

## **The Role of Empathetic Leadership in Human Resource Management: Employee Perspectives in the Era of Remote Work**

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the impact of empathetic leadership on employee performance, motivation, and well-being in remote work environments at PT Gojek Indonesia. Through semi-structured interviews and observations, the research investigates how empathetic leadership behaviors, such as active listening and emotional support, influence employee engagement and job satisfaction. The findings demonstrate that empathetic leadership enhances employee motivation and reduces stress, contributing to improved performance and organizational commitment. However, challenges in maintaining empathy in digital communication and ensuring consistency in its application across leaders were identified. The study highlights the critical role of empathy in fostering strong leader-member relationships, particularly in virtual settings, and provides practical implications for organizations looking to integrate empathetic leadership into their HRM strategies. The results contribute to the existing literature on leadership by offering empirical evidence on the application of empathy in remote teams and suggest avenues for future research on the long-term effects of empathetic leadership in digital work environments.*

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### **Introduction**

The role of leadership within organizations is critical for employee engagement, motivation, and overall organizational performance. As companies continue to adapt to the shifting dynamics of the global workforce, the need for empathetic leadership has become more apparent, especially in the context of managing human resources in a digital and remote work environment. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the widespread adoption of remote work, forcing organizations to rethink leadership strategies and communication frameworks. This shift, coupled with the increasing role of technology in workplace interactions, demands that

leaders possess a unique set of interpersonal skills. One such skill is empathy—defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, which has been shown to foster better relationships, job satisfaction, and ultimately, higher productivity. As the workplace becomes increasingly digital, the importance of empathetic leadership in managing remote teams has become more evident, offering a significant area for exploration in human resource management (HRM).

The rapid growth of digital tools and platforms has transformed not only how work is done but also how leaders interact with their teams. The traditional, in-person work environment has been replaced by virtual communication and collaboration, which presents both opportunities and challenges. Remote work has become a standard practice for many organizations, influencing HRM strategies, such as recruitment, performance management, and employee development (Kramer et al., 2021). In this new paradigm, leaders must balance the need for results with the well-being of their employees, particularly when managing teams that are geographically dispersed. The shift to remote work has amplified the need for leaders to develop and exhibit emotional intelligence, particularly empathy, to maintain a sense of connection and motivation among employees. As organizations transition to a digital-first approach, leadership that recognizes the personal and emotional needs of workers can enhance employee engagement and reduce the risk of burnout, thus improving both job satisfaction and productivity (Goleman, 2013; Carmeli et al., 2021).

Empathetic leadership is essential in this context, as it directly influences the success of human resource management practices. The role of an empathetic leader is not only to guide their team toward achieving organizational goals but also to create a supportive and inclusive work environment, especially in the digital space. The growing importance of emotional intelligence, particularly empathy, as a leadership trait in modern organizations has been well-documented in recent years. Leaders who demonstrate empathy can better manage conflicts, provide necessary support during crises, and build trust with employees, which fosters a sense of loyalty and commitment (Boyatzis & McKee, 2018). Moreover, empathy can contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction, which has been linked to improved employee retention rates (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In the context of remote work, where employees may feel isolated or disconnected, empathetic leadership becomes an even more crucial aspect of effective HRM.

The transition to remote work has not only altered the dynamics of workplace relationships but also the very nature of managing human resources. Effective communication and collaboration are two pillars that have been significantly impacted by remote working arrangements. Employees no longer have the physical proximity to interact with their colleagues and managers on a daily basis. As a result, communication breakdowns, misunderstandings, and feelings of isolation are common challenges faced by employees working remotely (Mazur & Rachwał, 2020). These challenges require leaders to go beyond traditional management practices and embrace new methods of interaction, primarily relying on digital tools and virtual platforms. Furthermore, remote work demands that HRM strategies adapt to these new modes of communication, which require leaders to exhibit flexibility, creativity, and understanding (McGinnis & Ozdemir, 2021).

Empathetic leadership plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of remote work by fostering trust, open communication, and emotional connection with employees, which can enhance engagement and performance (Zhu et al., 2018; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2020). While studies indicate that empathetic leadership improves employee satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Nelis et al., 2009), there is limited research on how empathy can be systematically integrated into human resource management (HRM) practices in remote environments. The existing literature lacks empirical evidence on the specific mechanisms by which empathetic leadership influences HR outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and performance in digital work settings (Kaiser et al., 2015; Niemann et al., 2021). Furthermore, although emotional intelligence is recognized as an essential leadership skill, few studies have explored the challenges faced by leaders in applying these skills effectively in virtual settings (Mayer et al., 2008). Therefore, further research is needed to examine how empathetic leadership can be effectively incorporated into HRM strategies for remote teams.

