

REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: THE EMPATHY GAP

SHORT DESCRIPTION

WHAT:

The Empathy gap reflects an inability to identify emotions in one self and others, and the impact such emotion plays in communication and decision-making.

PROBLEM:

Understanding emotions in one's self and others, is the key to effective communication, which is essential for success. Without the ability to empathize, you will have a distorted view of not just other people but of the entire world.

SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation will increase your awareness in general and specifically, help you identify and manage emotional states. Without this ability, you will be isolated and lost.



It is not a good trait for someone in a leadership or management role. In fact, it's a recipe for disaster. The Empathy Gap is a bias that is in many ways the opposite of emotional intelligence.

In the empathy gap people are driven by their emotional state. If they are hyper aroused and in a "hot state" then they are likely to be driven by exaggerated emotion and not realize it.

So, someone might be angry, hyped up, overly excitable and not appreciate how much their perceptions and thoughts are a function of their emotional state.

Conversely, if someone is in a "cold state" that lack of emotion and energy will also drive the narrative. For example, someone who is depressed, will have little enthusiasm or energy for anything and will not be able to understand that their mood is directing the thought process or the degree to which it is driving it.

Understanding moods and managing them so they do not influence important decisions is a very important life skill. Sure, we all get down from time to time but hopefully some of us know that this is not a good time to be making decisions because we know our perceptions are distorted by our moods.

We also know that the mood will lift and that when it does we will be able to see things more clearly, or certainly from a different perspective.

Reducing Workplace Bias: The Empathy Gap

The recognition of the importance of emotional states and how they impact thinking and decision-making is a critical life skill. It's even more important for those who have an empathy gap and can easily be hijacked by emotions.

HOW TO MANAGE THE EMPATHY GAP

1.

The first line of defense against the empathy gap is both the understanding of how emotions can drive the narrative and the awareness of our own emotional states. This involves really looking at how different emotions manifest in you and how you do, or don't manage them.

2.

The second strategy involves making a commitment not to make decisions when experiencing specific emotions, like being depressed, anxious or hyper. Excessive emotional energy might feel great but that doesn't mean it won't distort your perception.

3.

A third strategy to manage the empathy gap involves including other people in decision-making. Ideally, the use of other people mitigates any one person's more extreme emotions, leading to more balanced decision-making that is less informed, if at all, by emotional states. One does have to be careful here, about groupthink, so that the entire team doesn't become the victim of emotional extremes.

4.

A fourth strategy includes better management of emotions. Here the role of mindfulness and meditation is paramount in not only getting better control of emotional states but much greater awareness of them. Part of the problem with empathy gap is there is little awareness about how feelings can become strong and when they are, to be completely controlled by them.

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If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.

– Daniel Goleman

Reducing Workplace Bias: The Empathy Gap

The Empathy Gap refers to the inability to accurately judge emotions and the impact thereof, in one self or in others. Obviously these can lead to serious issues in relationships, communication and decision-making. Empathy gaps are divided into hot and cold, depending on whether one is in a heightened state of arousal (hot) or a neutral state (cold).

The hot-cold empathy gap is one in which people underestimate the power of visceral drives on their own and others' attitudes and behaviors.

The empathy gap is based on the notion that human perception, and thus thinking, is "state-dependent". When we're angry it is hard to imagine peace and calm. When we're exhausted it's hard to imagine being rested, and so on.

If we have an empathy gap, when we're in a hot state, we don't appreciate how much our physical state is driving our thoughts and behavior, and thus certainly making us much more susceptible to cognitive biases of all sorts.

When we are in the cold state, we don't appreciate how a hot state can lead us astray in our thoughts and actions. This can mean we are caught unawares when we do get into a hot state because we haven't anticipated the effect and planned accordingly.



When you show deep empathy toward others, their defensive energy goes down, and positive energy replaces it. That's when you can get more creative in solving problems.

– Stephen Covey

The empathy gap also can factor into your relationships with others.

If you are in a leadership or managerial position, the empathy that comes with good emotional intelligence is essential to not just understand your colleagues and subordinates but also to establish meaningful and positive relationships with them, too.

For example, if as a manager or a leader, you fail to recognize that you have alienated a team member you have two problems. The first is that you have upset that person, and because you don't recognize the problem, you have also failed to act in order to either explain, apologize or placate them.

In the eyes of your team mate you are now not just a poor communicator but an arrogant operator disinterested in other people's feelings. The vicious cycle can become a vortex of anger and frustration.

Reducing Workplace Bias: The Empathy Gap

One of the keys to communication is that “people will remember how you make them feel” more than anything. If you treat them with respect, trust, honesty and authenticity, they will be very likely to return those attributes and align with you.

If, however, you do the opposite, then you will have lost all your influence over them.

Sure, they might have to go along with what you say because of the role of authority in the organization, but you will ultimately pay the price in one way or another: from disengagement to outright sabotage, from silence to a smoldering fury.

And because emotion drives the narrative, someone who is mad at you for being so insensitive, will surely create and put out into the world very negative narratives about you, your performance, communication skills and personality.

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*Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action.
It's the impetus for creating change.*

– Max Carver

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MEDITATION

You must understand the impact of your emotions on your thoughts and actions. You must also understand the impact of emotions on other people's thoughts and actions.

You cannot allow yourself to be overwhelmed by visceral states like anger, fatigue, stress and frustration. You must recognize them for what they are, manage them accordingly and not allow them to interfere with your actions, thoughts and especially your decision-making.

Your relationships with others will depend on how you make them feel. If you cannot relate to their feelings, there will be a huge disconnect. You will lose their respect and their engagement and talents.

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Great leaders and managers know that empathy is the starting point for creating a community.
Great leaders and managers know that empathy is the impetus for creating change.
Great leaders and managers know that without empathy for themselves and others, they will not operate rationally.

Empathy is the basis of understanding. Empathy is the basis of rational thinking.

If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.

Great leaders and managers know that empathy is the basis of self-awareness and without such awareness you cannot succeed. Great leaders and managers know that if they can't manage distressing emotions they will not get very far. Great leaders and managers know that if they don't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart they are, they are not going to get very far.

You have to learn to walk in your own shoes before you can walk in the shoes of others. Great leaders and managers know that empathy is the starting point for creating a community. Great leaders and managers know that empathy is the impetus for creating change.

Great leaders and managers know that without empathy for themselves and others, they will not operate rationally. Empathy is the basis of understanding. Empathy is the basis of rational thinking. Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action.

It's the impetus for creating change If you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.