A systematic review of empathy and leadership

By

Heather Elizabeth MacDonald

A Major Research Paper Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Masters in Business Administration.

April, 2015, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Approved: Dr. Wendy Carroll
              Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Mark Raymond
              Second Review

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Abstract

A systematic review of empathy and leadership

By Heather Elizabeth MacDonald

Empathy, though not a new concept in the medical profession, is a new phenomenon discussed in management and leadership literature. Leaders need to be mindful and critical of where they get their information about how and when to be empathetic in business. The best knowledge a leader can use is supported by elevated research. The purpose of this study is to examine the evaluated research about leadership and empathy to better understand what evidence supports the claims being made in popular press about the role of empathy in leadership. The findings from this study reveal four themes -- ethics and leadership, educational institutions role in teaching empathy, trust, and emotional intelligence. The findings indicate that there is a limited amount of evaluated research evidence to support the directions espoused in popular press articles. Though many academics suggest that empathy is important for leaders to foster in order to reach objectives and better the bottom line, more research needs to be conducted.

<div align="right">April 11, 2015</div>

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Executive Summary

More than ever leaders are able to access information that may help them better their organizations, teams, and themselves and there has never been a time in history where information has been more accessible. The introduction of the internet has enhanced the ways in which leaders can learn from other's advice, experiences, and/ or opinions. Leaders can learn by accessing information from a variety of different mediums such as audio like podcasts, videos, like Ted Talks, and articles on websites website. Other than the more traditional platforms, many "suggested" knowledge experts have built their careers on social media and through blogs.

This all sounds very positive and it is easy to see the opportunity for leaders to grow, develop, and reap the benefits of this accessible information. However, the downside is that not all information is created equally. Having more information does not mean it is all true, proven, or helpful. In fact, it could be suggested that having this much access to various opinions and insights might be more harmful than good.

The purpose of this study is to take a look at what resources are available for practitioners, specifically leaders, and evaluate through a systematic review whether or not it positively or negatively correlates with what research and academia have discovered to date. This paper evaluates how popular press presents leadership and empathy.

Empathy is defined as understanding the emotional needs of others and using this comprehension to make better decisions and communicate more effectively for the betterment of the person and organization. Empathy has a prevalent topic of interest for

popular press writers while at the same time, organizations are starting to acknowledge how empathy may help leaders progress. This paper reflects on the types of messaging that popular press is providing leaders and generates an arduous and methodical review of the empirical evidence that exists about how empathy can benefit leaders.

The results of the rigorous systematic review suggest that there is a limited amount of unbiased empirical evidence to suggest that the popular press articles and publications are providing leaders accurate information about empathy. Of the elevated research included in this review academic researchers believe that empathy is important, though not a great deal of unbiased research has been conducted to date. This stresses the uncertainty that articles published by popular press are evidence-based. More research should be conducted around what effects empathy has on leaders and the impact it can have on an organization.

To conclude, though many academic researchers suggest that empathy is important for leaders to foster in order to reach objectives and better the bottom line, more research needs to be conducted. Leaders need to be mindful and critical of where they get their information and ensure that there is some evidence to support it. The best knowledge a leader can use is evidence-based and supported by elevated research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a review of the literature using techniques of a systematic review to examine the topic of empathy and leadership. The study's findings will show if there is a gap between what is being written in popular press articles about leadership and empathy and whether these claims are supported by the evaluated research evidence. There is a need to examine and compare the literature

because leaders need to be mindful and conscientious of the different kinds of information they absorb. This study will conclude whether empathy in leadership is portrayed accurately in these mediums based on the results of the systematic review.

Background

Practitioners today can access information on empathy from anyone anywhere in the world. With a quick online engine search, readers can access copious amounts of popular articles that are readily accessible. A popular press publication is generally written by a journalist (a writer, with an interest but not always a specialist in the topic) intended for a broad audience. This means that the advice, recommendations, and insights that are provided by the writer might not be useful for certain readers given that there may not be any cross-functionality with a specific situation a leader might be facing. In addition, articles rarely give citations or show evidence of what sources were used, if any. As a result, readers are left to determine the validity of the writer's claims and without access or time to evaluated research may be following directions that are not supported or accurate.

Since 2005 there has been an increase in popular press articles about the role of empathy in leadership. For example, a google search produces over 25,600,000 results. Though empathy has been researched and shown to have important role for doctors dealing with patients and families, it is a fairly new concept talked about in the context of business organizations. Forbes Magazine published an article stating that empathy "is the force that moves businesses forward" (Boyers, 2013, "Why Empathy Is The Force," para. 1). The author emphasizes empathy as being a differentiator for effective leaders.

Although there have been many articles written in popular press about empathy, there is no consistency or agreement on what leaders should do, be, or focus on to be an "empathic leader". Though there is valuable advice such as having strong communication, listening skills, open mindedness, and withholding judgement, leaders are provided a variety of opaque solutions and suggestions. Since the authors of these articles fail to identify any evaluated research evidence sources, it is difficult to conclude that these specific qualities, traits, behaviours lead to empathy or make leaders more empathic.

From a leadership perspective, what we do know from the evaluated research evidence is that there is a connection between leadership and emotional intelligence (EQ) and that it has an association with empathy. Empathy has been considered to be one of several components that make up a person's EQ. Some other components are namely, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills. It is suggested that a leader having strong emotional intelligence will be more successful at creating positive change internally and externally of themselves and their organization. Dr. Daniel Goleman suggests that having a strong EQ is twice as important as having a high IQ for jobs at all levels, (Goleman, 2004) but especially for leaders.

There is no question that there is an association between empathy and leadership. However, "what" specifically constitutes actions and/or behaviours of an empathic leader is the question. Much like the debate about whether leaders are born or made, there is an on-going discussion about whether empathy can be taught (a skill) or it being a quality in someone that is natural.

