt and maintain positive and avoid negative feelings when working with people	Matsumoto, D. &Hwang, H.S. 2011
3.	9. When someone smiles warmly at me, I smile too and feel the inner warmth	Doherty, R.W. 1997
	10. I always try to please the feelings of the people around me, because then I feel good myself	Brief, A.P. & Weiss, H.M. 2002
	11. I feel and understand the emotions of employees and help them spread positive and get rid of negative emotions	Chang, J.H. et.al., 2014
	12. I quickly notice when someone in the group feels uncomfortable and I don't remain indifferent to it	Matsumoto, D. &Hwang, H.S. 2011
4.	13. I'm willing to help most people with emotional difficulties, because ultimately that's when we all feel good	Chang, J.H. et.al., 2014
	14. When I induce smile and joy in other people, it also induces such moods in me	
	15. I am always ready to help people connect their work with their feelings better and more effectively	Brief, A.P. & Weiss, H.M. 2002
	16. Being around people who are depressed does nothing good for my mood and successful work	Doherty, R.W. 1997

Source: author's research

The Likert scale in the same form was distributed to both women and men with the aim of determining differences in claims and progress in empathic levels. Respondents' levels of agreement with the statements are: 1-do not agree at all, 2-disagree, 3-partially agree, 4-agree, 5-completely agree. The statements are weighted with weight ratios that have been established and identified with the respondents' scaling degrees. Statistical processing of the collected primary data was performed using the software packages Microsoft Excell and SPSS 21.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

There are several limitations related to the research and applied methodology that are worth highlighting. (1) There are no published studies on this topic and on the researched population (in selected counties in the Republic of Croatia). Therefore, it is not possible to compare the results obtained in this research with some of the earlier ones. (2) Due to limited resources, the author could not realistically choose a larger sample for the research and is aware that a larger sample would be desirable for a research like this. (3) The Likert scale for determining the differences between the sexes in the acceptance of a compassionate empathetic management style of employees was constructed by the author based on the exposed sources since, as far as she knows, the same or a similar scale has not been made known to the scientific public. It will be necessary, therefore, to confirm the validity and application of the same or to suggest a correction through subsequent research. The author believes that the stated limitations will not significantly affect the realization of the set hypotheses and research goal.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tables 3 and 4 present the average values of respondents' statements (a), variances (v), minimum values (min), maximum values (max) and Cronbach alpha indicators of consistency of statements (Ca).

Tab. 3. Indicators of women's claims by empathic levels

Empathic level	a	v	min	max	Ca
1	3,117	0,248	2,480	3,868	0,732
2	3,252	0,105	2,137	3,762	0,748
3	4,116	0,192	2,963	4,601	0.621
4	3,791	0,275	2,706	4,025	0,850

Source: author's research

Tab. 4. Indicators of men's claims by empathic levels

Empathic level	a	v	min	max	Ca
1	3,066	0,148	2,351	3,692	0,664
2	2,402	0,162	1,956	3,095	0,827
3	2,844	0,275	2,107	3,354	0,604
4	2,317	0,348	1,580	2,698	0,752

Source: author's research

Cronbach's alpha indicators of consistency of empathic levels in both tables are in the acceptable range and as such are suitable for further statistical analysis since these values range between 0.7 and 1.0 (Cronbach, L.J., 1950). Some values in this research only approximate this state.

The ability and willingness to accept one's own emotions as a natural component in the leader's behavior, to understand one's own emotions and to express them instead of suppressing them does not significantly differ between women and men, given that the average values of the four statements in the first empathic level are quite uniform. This knowledge provides enough arguments that the first hypothesis (H1) in the research cannot be accepted and should be rejected. Therefore, women leaders do not differ from men leaders in accepting and understanding their own emotions. This statement is different from the knowledge reached by Brody and Hull claiming that women experience their emotions more intensely than men. These values, however, are still in the zone of only partial agreement, which can be interpreted as the fact that there are still certain reservations in the respondents' attitudes towards their own emotions and empathic processes in the work and management of employees. This is nevertheless a valuable realization since in the not-so-distant past in the space and sample of the researched population, showing one's own emotions and emotional expression was mostly an undesirable form of organizational behavior and often stigmatized.

