

How to Teach Empathy to Business Students?

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ABSTRACT

Empathetic leadership has been considered as important trait nowadays. Leaders with empathy are considered being able to influence, inspire and help people achieve their dreams and goals. When many people think that empathy is something you're born with, studies show that empathy is actually can be learned and grown if it is practiced with discipline along a period of time. The skill of empathizing has become important in the era where disruption and transformation have changed organization consistently. Communicating the change and its impact to the employees' life should be conveyed empathetically when successful transformation is at the stake. But many leaders do not know how to do it. The benefit to improving empathy capability will be strongly connected with the latest trend in education 4.0 which are connecting data, technology and human. Teaching empathy has been a standard process in teaching nurses and medical students. Rarely the methodology for teaching empathy in Business is being documented. The role of empathy in innovation has been mentioned in design thinking. Empathy as the center of design thinking will help to build the human's side of the students. And since empathize is the most difficult process, finding the right tool and methods will help achieve the empathizing capability. The project is to seek the structured methodology to improve empathizing capability among Master of Management students with major in creative marketing. The project involves measurement of empathy score, introduction several interventions and the evaluation of methodology is presenting in this paper.

Keywords—teaching empathy, empathy, business education, design thinking

1. INTRODUCTION

With the keep changing business environment, leaders have to continually lead changes in the organization. Studies on organizational changes show that communication empathetically is the secret to successful transformation [1]. Empathy known as the ability to read and understand other's emotions, needs and thoughts, is one of the competencies of emotional intelligence and a critical leadership skill. It helps leaders to influence, inspire and help people achieve their dream goal. It enables us to connect with people in a meaningful way. We have been born with the capability to empathize, as human is born with physical structure in their brain called mirror neurons that help use understand others' experiences and feelings. However, not many people know how to develop it. The pressure in the workplace or from our circle of relationships might put us in the situation where we are difficult to develop this skill. Developing empathy requires self-awareness, self-management, patience, endurance and lots and lots practice. Although empathy can be learned with time and dedication. [2]

Empathy teaching has been developed properly in the medicine [3,4], nursing [5] and social workers [6]. In Business Education, it is very rare the teaching of empathy is structured methodically, although in several knowledge area

such as marketing, empathy has become part of critical skills to understand and identify consumers' needs and develop innovations to satisfy the needs. The emergence of design thinking has created opportunity to explore the tools and methods to teach empathy to business students.

This initiative is to find the technique(s) of empathizing that is(are) easily implemented but give(s) the most significant improvement in empathizing capability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empathy

There is no general agreement about empathy for scientific enquiry. Referring to [7], for leadership effectiveness, empathy is considered as one of three pillars of emotional intelligence which are self-awareness, empathy and ability to build social relationship. Empathy does not stand alone, but consists of three distinct kinds of empathy which are cognitive empathy (the ability to understand another person's perspective), emotional empathy (the ability to feel what someone else feels), empathic concern (the ability to sense what another person needs from you). Cognitive empathy enables leaders to explain themselves in meaningful way.

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Emotional empathy is important for effective mentoring, managing clients and reading group dynamics. Lastly, empathic concern enables leaders to sense not just how people feel but what they need from you. The measurement for empathy in business is rarely available and always refer to the psychology's measurement.

Reference [8] concludes that empathy is actually multidimensional and can be differentiated between cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy is referred to the ability to connect with the emotional states of others, and affective empathy is the ability to understand and actively experience the feelings of others. The definitions of cognitive empathy should exclude reactive emotions such as sympathy which is an output of the empathetic process and not part of it. And for affective empathy, the definition should contain the process of being sensitive to and experiencing other people's feelings and not just being known or let everybody know about another's feelings. It is very clear, developing both cognitive and affective empathy requires active participation from whoever that would like to improve this ability.