Need for Study

It is important for leaders to use a holistic and thorough approach when leading individuals, teams, and organizations. Leaders can gather knowledge from many sources, the most popular being books and articles in newspapers and magazines (both hard copy and online). It is imperative that leaders make decisions conscientiously whilst using a variety of different sources of evidence. Unfortunately, do to time constraints, lack of access to evaluated research evidence, and ability to assess evaluated research evidence; it is easy for leaders to take advice from accessible popular press articles and sources (like conference presenters, social media, and TED talks). This information gap is referred to as the rigour-relevance gap. This paper will strive to help fill this rigour-relevance gap for leaders to make better decisions based on appropriate knowledge.

When done accurately, and with a strong objective methodology, systematic reviews can provide insights into topics and can highlight the differences between what is reported in popular press versus the research evidence. This study about empathy and leadership is important as it will help show what is relevant and what should be "myth". When leaders make decisions based on relevant and evidence-based information, all stakeholders benefit.

Statement of Problem

Whereas empathy is being presented in popular press as everything from a trait, skill, and tool, there is no consistency on context for the reader (practitioner). This lack of clarity presents an issue for practitioners to understand a way to conceptualize

empathy and leadership and provide guidance for leadership development programs and support systems.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Purpose and scope of literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss how empathy and leadership is being presented by popular press. More and more are professionals turning to online resources like magazines and common publications that is readily available anywhere. This literature review will highlight key themes found in the articles found from specific business magazines. Articles in this section were selected based on three popular online resources for leaders, namely, SUCCESS Magazine, Forbes Magazine, and Inc. Magazine. All of these sources were selected based on their popularity as well as volume of content around empathy and leadership. When searching these mediums' websites, the words "empathy" and "empathy and leadership" were used to retrieve articles. It is important to note that the articles presented in this literature review are considered popular press (as described in Chapter 1).

Popular Press Reviewed

When reviewing the articles of the three popular press sources, three prevailing themes appeared, namely, 1) Empathy and leadership; 2) Feminism and soft skills; and 3) The benefits of empathy. Each of these themes is discussed below using the sources found from the popular press magazines.

Empathy and Leadership

The first theme that was evident throughout many articles was the actual explanation of what empathy and leadership have to do with one another. Many articles

were concerned with only educating leaders about empathy. In Shelly Levitt's article *Why the Empathetic Leader Is the Best Leader*, she mentions a supposed leadership expert Simon Sinek's belief that empathy is the most important thing that a leader can have. She defines empathy as the ability to recognize and share other people's feelings (2014). Sinek states, "True leadership isn't the bastion of a few who sit at the top. It's the responsibility of anyone who belongs to a group, and that means all of us. We all need to step up, take the risk and put our interests second—not always—but when it counts" (Levitt, 2014, "Why the Empathetic Leader Is the Best Leader, para. 19).

In Justin Bariso's article *Empathy: The Basic Quality Many Leaders Keep Getting Wrong* he writes, "Employer or employee, empathy makes us more flexible and compassionate" (2014). It makes us easier to work with, and in the eyes of others, it makes us more human (Bariso, 2014, para. 28). He denotes that a leader with empathy would take time to relate to how a subordinate may feel and how this might affect one's work and relationships or interactions with others. Bariso believes that leaders who demonstrate empathy to individual team members will help encourage them to perform at their best. Furthermore, he states that, "empathy begets empathy" (2014, para. 15) where as a leader showing empathy to a team might prompt a team to show empathy towards its leader. Tom Gimbel explains that taking the time to get to know the people one manages will create more responsive employees. Moreover, it states that how a leader approaches using empathy to find understanding may be different for each employee (Rice, 2013, "Empathy Is the Key to Effective Leadership," para. 1).

A number of articles also reference emotional intelligence (EQ), and empathy emerging as one of its key components. In the article *5 Reasons to Beef Up Your Emotional Intelligence* written by Karima Mariama-Arthur, the author references

Harvard Business Review's article *What makes a Leader?,* written by Daniel Goleman. Mariama-Arthur discusses Goleman's opinion that empathy is a specific component of EQ in addition to self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills (Goleman, 2014). Goleman also has a TED talk that came up within scope of this review that discusses empathy as being important to a leaders' success (2007). Mariama-Arthur believes that to be able to develop others, which helps establish credibility with followers, a leader must have self-awareness and empathy (2015, para. 11).

When researching more on Daniel Goleman, this quote was found to explain how important he believes empathy is to a leader's success:

> The increasing use of teams, (which he refers to as "cauldrons of bubbling emotions"), the rapid pace of globalization (with cross cultural communication easily leading to misunderstandings) and the growing need to retain talent. "Leaders with empathy," states Goleman, "do more than sympathize with people around them: they use their knowledge to improve their companies in subtle, but important ways." (Martinuzzi, 2014, "What's Empathy Got to Do With It?," para. 8)

Goleman believes that even though leaders may not agree with every person's point of view nor try to please every person, they should "thoughtfully consider employees' feelings" in the process of making decisions and taking action (Martinuzzi, 2014, "What's Empathy Got to Do With It?," para. 8).

Another article states that EQ "is under attack" (Balmain, 2014, "The Leadership Secret to Supercharging Your Team," para. 1) due to how society is changing how it

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communicates. The author states that due to technology, employees are no longer engaging with one another like they used to be. With some companies having multiple offices all over the globe it is "making it harder to feel empathy or use your social skills to advantage" (Balmain, 2014, "The Leadership Secret to Supercharging Your Team," para. 26). Balmain encourages readers to spread their emotional intelligence, one person at a time. The idea that technology and online communications is taking away from the social aspect of a workplace is not new. Conversely the impression that technology is making it more difficult to see another's perspectives and emotions is relatively new. The article concludes that technology is taking away opportunities for empathy to be cultivated.

