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# *Empathic Communication as a Negotiation Technique within the Human Resources Department. Case Study: FORVIA HELLA*

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**Abstract:** *People communicate from the earliest moments in their lives and spend half their life at the workplace. The whole organisational communication process is fascinatingly complex, but what about including empathy for more efficiency? This paper presents the results of a research conducted on several specialists from the human resources department of a multinational company. The research aims to highlight the impact of empathic communication as a negotiation strategy and to reveal how the professional climate may change if specific factors are taken into consideration. It is proven that empathy completely changes the brain structure; it can build bridges between people, and even increase efficiency in solving some problematic situations and minimizing mistrust and conflicts. This paper is meant to serve as an empathic*

*communication guide that can be used for both personal and professional purposes, focusing on seven key points.*

**Keywords:** *empathy, empathic communication, strategy, human resources, professional field, negotiation*

## **1. Introduction**

Negotiation is and has always been a complex process and equally an art. The art of negotiation primarily involves (but is not limited to) the ability to communicate effectively. According to several studies, perseverance, flexibility, patience, strategic thinking, and the ability to make decisions are the essential skills to be a good negotiator. Of course, negotiation is used in various fields, but in terms of notoriety, the business environment comes first.

New times demand innovative solutions. As such, empathic communication is the new way in the professional field. There is a wide variety of interpretations and definitions in the literature, which highlight different aspects of empathic communication. However, for those who are not familiar with this concept, empathic communication is essentially about improving interpersonal relationships through the language used. A single word spoken at the right time has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress. Language shapes our behavior and each lexical unit used is loaded with personal meanings. That is why we should pay special attention to our communication style in the workplace (Newberg & Waldman, 2019, p.15). This new communication style has radically changed the rules of the game in the business world. Therefore, it can be strongly argued that the success of an organization is first and foremost due to its people. Engaged and motivated employees are its most valuable resource. But that is not all. Teams can use empathic communication as an innovative strategy to avoid difficult situations and to reduce stress, which compromises productivity and ultimately leads to exhaustion and even burnout.

In other words, analysing negotiation in terms of empathic communication is a distinct topic that deserves research, irrespective of the subject of the negotiation. This paper examines how the application of empathic communication impacts interpersonal relationships among professionals within a multinational corporation. It explores whether greater emphasis is placed on individual interest or relational development and analyses the negotiation strategies successfully employed by human resources professionals within the framework of internal communication processes.

## **2. Research methods**

The research was conducted on specialists in the Human Resources (HR) Department at FORVIA HELLA in Timișoara, focusing on the personnel administration and recruitment teams by analysing their internal communication.

The methods employed to achieve the research objectives included personal interviews and experiments. Both methods are qualitative, chosen for their suitability in descriptive and informative research. As the term implies, qualitative research emphasises quality, offering insights beyond numerical data.

Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann (2009) define the interview as a method “based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest”. In other words, the interview cannot be defined as a simple conversation in everyday life, it is much more than that.

The second research method, the experiment, is a scientific method aimed at identifying a cause-effect relationship between two observable and measurable phenomena. Dascălu (n.d.) explains that “the experimental research is also called controlled observation, because

the researcher manipulates a certain variable, considered independent, to see the changes produced at the level of another variable, considered dependent. The researched phenomenon is, therefore, produced by the researcher". Hence, experimental research involves the deliberate manipulation of some variables to observe their effects on other variables.

### **3. Results**

#### **Interview results**

The research methods mentioned above were used to achieve the objectives. In what concerns the interview, it was carried out with the recruitment specialist, whose identity cannot be disclosed; instead, her initials, D.D., will be used for reference.

The interview consisted of nine questions, designed to capture as much information as possible. The questions were organised into three parts: the first involved recognising and defining some concepts, the second was about the improvements that could be made within the team, whereas the last part focused on the advantages and disadvantages of nonviolent communication.

The results reveal that they use empathic communication in the HR department, especially during team meetings in which they discuss the difficulties encountered by each team member during task performance. Nonviolent communication is used within the professional group to bring its members closer, by willingly looking at a situation from the interlocutor's perspective as well.

According to the expert, the following cues can help to understand others' perspective and to show true empathy towards others: the tone of voice, the voice pace, non-verbal communication, facial expressions, gestures, and of course, a friendly approach. At the same time, the way people relate to each other indicates their degree of openness to interaction. In fact, at a more careful look, it seems that verbal communication is hidden behind non-verbal communication.

The biggest challenge faced by D.D. was creating a connection. Really connecting with the interlocutor and succeeding in gaining their trust requires a lot of effort. Only the right approach can help in this regard. The results prove that there is a real circuit when considering the importance of empathic communication.

### Experiment results

For a better understanding of the communication process in the HR department, a sample of the collected data will be analysed.