The second empathetic level, which implies the ability to only free the leader from negative emotions and create a nursery of one's own positive emotions, differs significantly between women and men. Among women, it is in partial agreement with the statements offered, while among men it is in the area of disagreement. This provides the basis for accepting the second hypothesis (H2), i.e. that female leaders are more likely than male leaders to develop the ability to free themselves from negative emotions and create their own positive emotions. This realization is almost identical to the one reached by the Plan by establishing that women express less negative emotions than men. It is not a good indicator for male managers, because the inability to get rid of negative emotions does not only paralyze the possibility of more intense creation of desirable positive emotions in work and management of employees, but also hinders further progress in empathic processes and in general the development of emotional intelligence in managing employees. And Shields found in his research that men

suppress their emotions at work more than women. Since it was not the goal of this research, it remains unexplored whether such a relationship of male managers towards their own emotions is based on the retention and suppression of negative emotions (because this is what the claims point to) and affects employees to feel less enthusiasm at work and more fatigue, as in their research claim Glaso et al. or is it, on the other hand, the result of privileged emotions characteristic of men that come from their status as leaders, as indicated by Tridens? The third empathic level presented through the ability to understand, accept and support the expression of positive emotions of co-workers and employees and to release them from negative emotions in women is in the area of clearly expressed acquired ability, as indicated by the average value of the presented claims, while this is not the case with male respondents. This allows us to confirm that it is realistic to accept the third hypothesis (H3). Female managers are more inclined than male managers to support employees to express their emotions at work. There is a similar process with the fourth empathic level, which consists of the ability to create emotional temperature and emotional contagion in the group of people he leads, and which forms the basis for empathic values and processes of compassionate leadership of employees, which makes it realistic to accept the fourth hypothesis set forth in this research (H4). As leaders, women are more likely than men to spread compassionate empathic values and flows among employees.

For a better understanding and interpretation of these trends, it is worth looking at the interdependence between the respondents' empathic levels, which are shown in tables 5 and 6.

Tab. 5. Partial correlation coefficients of empathic levels in women

	1	2	3	4
1	0			
2	0,4713	0		
3	0,7294	O,3810	0	
4	0,6075	0,2975	0,6448	0

Source: author's research

Tab. 6. Partial correlation coefficients of empathic levels in men

	1	2	3	4
1	0			
2	0,3053	0		
3	0,4628	0,4966	0	
4	0,2716	0,2559	0,4607	0

Source: author's research

The correlations in Tables 5 and 6 show that there are different factors (latent constructs) of emotional intelligence between men and women and it would be interesting to find out. It is possible that the number of these latent constructs is different from those listed. This is, of course, possible in one of the following studies.

In men, there is no visible interdependence between empathic levels, which is to some extent expected since, apart from the first empathic level, almost no significant shift in the development of compassionate empathy in the management of employees was observed. In women, this interdependence is visibly expressed and is of medium intensity between the first and fourth and third and fourth levels. Thus, women managers express their ability to accept and understand their own emotions and express emotions through their ability to understand, accept and support the expression of positive emotions to their employees and help them to free themselves from negative emotions. Likewise, they do not only dwell on this acquired ability to understand, accept and support the expression of positive emotions to their employees and help them get rid of negative emotions, but transfer it through the ability to create emotional temperature and emotional contagion into empathic values and processes of

compassionate leadership of employees. The interdependence between the ability to accept and understand one's own emotions and express these emotions and understanding, accepting and supporting the expression of positive emotions to employees and helping them to free themselves from negative emotions is more intense. This knowledge is identical to that expressed by Goleman, who claims that good leadership is not only focused on controlling one's own emotions, but also on understanding the emotional states of one's followers and helping them to solve their emotional difficulties.

CONCLUSION

This research indicates that both men and women can contribute to the intellectual capital of organizations, although each in a different way. Based on the selected sample, it can be concluded that in the researched population of employee managers, there is a first empathic level in both sexes of respondents, which implies the ability and willingness to accept and understand one's own emotions and release them instead of suppressing negative emotions. The first hypothesis, according to which women as managers are more inclined than men to accept and understand their own emotions, cannot be accepted. The second empathic level implies the ability to free the leader from negative emotions and create a nursery of his own positive emotions and is significantly different in women than in men so that the second hypothesis can be confirmed. The third empathetic level presented through the ability to understand, accept and support the expression of positive emotions of co-workers and employees and in freeing women from negative emotions is in the area of a clearly expressed acquired ability, which provides sufficient support for the acceptance of the third hypothesis. It is also possible to confirm the fourth hypothesis, since it was established that there is an ability among the respondents, i.e. women, for empathic values and processes of compassionate management of employees. Also, the set goal of the work was fulfilled, since more significant differences between the genders of managers were found in the acceptance of a compassionate, empathetic leadership style of employees that benefit women.

Working through established findings indicates that the implementation of a compassionate leadership style of employees is a demanding and complex process, the success of which will depend on the readiness of the management of the observed economic entities to accept emotional training through an interdisciplinary approach as a way to acquire the second, third and fourth empathic levels and emotional intelligence. This is a confirmed basis through the findings presented in a series of earlier researches for compassionate and successful empathic management of employees. It is also necessary to make a turnaround in the existing concept of human resources management, both in terms of content and organization.

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