In Jessica Stillman's *3 Habits That Will Increase Your Empathy*, she discusses some research (expert opinion and biased) conducted around empathy. She references Roman Krznaric, one of the founding members of The School of Life in London. The school's mission is to develop emotional intelligence through culture (The School of Life, 2015, "About Us," para. 1). Stillman writes that Krznaric recommends three behaviours to increase ones empathic skills: having curiosity for others, listening and being vulnerable to others and by increasing the amount of people (and things) one can be empathetic towards (Stillman, 2014). This article, like a few others, is describing empathy and how leaders can use it. Conversely, it does not provide much depth or examples of when empathy could help a leader be more successful.

Ilya Pozin lists empathy as the primary trait underrated for leaders. It states that if a leader is unable to connect with others, then they are unlikely to accomplish a great deal in general. It recommends to leaders that empathy and listening to others is needed to gain trust, build relationships and understand reactions from others. (Pozin, 2013)

Feminism and Soft Skills

In several instances, there were references to empathy being a feminine quality. These articles discuss how empathy is considered valuable and important for leaders and relate the trait to one that is considered a "softer skill" and one that women have an easier time using than men. In article "*Attention Leaders: Embracing Your Softer Side Makes You Stronger,* Browning states that due to the increase of women in the workplace, empathy and flexibility has also increased. She states, "Men have begun to understand and accept empathy as a key component of effective leadership. They're tapping into the relational potential they possess and getting a positive response" (Browning, 2014, "Attention Leaders," para. 5). Browning did not provide any research to support her reasoning for this positive response.

In Leigh Buchanan's lengthy Inc. article she writes about traits that "true leaders" should have. She divides different characteristics (including empathy) into two categories; whether she considers the quality to be masculine or feminine quality (Buchanan, 2013). She suggests that the most effective leader is one that has been labeled as having feminine qualities such as empathy, vulnerability, humility, and balance (2013). Buchanan suggests that leaders must develop soft skills, admit failures, and to make decisions based on knowledge and holistic understanding of situations.

McClafferty, in his article *13 Practical Leadership Tips from 10 Years of Managing People,* he lists compassion (which was related to empathy in several articles) as the most important trait that a leader could have (2015). He states that generally, if a subordinate were to act out of character the leader should show compassion first. "As a leader, use your compassion and empathy to help you understand what went wrong. Instead of jumping to conclusions or trying to guess what happened" (McClafferty,

2015, "13 Practical Leadership Tips," para. 1). He also discusses trustworthiness as a way to get employees to "go the extra mile".

Ming Chang, CEO and President of Linking to World (an international humanitarian aid organization), outlines steps to build empathy. She believes that empathy has been misunderstood as pity, soft skills, and "fuzzy" feelings. In several articles, this softer approach is suggested to be much more valuable than other ways of managing employees.

Benefits of Empathy

In some articles there are unambiguous contrasts on whether or not empathy is a good quality for a leader to have. One article discovered suggests that empathy might not always be helpful for a leader to use. In John Baldoni's *How To Lead With Empathy (and When Not To)*, he discusses that managers who feel a high degree of empathy can have difficulties making decisions such as who gets promotions, demotions, or dismissal (Baldoni, 2011). He additionally inscribes that empathy can act as a blinder and paralyze a leader from acting, and that empathy can make a leader hold different subordinates at different levels of standards. Though Baldoni believes that a total lack of empathy is not positive, he believes that "empathy is the ability to have a heart, but leadership is the attribute to act on that heart when it matters" (2011, "How to Leader with Empathy," para. 10).

Jill Kransny, who wrote *The Awesome Power of Empathy*, rebuttals Baldoni's opinions by writing that the best leaders at work are the ones who take time to listen to their employees, see other's perspectives, and understand where an employee may be coming from (Krasny, 2014). Chang asserts that having empathy is the best advice a

leader can receive (2015). The contrasts in opinion creates uncertainty for readers as well as demonstrates that leaders are vulnerable to take in information that may or may not be accurate or proven.

Chang also describes having empathy as more than walking in someone's shoes, but by also walking beside someone. She provides readers a list of ways to make empathy a leader's "superpower". She recommends using empathy to create one's vision, become mission driven, inspire loyalty, increase meaningful communication, and finally, to see the big picture and focus on the bottom line (Chang, 2015).

Levitt writes that helping others, expressing kindness, and empathy provides a sensation of feeling good. Furthermore, she states that by training to be more empathic and by acting more congenial, there is a building effect. "Daily practice of putting the well-being of others first has a compounding and reciprocal effect in relationships, in friendships, in the way we treat our clients and our colleagues" (Levitt, 2014, "Why the Empathetic Leader Is the Best Leader," para. 18).

In the Young Entrepreneur Council's article *15 Traits of a Terrible Leader*, they proclaim the paper's content is from the experience of real-world leaders. It expresses that leaders that lack empathy cannot fully understand the problems that their team may face and thus are unable to remove barriers such as lack of resources, direction or cultural issues (Young Entrepreneur Council, 2015). The writers believe that by listening to all employees a loyal team is built. Additionally it states that team failure is the responsibility of the leader and thus blaming specific members of the team should be avoided (Young Entrepreneur Council, 2015).

Geoffrey James states that in order to become more relevant and worthy of job security in a volatile economy, one needs to be authentic, a master of skills, builder of

relationships, empathetic, and an action taker. James asserts that "Empathy is the capacity to recognize and, to some extent, share feelings […] being experienced by another being" (2013, "4 Ways to Become More Relevant," para. 15). Without providing any citation or explanation of where he came up with these definitions, he believes that there are three levels of empathy namely, "on-demand", "solution", and lastly "transcendent" (James, 2013, "4 Ways to Become More Relevant," para. 16). This was the only reference to these levels of empathy.

Summary

To summarize, there were many articles that boasted the positive benefits of empathy and some authors even believe that empathy is the best quality for a leader to have. There were only a couple articles that referenced research and other than the few writers who referenced Daniel Goleman's work with EQ, the research was expert opinion only - not peer-reviewed academic.