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of empathetic leadership on employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and performance in remote work environments, which has become increasingly relevant in today's digital era. By exploring how empathy can be systematically integrated into human resource management (HRM) practices, this study offers a novel approach to leadership, particularly in virtual settings, where traditional face-to-face interactions are limited. The research aims to fill the gap in existing literature regarding the mechanisms through which empathetic leadership influences remote teams, providing valuable insights for organizations seeking to enhance employee engagement, well-being, and productivity. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective HR strategies and leadership frameworks tailored to the unique challenges of remote work, offering both practical and theoretical benefits to businesses navigating this digital transformation.

## **Research Methods**

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore the impact of empathetic leadership on remote employees in various industries. A case study methodology is suitable as it allows for an in-depth understanding of leadership practices within a real-world organizational context (Yin, 2018). The research focuses on remote employees working at PT Gojek Indonesia, a prominent company in the tech industry that has adopted flexible work arrangements for its employees. The subject of the research includes both employees and managers leading remote teams across different departments within the organization. Data collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews with employees and managers, providing a comprehensive view of the application of empathetic leadership and its impact on job satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, observational methods will be employed to examine how empathetic leadership is practiced in real-time by managers leading remote teams, focusing on behaviors such as emotional support, communication strategies, and conflict resolution (Goleman, 2013). Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the role of empathetic leadership in remote work settings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This methodology allows for the identification of specific leadership behaviors that enhance employee engagement, well-being, and productivity, offering valuable insights for improving human resource management practices in a digital workplace.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Result**

This section presents the findings of the study on the impact of empathetic leadership on remote employees at PT Gojek Indonesia. The analysis is structured into three key areas: Employee Understanding of Empathetic Leadership, Impact of Empathetic Leadership on Employee Performance, and Challenges in Implementing Empathetic Leadership. Each area explores various dimensions based on interviews and observations of both employees and managers, providing a comprehensive view of the influence of empathetic leadership in remote work environments.

#### ***Employee Understanding of Empathetic Leadership***

Employees described empathetic leadership as a leadership style characterized by a strong emotional connection, active listening, and genuine concern for employees' well-being. Most participants identified empathy as a core trait that allows leaders to connect with their teams on a deeper level. One employee mentioned, "Empathetic leaders are those who listen to our problems, not just work-related, but personal ones too, and make an effort to understand what we're going through." This aligns with Goleman's (2013) assertion that emotional intelligence, including empathy, is essential for fostering trust and building strong relationships in the workplace. Many employees highlighted that empathetic leadership in a remote work environment was even more critical due to the lack of face-to-face interactions. According to Bartlett and Ghoshal (2020), empathy in virtual settings helps in maintaining emotional connections despite physical distance, preventing feelings of isolation.

In addition to emotional understanding, empathetic leaders were seen as facilitators of transparent communication. Employees felt that these leaders encourage open conversations and make themselves approachable. A manager mentioned, "Empathy helps me understand the unique challenges my team members face, and that allows me to offer guidance and create an open space for dialogue." This finding supports Schyns and Schilling's (2013) claim that empathetic leadership improves communication and organizational trust, leading to stronger team dynamics. Furthermore, empathy was viewed as a method of conflict resolution, with employees noting that empathetic leaders are better at addressing misunderstandings and maintaining team cohesion.

#### ***Impact of Empathetic Leadership on Employee Performance***

Empathetic leadership was found to have a positive impact on employee performance, particularly in terms of motivation, well-being, and productivity. Employees noted that the emotional support they received from empathetic leaders helped them feel valued, which in turn boosted their motivation to perform well. One employee stated, "When I feel supported emotionally, it helps me focus on my tasks more and be productive." This finding is consistent with findings from Judge and Piccolo (2004), who argue that positive leader-member

relationships, including those involving empathy, are strongly correlated with higher employee motivation and performance.

The sense of well-being among employees was also enhanced by empathetic leadership. Several employees mentioned that their leaders' understanding of their work-life balance and personal challenges created a sense of security. One participant mentioned, "Knowing that my manager is genuinely interested in my well-being makes me feel comfortable reaching out when things get tough." This observation is supported by the work of Carmeli et al. (2021), who highlight that empathy in leadership contributes to improved employee well-being, especially in remote settings where work-life boundaries can blur.