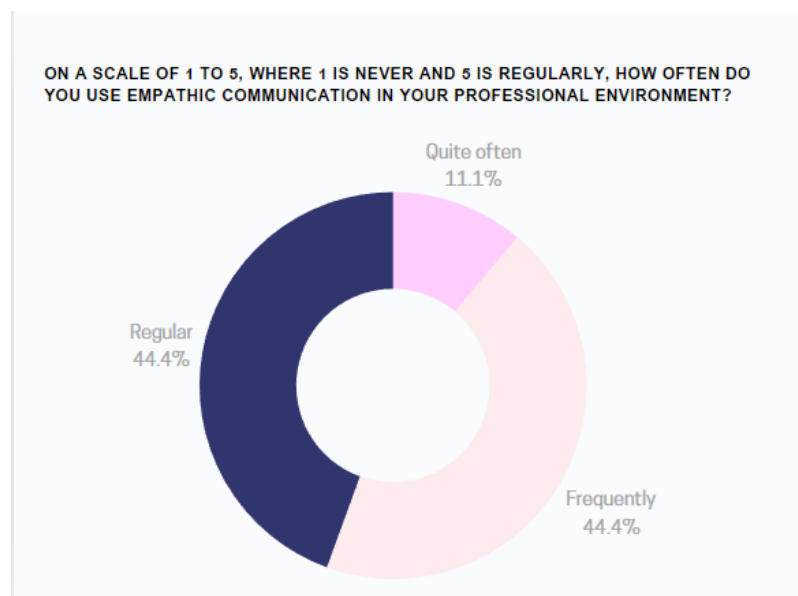


Fig. 1. The use of empathic communication in the professional environment

Although there were five answer options, the responses were limited to three possibilities. Most female respondents use nonviolent communication “frequently” (44.4%) and “regularly” (44.4%) within the professional group. Only one person (11.1%) answered “quite often” to this question.

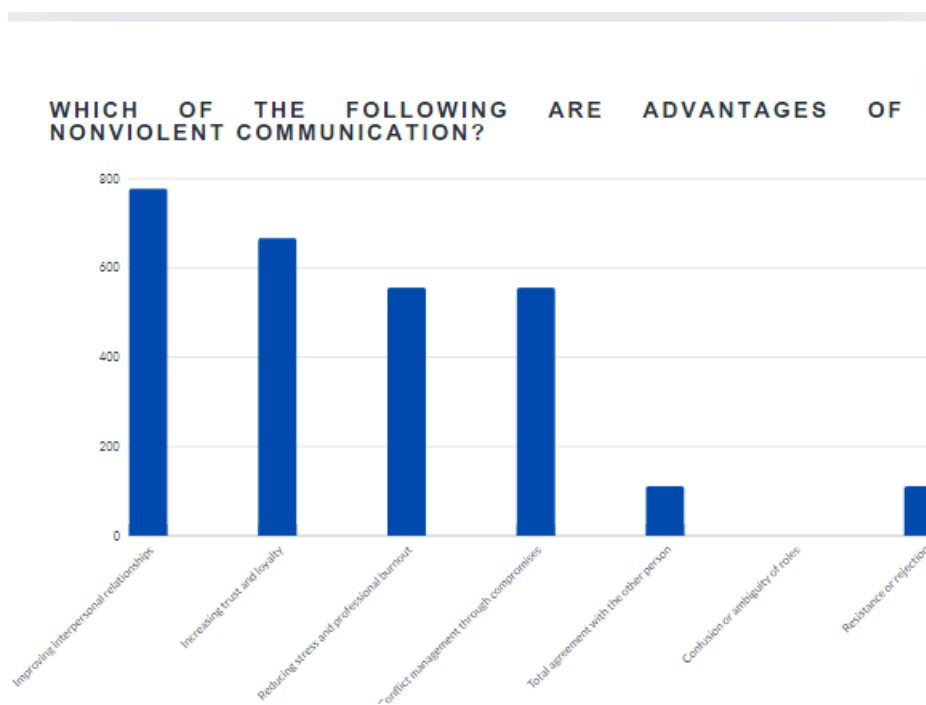


Fig. 2. The advantages of empathic communication

Figure 2 shows the results to the question about the advantages of empathic communication. This question was meant to test the respondents’ knowledge on the topic and hence, it also included some disadvantages in the answer options. As illustrated above, the most voted advantage concerns improving relationships (77.8%), followed by increased loyalty and trust (66.7%). Some respondents failed the test, as

they selected two major disadvantages of empathic communication in professional settings.

There were no significant variations after introducing the two variables. The subjects are oriented towards solving difficult situations through communication, because it is known that communication is the key. Identifying the cause of difficult situations also receives increased attention. In addition, the respondents try to find solutions and capitalise on the skills of the employees as well as possible. This leads to a negotiation based on collaboration, which in turn results in a win-win situation.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Not only should professional groups be aware of the importance of empathic communication and the changes that occur with it, but they must also understand how it can be used as a strategy. It is highly recommended they use this type of communication to determine which factors affect interpersonal relations most and how they can make use of them.

In light of the present research, it can be argued that it is not easy to consider other perspectives and manage a difficult situation, but surely empathic communication can be very helpful in a work team. The findings only apply to the HR department at FORVIA HELLA Timișoara. There are, however, some general guidelines. The Empathic communication guide provides the following seven tips: Put yourself in the other person's position, Be honest, Listen actively, Be understanding, Investigate, Be supportive, and Make compromises.

The results confirm some of the theories, such as claiming that nonviolent communication is an intelligent strategy in the internal communication of an HR department. Empathy completely changes the work environment and increases communication quality. Moreover, it may even improve efficiency and facilitate authentic connections within a professional group. It is also interesting that empathic communication is an ingenious way to solve difficult situations or conflicts among group

members. As a negotiation strategy, the art of collaboration dominates in this context, because emphasis is placed more on relationships than on interest. Of course, creativity and out-of-the-box thinking can only bring advantages to the group. Channeling energy towards the creative resolution of any difficult situation is indisputable evidence that nonviolent communication can be used as a smart negotiation strategy, in both personal and professional life.

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