Due to this extremely minimal amount of evidence-based articles, this paper is important because practitioners need to be aware of where and what information they are collecting. There is a major increase in the volume of content available to practitioners, however, as discovered in this literature review, it is not backed by research and nor are the opinions united. By conducting a systematic review on empathy in leadership, practitioners can be better educated on what currently exists in terms of elevated and empirical data and findings.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction to Research Design

A systematic review is a process where researchers analyse a topic or specific question using an orderly and predetermined methodology. The purpose of this type of review is to present available research, through databases and academic articles, on a specific question or problem. By using a systematic review, the reviewer's intent is to make the research approach explicit and unbiased. It allows the reviewer to transparently find and critique research. Discoveries are found by synthesizing research findings and conclusions.

A systematic review helps researchers determine how to evaluate publications and studies by using an evidence-based approach. It allows readers to approach a topic from a holistic perspective in a specific field or issue. A systematic review can assist in medicine, science, business and many other fields where there are diverse opinions and topics. It is especially important to evaluate all information to ensure accuracy in reporting of data, which leads to intangible and tangible outcomes. Without accurate and evidence-based knowledge, there are limitations to what can be achieved.

This objective approach details important information about the specific question or problem at hand in an efficient way. When research and studies contradict each other, there is a more critical need to conduct a thorough and well-designed systematic review to ensure decision makers make the most appropriate choices. When done correctly, it can provide the opportunity to overcome shortfalls of comparing and contrasting data and findings.

The following outlines the framework for analyzing the literature determined for inclusion for this research methodology:

Case Section Criteria

Using the practices of a systematic review, the following criterion was established for the search and evaluation process of academic literature for this paper.

1. This systematic review will contain academic articles found from ABI/INFORM Global, EBSCO Business Source Premier, and JSTOR databases only.

2. The search criteria will be confined to peer-reviewed articles published since 2005.

3. The analysis of article findings and research, found in the above databases, will be made by reviewing the articles' abstracts and full text.

4. To manage scope and relevance when searching in the above databases the keyword search will be limited to "Empathy + Leadership".

5. The articles that reference "training" will be analyzed; however articles may not be limited to training.

6. This review will discard any papers that diverge from what empathy is and how it is used in leadership. These articles will be deemed out of scope for the purpose of this review.

In order to maintain detail and within scope of this topic, the data collected will be categorized and labelled based off of the information provided by the articles. The data will be used to discuss qualitative and quantitative findings and any themes that emerge

from the selected sources. Examination of this data may have implications on current research in regards to this topic

The academic literature identified for inclusion was analyzed using a framework with the following fields (See Appendix A): 1. Number (each article was numbered to allow for quick access and filing); 2. Title of article; 3. Author(s) of article; 4. Journal name (that the article was retrieved from); 5. Database (from where article was found); 6. Year of publication; 7. Topic of article; 8. Reasoning for inclusion in review; 9. Level of evidence; 10. Article's definition of empathy; 11. Variables studied; 12. Key findings; and lastly, 13. Future research and gaps.

Research Summary

By using a systematic review application with the criteria above, finding negative or positive correlating evidence will be possible with the articles in the literature review (from popular press sources) and what elevated research evidence is available. This methodology will be thorough and transparent to the point that the review can be duplicated with the criterion above. This evidence-based approach will guide findings, discover possible themes, and help draw conclusions.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discusses the findings from the data collected using a predetermined systematic review framework. As discussed in the methodology chapter of this paper, the systematic review was conducted using a specific number of databases, searching the keywords "empathy + leadership" and using only peer-reviewed journal articles. The result of this review was determination of the level of evidence and the discovery of themes in the research on empathy and leadership thus far.

Results

There were 30 papers that met the criteria of the review framework. Of these 30 articles, though found using the methodology, ten did not fit the scope of this systematic review. These ten papers varied in topics and though had reference to the keywords searched, they were too aloof from leadership and empathy. Of the 20 that did fit the criteria, empathy in leadership was studied in a variety of different ways and presented a diverse amount of evidence to support the researchers' conclusions.

Figure 1: Systematic Review Article Inclusion
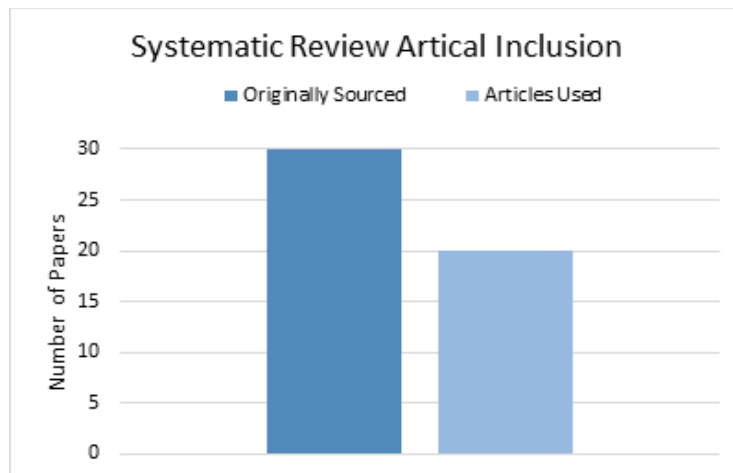
Findings

As noted above, there were 20 articles used in the systematic review that were relevant to the scope of this paper. Of these 20, there were many similarities and differences discovered. There are three major discussions from the review: 1) various definitions of empathy 2) common themes that appeared throughout the review; and 3) differentiated levels of evidence. Each of these components will be discussed in detail and are pertinent when compared to how popular press is portraying empathy in leadership.

Level of Evidence

All of the articles were evaluate by the quality of evidence provided. By looking at the different kinds of research conducted and evaluating whether it is biased or not, helps determine the quality of the evidence searched as a whole. This also provides a snapshot of the current research available for empathy in leadership. The table below provides insights on the type of evidence provided in the 20 articles sourced for this systematic review.