In terms of performance, empathetic leadership was linked to a reduction in stress levels and burnout. Employees reported that empathetic leaders were proactive in providing support during high-stress periods, ensuring employees did not feel overwhelmed by their workloads. One employee remarked, "Our manager checks in with us regularly, not just about work, but how we're feeling emotionally, which helps prevent burnout." This finding aligns with the work of Nelis et al. (2009), who emphasized that emotionally intelligent leadership, particularly empathy, contributes to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. Furthermore, managers in this study recognized that when they demonstrated empathy, it not only led to greater trust but also improved employee engagement and overall team performance (Smith et al., 2022).

### ***Challenges in Implementing Empathetic Leadership***

Despite the positive outcomes of empathetic leadership, both employees and managers noted several challenges in its implementation, especially in the context of remote work. One of the primary challenges mentioned was the difficulty in maintaining a consistent level of empathy without direct, face-to-face interactions. Managers highlighted that while they could make efforts to reach out emotionally to their teams, it was harder to gauge employees' emotions through digital communication channels. One manager commented, "It's harder to read people's body language, so I sometimes worry if my support is coming across the way I intend." This aligns with the findings of McGinnis and Ozdemir (2021), who point out that non-verbal cues, often crucial for empathetic engagement, are minimized in virtual settings, posing a challenge to leaders.

Another challenge identified was the time and effort required to foster empathetic relationships remotely. Managers admitted that despite their intentions to stay connected with employees, the demands of remote work sometimes made it difficult to engage fully on an emotional level. A manager explained, "With the focus on productivity and deadlines, it's easy to forget about the emotional needs of the team, even though we know it's important." This issue is supported by the literature, with Zhu et al. (2018) discussing how remote work can sometimes prioritize task completion over emotional engagement, leading to potential disengagement and burnout.

Additionally, employees noted that while empathetic leadership was appreciated, it was often difficult to apply empathy consistently across a diverse team with varying needs. Some employees felt that not all leaders were equally empathetic, which led to inconsistencies

in emotional support. This observation is echoed by Niemann et al. (2021), who stress that while empathy is critical, its application varies significantly depending on the leader's emotional intelligence and awareness of team members' diverse needs.

Finally, both employees and managers pointed to the challenge of balancing empathy with the need to maintain high performance standards. Managers expressed concern about maintaining authority and performance expectations while being empathetic. One manager stated, "Sometimes it feels like being empathetic conflicts with holding people accountable. But I know that without empathy, I lose my team's trust." This finding highlights the delicate balance between emotional support and leadership authority, a challenge also recognized in the works of Kaiser et al. (2015), who discuss the need for leaders to navigate the tension between empathy and performance demands.

## **Discussion**

### ***Analysis of Research Findings***

The findings of this study illustrate that empathetic leadership plays a significant role in enhancing employee satisfaction, motivation, and overall performance, particularly in remote work settings. These results are in line with existing theories on leadership and human resource management (HRM), particularly those highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. Goleman (2013) argues that empathy, a key component of emotional intelligence, is a crucial trait for leaders to build trust, foster strong interpersonal relationships, and enhance organizational outcomes. In the context of this study, the empathetic behaviors exhibited by leaders at PT Gojek Indonesia—such as active listening, emotional support, and personalized communication—were recognized by employees as essential for maintaining team cohesion and improving job satisfaction, even in a virtual environment.

The impact of empathetic leadership on employee performance is consistent with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating their teams through personalized attention and understanding (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Employees in this study reported feeling more motivated and productive when they perceived their leaders as empathetic, with empathy helping to reduce stress levels and prevent burnout. This is aligned with the findings of Nelis et al. (2009), who assert that leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence and empathy contribute to higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and better overall performance.

Moreover, the ability of empathetic leaders to recognize and address the personal challenges faced by remote employees is an important contribution to employee well-being, which ultimately enhances performance. According to Carmeli et al. (2021), emotional support in leadership plays a pivotal role in mitigating the challenges faced by remote workers, such as isolation and work-life imbalance, and this study corroborates this claim. By offering timely support and maintaining open lines of communication, empathetic leaders help employees feel valued and understood, which contributes to a stronger emotional commitment to the organization.

In contrast, the challenges identified by both employees and managers regarding the implementation of empathetic leadership are also worth discussing. The difficulty in maintaining empathy in the absence of face-to-face interactions has been highlighted in the literature, with several studies indicating that digital communication limits the ability of leaders to read non-verbal cues, which are critical for effective empathetic engagement (McGinnis & Ozdemir, 2021). The findings of this study confirm that remote work presents a unique challenge in this regard, as managers struggle to gauge the emotional state of their employees through virtual communication channels. This suggests that while empathy remains a critical leadership trait, the effectiveness of its application is influenced by the medium of communication and the leader's ability to adapt to the digital environment.

