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Can We Talk of Empathy in Online Communication in Education and Business?

[Putem vorbi de empatie în comunicare educațională și afaceri online?]

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Abstract: *The development is not only from the economic point of view, but also from the human perspective.*

We used information and experiences in the field, corroborated with my own experience and with the pandemic and post-pandemic realities, in order to highlight that empathy is a very sensitive and necessary factor for the human development

Thus, it's about a psychological feature of someone, the power to train each and every person's capabilities and skills to get profit, in the case of firms, or to achieve behavioral performance and standards in education.

The conclusion is obvious: in online conditions of teaching and working, with a high level of stressors, the empathy mean of action is diminishing. The results indicate that the face-to-face students increased their knowledge of the subject material at a higher percentage than the online students. In businesses, the use of empathy is also beneficial for win-win strategies.

Keywords: *empathy, human development, stressors, performance, profit.*

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1. Introduction

The term of *Empathy* is very important in our times, especially when it's about working with people, in order to ensure a higher value of the activities and to improve the quality of these human interactions. It is used in a broader sense like *sympathy*, meaning *feeling into someone else* (that is to be in his/her skin/shoes), as Rowell (2015) revealed. More specific, the concept means the capacity, ability to be in another position, experiencing the emotions or ideas of that person (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

After synthesizing the meaning of the term, it is mandatory to integrate it in the educational and social-economic environment.

For example, Toranzo (1996) highlighted the importance of this term, especially in social environment and how much appropriate or inappropriate the social values of a culture are. But our interest in the present is represented by the understanding the bi-univocal relationship between teachers and students, or entrepreneurs/CEOs vs. employees in the businesses. And, all these, in the context of understanding *empathy* within online learning or working vs. face-to-face activities.

The use of this term is more appropriate in these situations, much more because it is necessary to add *the process of feedback* from students or workers/employees.

In the Academic environment, the empathy teacher-students can be remarked during the classes, but especially to seminars and labs. In this respect, we are dealing with a heterogeneously mass of students, the main problem being how to bring the students to the same denominator, i.e. *a modus in rebus* in teaching and practicing activities with students. This aspect, because mainly in vocational education domains, due to the existence of *gifted-students* and, hence, the logic question: is there a significant influence of the empathy on academic achievements among gifted-students? (Mohd & Al-Sahafi, 2015). Sure, this study presented the realities from Saudi Arabia, but the idea deserves to be enlarged to more analyses. Once again, when it's about the vocational education domains, especially, the students are represented by the gifted ones in those domains.

Empathy is considered a specific trait for the real teachers and it is necessary trait which defines a good (and efficient we may say) teaching for getting the necessary knowledge (Rowell, 2015).

Empathy is an important practical tool that can help you better understand what's driving the students' (and by extension, the employees') behavior and find strategies to help, to connect each other.

Moreover, in the specific literature, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Model (2008) is considered suitable to the relations with *gifted students*, because it represents a new type of intelligence based on *individual differences* (our emphasis) to treat emotional information. In this respect, for example, Moshe Zeidner et al. (2005) analyze this aspect about the students in Israel, reaching the conclusion that the *gifted students* possess a higher quantity of *emotional intelligence (EI)*, but possible lack of confidence in their emotional skills and, here it is the moment (our emphasis) where *an efficient empathic teacher intervenes*.

Yilmaz (2007) is another important researcher who emphasized *vital empathetic skills* to do effective activities, both in higher education and businesses: looking through the other's eyes, to perceive the other's perspective and to build connections with someone, all in order to design an effective connection in the activity/job done.

When the teacher, even the CEO or another manager, has the ability, native or acquired, to understand the student's/employee's reactions from inside the system and an awareness of the relationship regarding how the process is functioning, the likelihood of learning or working (we add) is significantly increased (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Significant for this paper is to present, in our opinion *the 3 (three) parts of being empathic* (Morin, n.d.):

- 1) *Perspective taking*, in order to understand the scopes and goals through the students; or employees' eyes;
- 2) *Trying to understand the students' (and employees') feelings*, taking into account that each person has his/her own experiences, beliefs, traits regarding actions or facts;
- 3) *Communicate that you understand*, meaning the use in a communication reflective forms like „it sounds like you...”, or „I hear that you...”

Also, it is very important to see and perceive when we talk about *false empathy* that is a *mimicked empathy*, which is more dangerous and with negative effects than the lack of empathy.