Table 1: Levels of Evidence

	Level of Evidence	Number used in systematic review
Least amount of bias	**Randomized controlled studies**	**3**
	Non-randomized controlled studies	**3**
	Observational studies	**0**
	Before-after studies	**2**
	Surveys and case studies	**4**
Most amount of bias	**Expert opinions**	**8**

As denoted in the methodology, a specific process was conducted to generate the qualified list of research included in the table above. The articles used are the most current, peer-reviewed, and as academic as possible. The majority fall well within the expert opinion level of evidence. 60% of the articles reviewed, a combination of surveys and export opinion, are considered to have a high level of bias by the author(s).

These results suggest that there is not a significant amount of unbiased empirical evidence to put forward that the findings and themes presented in this chapter are truthful. Additionally, this stresses the uncertainty around the content in the publications presented in literature review chapter and the need for more research to be done regarding the implications that empathy might have on leaders (be it positive or negative).

Various Definitions of Empathy

Majority of the papers included a definition of empathy although 25% of articles discussed empathy without providing the reader an explanation of what it means. For the papers that included a definition, it was recorded. The table below provides excerpts from the articles that did include a definition:

Figure 2: Definitions of Empathy from Articles

Definition of Empathy from Articles
Understanding and empathizing with others (Sabbaghu, 2013).
According to Calitz (2002), a leader's demonstration of empathy is directly related to the ability to work with, understand and react accordingly to the emotional grammar of workers (Singh, 2013).
"Concerned with, for, and about others in addition to company profits, are optimistic about subordinate success as well as their own." (Ramesh, 2013, p. 212). Continuously addressing the emotional needs of followers in an effort to: "Bring out the best" in them (Ramesh, 2013).
"One's ability to understand the feelings transmitted through verbal and nonverbal messages to provide emotional support to people when needed, and to understand the links between other' emotions and behaviour" (Holt, 2012).
"Closely related to the comprehensive view of nurturing above is empathy in the sense of compassion, not only for co-workers, supplies, and other supporting groups, but even for those who engage in adverse practices." (Marques, 2011, p. 27)
The ability to relate to others' feelings, and therefore understand their predicaments and troubles better. Terms that are often mentioned in affiliation with empathy are emotional intelligence and compassion (Marques, n.d.).
"Empathy is the ability to recognize and understand the emotions and feelings of

others, and this interpersonal skill can make it easier to develop a cooperative relationship of mutual trust with a subordinate" (Mahsud, 2010, p. 562-3).

"Empathy refers to one's ability to understand the feelings transmitted through verbal and nonverbal messages, to provide emotional support to people when needed, and to understand the links between others' emotions and behaviour" (Polychroniou, 2009, p. 345).

"The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, and the skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions (Daniel Goleman, p.5)" (Karnes, 2009, p. 194).

To be aware of and understand how others feel (Stein, 2008).

"Walking in someone else's shoes" The ability to think and feel what it might be like to be other than yourself" (Kana, 2007)

"Servant leaders transcend their personal self-interests in order to fulfill the needs of followers is to empathize with followers. …Reinforce their communication and decision making with a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Through listening servant leaders seek to understand and empathize with others in order to identify and clarify the will of their group". (Washington, 2006, pg 702) "Leaders empathy reflects fundamental personal values that appreciate, honor, and esteem people." (2006, p. 703)

Interactive Empathy "measures whether leaders take initiative in creating a two-way emotionally bond in which they influence others' emotions as well as feel others' emotions" (Humphrey, 2013, p. 291).

"The ability to comprehend others' feelings, as well as to re-experience those feelings themselves so as to communicate mutual understanding and compassion in the workplace." Walking in the shoes of other people and choosing the most acceptable communication strategies is a challenge to any public relations leader" (Jim, 2010, p. 175)

The ability to understand and experience another person's emotions. "Empathy serves as a bridge between individuals and as such, it is an essential condition for full participation in transformational discourse" (Berkovich, 2014, p. 252)

To summarize, the most commonly used definition of empathy is to understand the emotional needs of others and using this comprehension to make better decisions and communicate more effectively for the betterment of the person and organization. This however was in less than half of the papers reviewed, resulting in uncertainty around the actual academic definition of empathy and how individuals might measure it.

Themes

The articles that were examined in this systematic review varied in findings as well as types of evidence. Out of this diverse group, there were four main themes that were garnered from the review. They include 1) Ethics and Leadership 2) Business Schools and Educational Role in teaching Empathy; 3) Trust; and 4) Emotional Intelligence.

Ethics and Leadership

While some papers discussed empathy as a form of emotional intelligence, there were also those that suggested that empathy and ethical leadership were intertwined. Ethical leadership behaviour means to have high morality and as a leader, to be virtuous in one's decision making and actions. Ethical virtues include, but are not limited to courage, prudence, optimism, compassion, humility, justice and integrity (Johnson, 2012). Virtues of compassion, humility, and integrity have been described as empathic

qualities. Like ethics and leadership, there is a belief that empathy is under-utilized and underdeveloped by organizations.

Karnes' research suggests that an increase in employee-employer relationship not only increases the bottom line but also increases employee satisfaction. "Areas such as empathy and social skills are under trained and under developed by organizations" (Karnes, 2009 p. 189). The author believes that empathy, like ethics, is "the right thing to do" (2009 p. 196). Karnes also discussed that when leaders demonstrate empathy, employees are willing to produce "two-fold returns" for their employer.

In the article *Leader empathy, ethical leadership, and relations-oriented behaviours as antecedents of leader-member exchange quality,* the authors assert that leader empathy and ethical leadership should be considered when firms determine leadership selection and in educational programs that develop potential future leaders (Mahsud, 2010, p. 591). Being the first of its kind (as an empirical study), to simultaneously examine the complex relationships among different aspects of leadership, the authors concluded that, "A leader's relations-oriented behavior fully mediated the relationship between leader empathy on LMX [leader-member exchange] and partially mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and LMX" (Mahsud, 2010, p. 591). The author asserts that ethics and empathy should be considered important to employers when hiring.