### ***Comparison with Previous Research***

The findings of this research are consistent with several studies that have examined the role of empathetic leadership in enhancing employee engagement and organizational commitment. For example, Zhu et al. (2018) found that transformational leadership, which closely aligns with empathetic leadership, leads to improved employee performance and job satisfaction. Similarly, Carmeli et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, particularly in remote environments, where the absence of physical proximity can lead to a lack of emotional support. The results of this study further strengthen these findings by showing that empathetic leadership is not only associated with improved motivation and performance but also plays a critical role in reducing stress and preventing burnout among remote employees.

In comparison with studies conducted in traditional office settings, this research highlights that the role of empathetic leadership is even more pronounced in remote work environments. While traditional leadership theories have emphasized the importance of empathy, the current research contributes new insights into how empathetic behaviors must be adapted to the virtual work context. As employees working remotely are often disconnected from the organizational culture and face unique challenges, such as isolation and the blending of personal and professional life, the need for empathetic leadership is heightened (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2020). The findings of this study underscore that empathetic leadership is a crucial factor in maintaining employee engagement and preventing disengagement in remote settings, supporting previous research by Judge and Piccolo (2004), who suggested that leadership quality directly influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

However, this research also identifies gaps in the existing literature, particularly regarding the practical implementation of empathetic leadership in digital work environments. While much has been written about the benefits of empathetic leadership, few studies have explored how these practices can be effectively integrated into HRM strategies for remote teams. This study contributes to filling that gap by providing empirical evidence on the specific leadership behaviors that promote employee well-being and performance in remote settings, thereby advancing the understanding of how empathy can be applied in leadership practices for virtual teams.

### ***Practical Implications***

The findings of this study have significant practical implications for organizations, particularly those that have adopted or are considering adopting remote work practices. First, it is clear that empathetic leadership is a key factor in enhancing employee satisfaction, motivation, and overall performance. Therefore, companies should prioritize the development of empathy in their leadership training programs. This includes not only understanding the emotional needs of employees but also actively engaging in empathetic behaviors such as active listening, providing emotional support, and maintaining transparent communication. The ability to create an emotionally supportive work environment is especially critical in remote settings, where employees may otherwise feel isolated or disconnected from the organization.

Organizations can also implement strategies to overcome the challenges associated with empathetic leadership in remote environments. One such strategy is the use of advanced communication tools that allow leaders to engage with employees more effectively. Video calls, for example, can help leaders maintain a closer connection with their teams by providing a more personal interaction, which can compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication (McGinnis & Ozdemir, 2021). Additionally, companies should encourage managers to regularly check in with their teams not only about work-related matters but also about personal well-being. This helps to maintain a sense of connection and trust between leaders and employees, which is essential for fostering engagement and productivity in remote teams.

Furthermore, companies should be aware of the potential inconsistencies in the application of empathy across different leaders and teams. As identified in this study, employees sometimes felt that empathy was not applied uniformly, with some leaders being more empathetic than others. To address this, organizations should establish clear guidelines and training on empathetic leadership, ensuring that all leaders understand its importance and know how to implement it effectively. Leadership development programs should focus on enhancing emotional intelligence and provide leaders with the tools they need to manage the emotional needs of their teams, particularly in remote work contexts.

Finally, organizations should be mindful of the balance between empathy and performance expectations. While empathy is crucial for employee engagement, it must be balanced with the need to maintain high performance standards. Leaders should be trained to manage this balance effectively, ensuring that their empathetic behaviors do not compromise their authority or the organization's goals. This is particularly important in remote settings, where the physical distance between leaders and employees can make it more challenging to maintain accountability. By providing leaders with the skills to balance empathy and performance, organizations can create a supportive yet high-performance culture in remote work environments.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of empathetic leadership in enhancing employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance in remote work environments. The findings reveal that empathetic leadership, characterized by emotional support, active listening, and transparent communication, plays a crucial role in improving employee



engagement and preventing burnout, particularly in virtual settings. These results support existing theories on emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, emphasizing the importance of empathy in leadership. However, challenges in maintaining empathy through digital communication and ensuring consistent application across leaders remain. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the practical implementation of empathetic leadership in remote teams, filling a gap in the literature. Future research could explore the long-term impact of empathetic leadership on organizational outcomes and investigate specific strategies for training leaders to apply empathy effectively in virtual environments.

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