To measure empathy, many tools in the form of self-report questionnaires are used to measure empathetic experience and behavior because it is fast and easy to manage. Questionnaires such as Hogan Empathy Scale (HES) [9], Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) [10], Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) [11] and Empathy Quotient (EQ) [12]. Because these questionnaires can't specifically measure cognitive and affective empathy, the QCAE (Questionnaire for Cognitive and Affective Empathy) is developed [8]. The available questionnaires are either rely on different definitions of empathy or do not take into consideration the multidimensional concept of empathy.

2.2 Design Thinking as method to empathize

Methods to teaching or practicing empathy have been developed such as simulations [13], reflective writing [14] and experiment [15]. This methodology is widely used in the area of medicine, nursing and social work.

For business education, the approach to empathize should be based on the innovation process. The concept of innovation process that is emerging currently is design thinking. Innovation is no longer a survival strategy in this era when the center of economy has shifted from industrial manufacturing to knowledge creation and service delivery. The implication of the shift from product center tasks to human-centered tasks has created evolution from design to design thinking [16]. Design thinking takes design process as a system of space rather than a predefined series of orderly steps. The spaces establish different type of related activities that at the end will form the continuum of innovation. Those spaces are inspiration, ideation and implementation. The label "inspiration" is for the circumstances (be they a problem, an opportunity or both) that motivate the search for solutions; "ideation", for process of generating, developing and testing ideas that may lead to solutions and "implementation" for the charting of a path to market. Project will loop back through these spaces [17].

In the space of inspiration, design thinking has the first and most important principle which is innovation is made by humans for humans. This principle shows that design thinking is a deeply human centered method that rooted in human needs. As consequence, if those human needs can not be met, the innovation process should be repeated [18]. Understanding human needs is strongly related with the empathy [2] or specifically cognitive empathy [8]. Design thinking is not only just principles, but also develop the process of design thinking (from need finding & synthesis, ideate, prototype, test and re(define) the problem) and introduce tools such as empathy map as one of its tools [18].

3. METHODS

3.1 Target Respondents and Time

The searching for teaching method for teaching empathy to business students is based on the process of design thinking by Stanford University [19] and measured by QCAE [8].

The unit analysis is the students of BINUS Business School Master Program with Creative Marketing major. The students enrolled the course ENTR8034 Design Thinking and Entrepreneurship between March - September 2019 are included into the project. The teaching method is Project Based Learning that involves project as part of learning experience and teaching method. For this course, students are assigned to solve any social problems using Design Thinking approach. Students have to apply the process of empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test in order to come up with the appropriate solution for any social problem that they choose. The social issues are chosen because it consists of layers of problems and its complexity requires students to pay attention to detail and creativity.

The students are given 2 weeks (4 sessions) to go to the field and gathering data to understand the social problem that they choose.

3.2 Data Collection

The students will collect the data using design thinking toolbox (empathy map) and process. Every session, students should come back to class and present the findings. Mentoring session by challenging the students about their findings are done by researchers.

Students will apply 3 (three) data collection methods which are observation, immersion and interview. Before going to the field, students are trained to identify needs by observation, immersion and interview.

3.3 The Training Method

In order to be able to empathize, students have to go to the field to meet the target for design. To equip the students with

the proper skills, several methods are introduced. Those methods are

1. Observation – the students are introduced with the concept of observation using What-How-Why and inferences on the observation. Still photograph and movie clip are used as the tools.
2. Immersion – the students experience the situation of pregnant women. A bag of 6 kg water is attached to the belly of the student. They have to walk, sit, lay down and walk downstairs for 10 minutes. After that they have to reflect how they feel during the exercise and confer with their own mother to seek validation.
3. Interview – the students will be trained to be able to ask the right questions to empathize. The students are trained to use laddering questions methods and listening to their friends’ questions and the interviewee’s answer. The question should be based on the answer of the interviewee. The new question will only be started when they can identify the insights which the real feeling of the interviewee.
4. Empathy map analysis – the students should be able to identify the pain point and gain of their respondents by connecting the answers from several questions. The students will be challenged by asking 5 whys until they understand the real feelings which end up with identifying the insights or new learnings from the situation.