Pastoriza and Ariño discuss how ethical leadership of supervisors can generate internal social capital with a leader's subordinates, resulting in the subordinates having a greater attachment to the overall goals of the firm (2013). "By displaying and enforcing ethical behavior, supervisors can facilitate the process through which employees learn to feel empathy towards others and establish profound affective relationships with them."

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(Ariño, 2013, p.1) The authors conclude that "ethical leadership at the supervisory level contributes to the development of structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of internal social capital," (2013). This paper highlights that ethics and empathy can help supervisors foster employee actualization. Moreover, it acclaims that supervisors who display integrity and concern are in a better position to provide meaningful explanation of the firm's goals and as such, increasing the understanding of the firm's goals and how subordinates might play a role in achieving these goals. This internal social capital can create dedicated followers to the leader and subsequently, the organization.

Business Schools and Educational Role in teaching Empathy
A number of articles contained different kinds of studies. Many of the studies were conducted using students in either undergraduate or graduate programs and were specifically students studying business. Additionally, there were a articles that suggested the idea that without business students being taught about empathy, it can be assumed that majority of the facilitation of empathy development relies on employers.

In the paper, *Service-Learning and Leadership: Evidence from Teaching Financial Literacy*, the authors were able see positive effects of students providing empathy for others. The before-after studies provided a virtually risk-free exercise but took students out of their normal elements by partaking in teaching financial literacy service-learning. The students that took part in the study exhibited improvement in "nurturing growth of employees and colleagues, commitment to serving the needs of others, understanding and empathizing with others, ethical behaviour, ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation, and listening intently to others" (Sabbaghu, 2013, p.131) resulting in business students developing empathy.

Varies papers stressed the role that business schools have in teaching students soft skills like ethics, empathy, and corporate social responsibility. The assertion is also made that empathy can be taught, and developed over time. They suggest that these skills can play a large role in the results a leader can achieve. They assert that training for managers and senior executives will create a "commitment of growth of people" and serving the needs of others (Sabbaghu, 2013) however training students well in advance of them becoming business leaders will benefit firms.

Holt and Marques suggest a proactive approach from educators when equipping students with required leadership skills; to change the current paradigm to one that includes qualities like empathy (2012). They write, "The 21st century brings a whole new set of demands, which radically change the way leaders will perform" (Holt, 2012). The authors discuss how changes and advancements in technology, globalization, knowledge workers, diversity, corporate social responsibility, and partnerships can emulate how leaders lead. They assert that changes in how future leaders are taught need to occur. This theme is also woven through Marques' paper on *Understanding the Strength of Gentleness: Soft-skilled Leadership on the Rise*. She emphasises,

...soft leadership skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, are steadily on the rise, and that greater attention should be apportioned to strengthen these skills in future leaders. (Marques, 2012, p. 164)

In several papers, narcissistic leaders were described to have little empathy for others. Samier and Atkins, upon their observation studies of students, faculty, and

administrators in an educational setting, suggest that a narcissistic person has anti-characteristics of empathy. Some of these qualities include not listening, trying to dominate, treating others with disdain, showing no respect for confidentiality, reacting defensively, and showing no concern for others (Samier, 2010). "Their behaviour towards others ranges from superficially charming, if they want something from you, to arrogant and haughty, if you apparently do not matter to them, and derisive and contemptuous, if you are in their road" (Samier, 2010, p. 581). This can be somewhat alarming to find in an education setting and suggests that the lack of empathy might affect learning and knowledge sharing.

In their paper, they note that other researchers such as Kets de Vries (2003, p.23) have stated, "Narcissistic personalities [...] are frequently encountered in top management positions." Given that narcissistic individuals have a desire for power and attention, it makes sense that they aim for leadership roles in organizations. The authors also discuss Kohut's (1971, 1977) assertions regarding why narcissistic individuals act the way they do. "The underlying cause of narcissism [...] is a lack of cohesive self-able to mirror to oneself a validation of success causing this personality type to seek external validation, or mirroring, to produce a healthy self-image" (Samier, 2010, p. 581). This leads to the conclusion that a characteristic of a narcissistic leader is one without a great deal of empathy.

Trust

Building conviction and trustworthiness came up in several papers analyzed. Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia define empathy as, "the ability to recognize and understand the emotions and feelings of others, and this interpersonal skill can make it easier to

develop a cooperative relationship of mutual trust with a subordinate" (2010, p. 562-3). Others suggest that the relationship between leaders and their subordinates comes from the leader's competence in empathy and transformational leadership. The greater the leader's competence, the more successful they are in gaining trust and managing the frustrations and optimism of their subordinates, and by standing up for them in decision-making conflicts (Jin, 2010, p. 159).

In the article *Emotional Leadership as a Key Dimension of Public Relations Leadership*, Yan Jin assets that a leader demonstrating empathy with the public can develop and restore trust (Jin, 2010). The paper illuminates that empathy is a critical aspect of public relations leadership. Furthermore, Jin writes that both transformational leadership and empathy are thought to be forces that enhance trust both internally and externally of an organization.

In the paper *Spirituality, Meaning, Interbeing, Leadership and Empathy: SMILE*, Marques states that empathy, as well as the other concepts in the acronym of SMILE, is inevitable if organizations and society want to establish and sustain a turn for the better in human interactions. Engaging with these five qualities will lead to greater workplace connection, ownership, and satisfaction, and triple bottom line (Marques, n.d.). Marques states that empathetic leaders are usually most appreciated in the workplace and, "therefore can establish better relationships with their co-workers; leading to better overall performance, and hence better corporate functioning" (n.d., p. 15). She notes that all these concepts must be interdependent upon one another if employees are to feel greater satisfaction and generate trust among colleagues. She emphasises that to foster trust these qualities are "mutually dependent concepts that need to be considered and

implemented with increased seriousness and structure in today's work environments"
(Marques, n.d., p. 12).