2. Methodology

Basically, the study is based on my own experience and of my fellow colleagues, taking into account my responsibilities within university and faculty. We agree that, in the case of using questionnaires, the subjectivity of answers is high, possibly not true opinions about some issues, even the questionnaires are anonymous. The same situation when it's about the evaluation of the management in businesses.

This approach, combined with the survey of specific literature and others experiences, configure the frame for the observation of empathy functioning and increasing possible results.

In these terms, we can formulate now the work hypothesis for this case:

Hypothesis no. 1 - it is necessary to take into account the empathy in academic business activities.

Hypothesis no. 2 - it is mandatory to use the feedback mechanism to understand the double sense empathy in Higher Education (teacher ↔ students).

In sum, our methodology is based on observations of facts, lived directly, or described/presented in papers of speciality. And a single question asked, both pre and after thest or directly after the job/activity done: *How do you appreciate the importance of empathy in carrying out a specific activity?*

In my practice and of my fellow colleagues, one single question is asked: how do you appreciate the online education? In these cases, only *post festum* were done, in the sense that in the case of technical problems, statistical, projects, yes, the online teaching is good, giving the necessary knowledge, but, structural speaking, the development is done by face-to-face education.

3. Arguments in favor of face-to-face communication vs. online

A very recent fact, coming to strenghten the importance of the empathy in the phisic approach is represented by the researches in physiology or medicine of the 2021 Nobel Prize laureates in these fields, David Julius of the University of California and Ardem Patapoutian of the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California, for their researches to identify sensors on nerve cells responding to heat, cold and pressure (Hesman et al. 2021).

The problem issued is not new, as many other discoveries and improvements. In the 17th century, the famous philosopher and matematician Rene Descartes (Skirry, n.d.) envisioned threads connecting different parts of the skin with the brain. Why these researches are very important for the problem in discussion? Because, they demonstrate that proteins called receptors *are crucial to the sense of touch and for the external environment impact*. These receptors turn the heat of eating chili peppers, or cooling menthol's sensation into signals to be sent to the brain. That's why, the medicine inreferes with Economics in supporting the direct interactions of the body with stressors from outside, which is exacrlly the meaning of the *empathy phenomenon*. The physiological and psychological importance resides in highlighting the reaction of our nerves, of our brain with the environment with no

obstacles between them. The experiments with chili peppers, with their discovered protein (capsaicin), were determinant in allowing people to feel chili's burn (in this case). In fact, the direct impact to our receptors of the environment stressors and the adequate response to them.

We consider that in this situation a very important aspect is linked to *rethinking accountability* (Jorgensen, 2020). The practice demonstrates that there significant differences between different types of classes: the general Economics, the art studies, philosophy, psychology aspects are quite different from scientific and technical disciplines. The switch in thinking learning and practice should include the qualitative goals in keeping connected the students and employees as well. We can modify the assignments, adjusting expectations, BUT permanently using and extending graceful practices and support the students/employees specific traits.

So, studies revealed the positive correlation between *empathy* and affective skills, the lack of empathy being able to lead to a reduced expression of students' affective behaviors, followed by proper development. Also, the encouragement of employees, of productive ones and the creation of stimulating working environment, even in online conditions, are the keys of success for entrepreneurs and CEOs.

The students and the employees who see that their opinions, ideas are not only valued by also empowered, become in a larger measure motivated to do their best and get more values, or in the second case, profit (Ferlazzo, 2013).

4. Conclusions

The results from the pre and post-question indicated that the online students are more aware of the subject material and, in technical problems, they receive also easy the knowledge, but including empathy in the equation, the face-to-face students increased their knowledge of the subject material at a higher percentage than the online students.

That is, the communication online is very efficient, giving the possibilities to send works/tasks through online channels, meaning „cold” aspects of the teaching and working, BUT taking into account the human feelings and interactions teacher-student, manager-employee, the face-to-face activities are better, not only for the performance of activities, but also for human psychic and behavior.

The two practices reveal that the online learning is as well efficient as the face-to-face method, being slight differences between them. In this respect, we speak about quantitative, mainly, aspect of the activity. But, speaking, mainly, of the

qualitative, structural, aspect, the face-to-face learning, i.e the direct communication is above the other aspect.

In businesses, the use of empathy by the CEOs and the other managers, using as much as possible the direct works, lead to improve the internal work environment, to strategies type win-win, for the well-functioning of the firm and getting profit.

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