Role of Empathy in the Digital Age: A Stakeholder's Approach

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Abstract

Use of virtual platforms has given rise to the sense of liquid workplace where digital transformation and flexibility is at the core of any organizational strategy. With the advent of new technologies, the social and interactive dimension has taken a new meaning in all the sectors of business operations. While digitalization has led to shrunken cultural spaces and places, socialization in the context of workforce and organizations have developed new challenges that are essential part of workplace effectiveness. With the advent of covid- virtual platforms, digitalization has taken a new form of communication and operating. As a result, there is a growing need of empathy in this digital age of operating businesses. The current research aims to conduct a primary and an exhaustive review of the trajectory of digital empathy and its defined role in organizations. The study also tries to use a stakeholder approach to explain why it is crucial for all levels of an organization to understand digital empathy in order to increase employee productivity. The study will help researchers and practitioners in understanding the importance of empathy in the increasingly technological workplace, and the possible directions it could take in the future of work.

Keywords: Empathy, Digital Empathy, Productivity, Mental-wellbeing, Technology, Business organization

INTRODUCTION

There is ample proof that technology is becoming more and more important in our daily lives. Over 69% individuals have access to the Internet globally in 2022. (Internet World Stats, 2022).Even though that percentage represents just over 50% of the world's population, access is more common in industrialized nations. The pressure to innovate in the creation of digital products and services is rising because of the digital revolution. Leading businesses like Google, Amazon, or Facebook have raised the bar for user experience [UX] and encouraged consumers to expect natural interactions. In the digital age, improving the user experience is more important, especially for boosting conversion rates. The COVID 19 pandemic's outbreak changed the market and the entire planet. The epidemic has had a devastating impact on every area of the world's economies, including civil aviation, industry, tourism, agriculture, and transportation. The primary reason for this abrupt decline in the economy is attributed to forced intermittent lockdowns that have completely disrupted the demand and supply chains globally.Digital work was established so that employers could safeguard their employees and prevent them from being exposed to the risk of catching the new virus. Businesses began carrying out routine duties from home. Therefore, digital intelligence is emerging as a key component of scientific study alongside intellect and emotional intelligence. Technology has brought an enormous change in the way communication is being carried out now a day's post pandemic.

The digital intelligence has made the world even more connected with an instant access environment that has further blurred the separation between the physical workspace and the workspace where work actually is being conducted. (Deloitte, 2014).

Embracing digital workplaces, as a solution for all the operations of the business from sustainability and continuity to workforce engagement and retention, organisations are still contemplating on the future of virtual work and new ways of working. Some have accepted a blend of in-person and remote working resulting from digital workplaces that has further helped businesses not only invest in new skills but establish new working norms also. Along, with these industries are enhancing their operations through digital enablement and automation that is reducing the gap between the

businesses and the customers. Thus, all jobs whether in-person or remote, digital intelligence is considered the future of work at present.

Digital workplaces are now being acknowledged for optimizing worker's productivity. (Attaran, Mohenson & Attaran (2019). Although there is few research conducted on the digital workplace, scholars have conducted intensive research on its benefits like collaboration, mobility, compliance, reduced stress and overburdened. (Koeffer, 2015; Haas, Criscuolo, and George, 2015; Perlow, 2012; Przybylski, Weinstein, 2013; Reyt and Wiesenfeld, 2015; Sykes, 2011; Turkle, 2015; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Aaltonen et al, 2012). However, adequate research on the effects of the digital workplace on employee well-being is still lacking. While several studies showed the advantages of digital workspaces for company, including higher staff satisfaction, better employee experiences, tighter cooperation, lower operational expenses, increased innovation, and higher revenue. However, studies also show that employers who have made investments in more digital methods of working are rethinking the virtual and hybrid workplace with people at the core to enhance employee satisfaction and produce meaningful economic results.

The pandemic has promoted the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work models. However, many organizations are finding themselves ill-equipped to tackle digital friction issues in these decentralized work settings. Digital friction encompasses problems such as difficulties in running necessary applications, slow or crashing PCs, disruptive software updates, and the time and productivity lost to IT remotely accessing and controlling devices for issue resolution.

A significant number of IT decision-makers and knowledge workers are currently grappling with digital friction, impacting the overall employee experience and causing organizational disruptions. Traditionally, IT remediation, security, and compliance have been treated as separate challenges from the perspective of employee experience. Nevertheless, addressing these issues collectively is crucial, as employees may resort to bypassing IT friction, leading to disruptions in productivity.

To effectively address these challenges and enhance operational efficiency in the digital workplace, organizations must implement a comprehensive digital employee experience (DEX) strategy. This approach is essential for mitigating digital friction and ensuring a seamless and productive work environment.