Prakash Singh's research confirms that the more satisfied a worker is, the higher the leader's social skills are likely to be. The opposite is said to be true. Singh states however, "this data must be interpreted in terms of the social skills of leaders as being one of the major factors affecting the job satisfaction of workers." (Singh, 2013, Page 48). The research suggests that empathy will blossom in an organization that prescribes as one that emphasises the importance of "lateral relationships and the decentralisation of power because those who are willing to lead need to be identified and empowered (Singh, 2013).

Emotional Intelligence
Empathy and Emotional Intelligence (EQ) has been a strong theme amongst the articles analyzed in this review. The term first appeared in 1985, in Wayne Payne's doctoral thesis, *A Study of Emotions, Developing Emotional Intelligence* (Ramesh, 2013). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990, 1994), EQ is defined as one's ability to be aware of one's own feelings, be aware of others' feelings and to be able differentiate among them, and to utilize this information to direct one's thinking and behaviour (Polychroniou, 2009, p. 343). Some suggest that empathy is a key component of EQ while others suggest that EQ comes from being empathetic. The bottom line conclusion from the papers was that EQ is positively associated with transformational leadership resulting in increased subordinate or team effectiveness (Polychroniou, 2009). Research has concluded that leadership abilities vary according to perspective and level of EQ (Ramesh, 2013).

Ramesh candidly states, "Leaders cannot afford to ignore and even avoid follower emotions in the workplace." (2013, p. 212). Below is a version of the Emotional Intelligence Model presented in Ramesh's paper. It depicts how empathy is present in all four aspects of the model (self-awareness, self-management, awareness of others, relationship management). Ramesh describes that "The ability to recognize, acknowledge, manage and handle your emotions in such a way that promotes personal growth" (2013, p. 210) is an aspect of being able to empathize with others. As the model depicts, there are many bottom line benefits of being aware of one's emotional intelligence and learning how to better understand emotions of others in a situation. Ramesh writes that the failure to regard the emotions of others creates low achieving leaders who avoid communication, distrust subordinates, do not consult followers in decision making, and are not able to create long-term success (2013). The writer believes that leaders who possess empathy and consistently address the emotional needs of their followers, to better strengthen the followers, will also turn the leader into a high achieving leader. Additionally, building relationships will create collaboration, more meaningful connections, and better decisions. More positive outcomes can be seen in the model.

Figure 3: Emotional Intelligence Model
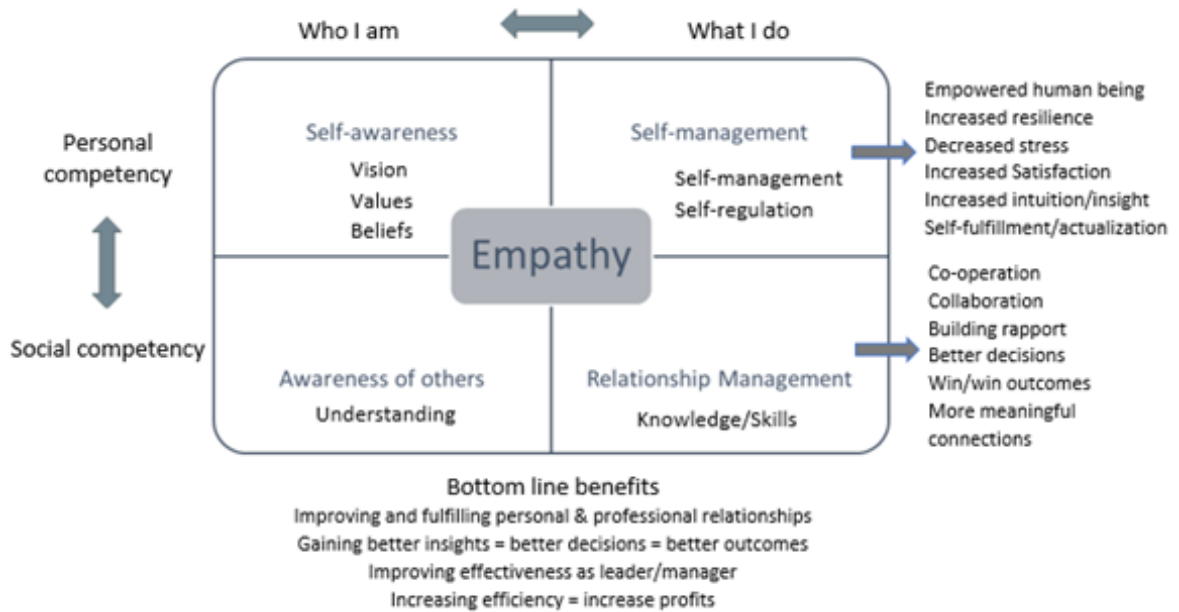
<div align="right">(Ramush, 2013)</div>

The bottom line of Ramesh's model describes that as a leader, being mindful of others and oneself will lead to fulfilling and improving personal and professional relationships, goals, effectiveness as a leader, and efficiency. This ultimately can lead to an increase in profits. These sentiments were echoed by Polychroniou's study that concluded that,

> Supervisors need to acquire and use their social skills, motivation, and
> empathy competencies in order to enhance their own transformational
> leadership and improve team effectiveness regarding supervisor-
> subordinate interaction. […] Transformational leadership has positive
> impact on subordinate's willingness to integrate goals with their

supervisors and follow a creative problems solving process. This will help the supervisors and subordinates to develop participative management, team consensus and to work together to attain goals. (2009, p. 352-353)

Polychroniou also references Dr. Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework model (below), which suggests that a leaders' EQ components are positively correlated with transformational leadership and an increase in team effectiveness and follower satisfaction (2009). Marques agrees that empathy, a leader's' ability to relate to others' feelings, and therefore understand their predicaments and troubles better, is in affiliation with EQ (n.d).