3.4 Empathy Measurement

The development of empathy skills will be measured using the QCAE questionnaires. Participants will rate these items using a 4-point Likert scale to show to what scale that they agree about the statement. The options of 4-point Likert scale will be strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, and strongly disagree. There is no neutral answer. The participants is forced to make a choice [8].

Before Design Thinking class is started, the students will be assessed using QCAE questionnaire to get empathy score as the baseline of the current empathy score. During the class, students will be monitored intensely and encouraged to practice using the techniques to get the powerful consumer insights.

Since the time in Design Thinking class is very short, the students will be monitored until they pass Social Innovation Camp (mandatory event for 1st Semester Students which is similar design thinking process but involving the real NGOs with the real problems), MKTG8010 Strategic Marketing Planning (Semester 1), MKTG8075 New Product Development and Channel Management and COMM8159 Creative Marketing Communication (Semester 2). A post event QCAE will be held to measure the empathy skills development.

QCAE will measure both Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy. Cognitive Empathy will be consist of (1) Perspective Taking (unconsciously able to see other person’s perspectives from those person’s point of view) and (2) Online Simulation (make an effort to understand another person’s perspective by imagining other person’s feeling).

Online simulation is likely to be used for future intentions). Affective Empathy will consist of (1) Emotion Contagion (assesses the automatic mirroring of the feelings of others), (2) Proximal Responsivity (focus on the responsiveness aspect of empathic behavior, showed by the affective response after seeing the feelings of others when interact with each other. A response to the empathetic experience is usually reflected into sympathy, feeling to provide support and comfort urgently) and (3) similar to Proximal Responsivity, but in the less engagement context, Peripheral Responsivity [8].

3.5 Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed by comparing (1) Empathy Score pre and post intervention, (2) identifying the subcomponent performance, (3) relationship between Empathy Score Variance with the number of activities and the methods that are used in gathering the data. Besides those quantitative data, the qualitative analysis will be held to review the creative ideas progression.

4. RESULTS

This research is a preliminary research to identify the methodology to teach and monitor the result. The participants are Graduate students in Magister of Management in Creative Marketing. There are 39 students involved in this project, but only 32 students completed the pre and post measurement.

Empathy Score: There are increase in Empathy Score after the students finish the course and other activities/courses. However, the t test result show that there is not significant difference before and after the course.

Table 1 Empathy Score Performance

	Empathy Score	
	Pre	Post
N	32	32
Mean	88.19	90.84 ^a
Minimum	71	60
Maximum	103	107
Percentile 25	82.75	87.00
50	88.00	91.00
75	92.00	95.00

T test -1,745; df 31; sign (2 tail) 0.091 (not significant)

Cognitive Empathy : same as the result of total Empathy Score, although there is an increase in terms of the score of Cognitive Empathy, t test indicates that the significant increase difference apply only for subcomponent Perspective Taking and Online Simulation.

Table 2. Cognitive Empathy Performance

	Cognitive Empathy	
	Pre	Post
N	32	32
Mean	57.25	58.66 ^b
Minimum	48	33
Maximum	68	72
Percentile 25	54.00	55.25
50	56.00	59.00
75	61.50	64.00

^bT test -1.205; df 31; sign (2 tail) 0.237 (not significant)

Table 3. Cognitive Empathy Performance

	Perspective Taking		Online Simulation	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
N	32	32	32	32
Mean	29.16	31.78 ^c	28.09	26.88 ^d
Minimum	23	16	23	17
Maximum	37	40	35	33
Percentile 25	27.00	29.00	26.00	25.00
50	28.50	32.00	27.50	27.00
75	31.00	36.00	29.75	29.00

^cT test -3.108, df 31; sign (2 tail) 0.004 (significant); ^dT test 2.392; df 31; sign (2 tail) 0.0231 (significant)

Affective Empathy: same as the result of total Empathy Score and Cognitive Empathy, although there is an increase in terms of the score of Affective Empathy, t test indicates significant increase difference only apply for subcomponent Emotion Contagion.