Figure 4: Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework

(Goleman, 1995)

The benefits of EQ and empathy were also discussed as lucrative for entrepreneurs. Humphrey's paper *The Benefits of Emotional Intelligence and Empathy of Entrepreneurship* concludes that entrepreneurs with more empathy (and higher EQ) will be more successful at motivating and leading others, can better assist employees with workplace stress, are more aware of customer needs, wants, and preferences, and lastly, entrepreneurs with high empathy tend to be more innovative (Humphrey, 2013). He suggests that all of these outcomes create a competitive advantage for entrepreneurs and can increase the bottom line. He concludes that, "small business owners and entrepreneurs are the ultimate leaders, so it makes sense to explore how these two sets of traits and abilities are also relevant to entrepreneurship" (Humphrey, 2013, p.292). His conclusions positively correlate with other researchers that believe that a leader with strong EQ and empathy leads to better results for followers and their organization.

In Stein and Sitarenios' *article Emotional Intelligence of Leaders: A Profile of Top Executi*ves found that empathy was shown to differentiate between high and low profitability (2008). They describe that their findings support the assertion that effective leaders regularly display empathic behaviour to demonstrate their understanding of other's feelings, resulting in strengthened relationships. They state that, "Executives who possessed higher levels of empathy, self-regard, reality testing, and problem solving were more likely to yield high profit-earning companies" (Stein, 2008, p. 87). This furthers the idea that EQ and empathy are positively interrelated and suggests that leaders with empathy are able to produce better outcomes.

Summary

The findings of this systematic review present three critical discoveries from the journal articles analyzed. First, there is very little elevated research thus far conducted to confidently support the use and benefits of empathy for leaders. Not only was there a limited amount of studies in general, there were minimal controlled studies used to draw confident conclusions.

Secondly, there was no one definition of empathy, and though some were very similar, there were many that were differentiated enough to create an ambiguous definition and create uncertainty for readers. The most common definition of empathy used was for someone to have an understanding of the emotional needs of others and using this comprehension to make better decisions and communicate more effectively for the betterment of the person and organization. However common, less than 50% of articles had this type of definition included.

Lastly, a number of themes that arose from the various papers systemically reviewed. They were: 1) Ethics and Leadership; 2) Business Schools and Educational Role in Teaching Empathy; 3) Trust; and 4) Emotional Intelligence. These themes were stitched throughout the papers that fit the criteria for this review and pose important ideas around how empathy can affect a leader, followers, organizations, and the bottom line.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is an analysis of the topic of empathy in leadership in the form of a systematic review. The review was conducted using specific parameters and article selection criteria. With this arduous methodology, the material sourced is the most concise for this review. The peer-reviewed articles included in this report were labeled and organized in a pre-determined systematic review framework that allowed for structure and thorough analysis of each article. Once all articles were read, this framework provided the ability to discover themes around empathy and leadership, and provide summary of the various types of evidence-based research completed on the topic.

There is little elevated research evidence in the articles found around the topic of empathy in leadership and there is much more research to be done around this topic. The volume of popular press articles around this topic suggest that leaders and organizations are starting to be more aware of how empathy might alter the workplace, however the opinions of the authors of popular press articles reviewed vary and majority do not offer any research to support their findings. With the huge popularity that business magazines and other mediums like TED have in today's society, it is concerning that leaders may be misinformed and act solely on what they have acquired through popular press. Confidence and success comes from being prepared, educated, and by providing leaders evidence-based knowledge to think, learn, and lead. This is not to suggest that if leaders use empathy it might lead negative consequences, but rather how and when leaders use empathy needs to be researched further.

Implications for Future Research

      This paper and the systematic review revealed many opportunities for future research that could both helpful in understanding empathy and fill in gaps around empathy in leadership. More research needs to be conducted on determining the definition of empathy as well as conducting more non-randomized and randomized controlled studies so conclusions drawn are elevated and popular press is providing more accurate information to leaders.

      The themes discussed in the literature review were around defining empathy and leadership, feminine qualities and soft skills, and the benefits of empathy. There was little correlation between the academic research and the popular press publications. Though there were similar topics discussed in the academic articles, the popular press articles did not provide nearly enough breadth or depth. Additionally, the literature review did not include books or mediums like TED Talks on empathy in leadership. Another review could be conducted with the inclusion of popular leadership books that include advice on empathy.

      The themes that elevated from this systematic review, found in the findings chapter, were the most prominent. However, there are many angles that empathy in leadership could be evaluated, namely, empathy and narcissistic leaders, and empathy and authentic leadership. Additionally, it would be interesting to analyze how empathy fits in the theory of servant leadership.

      Due to the volume of popular press articles that mentioned empathy as a feministic quality, it would be interesting to also study how empathy is perceived in a female leader than in a male leader. Is there a difference? And what does this mean to organizations? Does this affect the bottom line? More research could be focused on the

whether there is a differentiation between women and men leaders using empathy. Empathy has been labelled as a soft skill that can be developed overtime and is needed especially when working in teams and subordinates. Some research within this review alluded to this however provided no evidence or explanation for these indictments. More research on how empathy can be taught and developed is needed.

Conclusion

Empathy is defined as understanding the emotional needs of others and using this comprehension to make better decisions and communicate more effectively for the betterment of the person and organization. Empathy has been a topic of expansive and current interest for popular press writers. Organizations are starting acknowledge how empathy may help leaders progress. This paper reflects on the types of messaging that popular press is providing leaders and provides arduous and methodical review of the empirical research evidence of how empathy can benefit leaders.

The results of this rigorous review suggest that there is a limited amount of elevated empirical evidence to put forward that the findings, and by extension, popular press articles, and publications may not providing leaders with accurate information about empathy. Additionally, this stresses the uncertainty that articles published by popular press are not evidence-based. More research needs to be conducted around what effects empathy has on leaders and the impact it can have on an organization.

To conclude, though many academics suggest that empathy is important for leaders to foster in order to reach objectives and better the bottom line, more research needs to be conducted. Leaders need to be mindful of where they get their information and be sure to be critical about popular press declarations of empathy in leadership. The

best knowledge a leader can use is evidence-based and supported by elevated research studies.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Systematic Review Framework