Table 4. Affective Empathy Performance

	Affective Empathy	
	Pre	Post
N	32	32
Mean	30.94	32.19 ^c
Minimum	22	24
Maximum	41	41
Percentile 25	28.25	30.00
50	32.00	32.00
75	33.00	34.75

^cT test -1.805; df 31; sign (2 tail) 0.081 (not significant)

Table 5. Affective Empathy Performance (Specific Data)

	Emotion Contagion	
	Pre	Post
N	32	32
Mean	9.81	11.19 ^f
Minimum	5	6
Maximum	16	15
Percentile 25	9.00	10.00
50	10.00	12.00
75	11.00	13.00

^fT test -4.216, df 31; sig (2 tail) 0.000 (significant)

The Influence of Activities to Empathy Score, Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy: since the initiative involves students from different semester, the exposure to several key courses that might help improving their empathy capability is not uniform. The number of activities, in this case other courses and Social Innovation Camp, are scored and their correlation is measured. The result shows that there is no correlation between the increase of Empathy Score and the number of activities (course and event) that students attend between the pre and post measurement.

The analysis is also done for Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy. And the result shows that there is no correlation between the number of activities with Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy.

The Influence of Method for Data Collection to Empathy Score, Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy: the correlation test between the method of data collection (observation, immersion and interview) shows that there is no correlation between the data collection method and the score of Empathy Score, Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy.

5. CONCLUSION

The increase of Empathy Score, Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy Score have not significantly different with the pre-intervention. When comparing the number of students using percentile 25%, 50% and 75%, there is no movement in total Empathy Score. However, if we analyze by component of Empathy which is Cognitive and Affective Empathy, although still small, there are students who move their score from 25% percentile to 50% or 75% percentile. There is one student move up to 75% percentile.

This fact can be an indication that when a certain method is applied, we have to make sure that the discipline to empathize in Design Thinking process should be applied also in other courses that have innovation as their main objectives, because empathy is actually not a single component but it consists of several components that might link with each other [8].

There are 3 subcomponents that significantly increase which are Perspective Taking, Online Simulation and Emotion Contagion. It can be concluded that students have improve their intuition to understand other people's perspective from the eyes of those people. This result also indicate that the student has tried to imagine other people feelings in that person's position. The increase of two subcomponent of Cognitive Empathy has shown that with either improving the method or challenging their way to understand people might have influence on this increase. When students are asked about the difficulties during interview, most of them can identify their weaknesses either leading the questions or fail to identify the insights. These answers can be an indication that the students have started to build their self-awareness to

the way they ask questions and draw conclusion. Self-awareness is the first pillar of emotional intelligence [7].

The last subcomponent that shows significant increase is Emotion Contagion which measures the immediate imitation of the others' feelings. Again, this shows that the exercise to keep reminding about understanding the consumer and challenges their findings about consumer insights might have impact the slight behavior changes toward understanding and act upon those understanding.

This initiative has been held since March 2019 and end at October 2019. Within 6 months, and without the proper methodology established yet, there is slight improvement toward self-awareness to think about other people's feeling. Project Based Learning has help to accommodate the needs to deal with close to actual reality. And developing this kind of skills should be accommodated with frequent practices.

Students who have gone through courses that have project assignment such as New Product Development and Creative Marketing Communication where they get a real- life clients have shown improvement in the creativity and in- depth analysis.

This preliminary result shows an indication that teaching empathy can create result for students in Business Education. However, the method should be standardized, simplified and robust to achieve a significant improvement. The type of course and the continuous monitoring might create differences.

6. LIMITATION

The limitations of this study are the small number of participants and no established single method in terms of empathize processes. The length of time for observing the improvement should be more than 6 months. However, when we monitor more than 6 months, it should be considered for not using the tools to measure Empathy Score very often to keep the objectivity.

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