This extensive change has brought up major challenges relating to maintaining productivity and staff welfare. While working remotely has boosted benefits for employees including greater autonomy and flexibility in terms of time and place for individual work processes, it has also lowered mental health owing to isolation from the workplace and a lack of verbal communication. A significant portion of the work from the industrial revolution is done through gadgets such as desktops, laptops and smartphones. These gadgets have increased the work efficiency and productivity but on the other hand has made employees physical and emotionally vulnerable especially during the pandemic where employees were asked to work remotely and still remain connected through virtual platforms.

The shift to remote work during the pandemic has significantly altered expectations for the digital employee experience, necessitating continuous adaptation from organizations. Those relying on outdated technology for the digital employee experience risk encountering heightened digital friction, leading to increased frustration among employees. Employees now anticipate the same speed and efficiency from workplace technology as they experience in their personal lives.

The key to alleviating digital friction lies in embracing digital empathy, emphasizing a more employee-centric approach to IT. It's no longer sufficient for organizations to approach IT challenges solely from a technical standpoint; instead, they must implement solutions that consider the sentiments and varied experiences of their employees in utilizing IT.

As remote and hybrid work models become the norm, digital friction emerges as a significant obstacle to an optimal employee experience. Establishing a Digital Employee Experience (DEX) strategy that specifically targets IT challenges and incorporates digital empathy is crucial. This approach not only improves operational efficiency but also provides organizations with a competitive edge in the evolving work landscape.

The entire workforce was expected to continue to work yet remain empathetic towards each other through virtual platforms that gave emergence to the significance of digital empathy. Because of these digital workplaces and a constant expectation to remain focussed and attentive from an increased screen time, the employees' lost their sense of time, sense

of place and sense of self also. The constant need to enhance digital empathy lead to further rise in the awareness of mental health wherein organisations are now devising strategies to ensure the well-being of employees through digital detox (Umasankar M, Boopathy S, Padmavathy S, Leena N Fukey, Rubee Singh (2022).

Digital workspaces and productivity as discussed so far:

Year	Author	Journal	Contribution
2019	Attaran, Mohenson & Attaran	International Journal of Enterprise Information Systems	Digital workplaces are now being acknowledged for optimizing worker's productivity
2011-2015	Koeffer, Haas, Criscuolo, George, Perlow, Przybylski, Weinstein, Reyt and Wiesenfeld, Sykes, Turkle, Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, Aaltonen	International Conference on Information Systems	Although there are few research conducted on the digital workplace, scholars have conducted intensive research on its benefits like collaboration, mobility, compliance, reduced stress and overburdened
2012	Miller	TECL Publishing	Digital workplaces had a positive effect on absenteeism with fewer health problems, less signs of depression, fewer sleep problems, and reduced stress levels.
2009 2011 2012 2014 2016	Gantz, Boyd, Dowling Schillerwein, Miller, Deloitte, Miller	IDC Infocentric Research AGRoutledge	Organisations with digital workplaces have benefits for the business as well as the employees with increased staff satisfaction, improved employee experience, closer collaboration, reduced operational costs, enhanced innovation, improved customer experience, and increased revenue

EMPATHY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN BUSINESS

The need of empathy amongst employer and employees is well documented in previous literatures. The need for employees to have a deeper grasp of empathy is urgent given how rapidly the world is becoming digital. Therefore, it is very important to understand the importance of digital empathy, which is the crux of this paper. The focus of this research is on digital empathy and its effects on work performance because digital intelligence is a broad field. In addition, the paper tries to capture the mediating role of mental well-being on the effects of digital empathy on work productivity. Park (2019) asserts that the fourth industrial revolution we are presently seeing is advancing digital advancements like artificial intelligence and automation. As a result, human social communication will decline and be replaced by digital communication. Therefore, in order to remain kind, leaders and marketers must comprehend the idea of digital empathy.

Empathy and its effects in various spheres of business has been well researched over the years. Empathy is the capacity to understand and relate to the thoughts, emotions, or experiences of another. Being able to comprehend and support others with compassion or sensitivity is what is meant by empathy, which is more than just basic sympathy (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; George, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Empathy is not an independent feeling by itself; rather, it is a type of induction process via which emotions, both positive and negative, are shared, increasing the

likelihood that participants will act similarly (Plutchik 1987). High levels of empathy in a relationship may be the most effective and undoubtedly one of the mosteffective components for fostering change and learning, according to study. (Rogers, 1975). Empathy is considered one important characteristics of employees in interacting with consumers also (Bowen and Schneider, 1985). Therefore, having empathy for others and understanding their perspectives will increase work productivity. Empathy is a significant factor of employees' emotional intelligence in understanding their workplace behavior as "empathy is the ability to see the world from another person's perspective- the ability to tune into what someone else might be thinking and feeling about a situation"- regardless of the difference in perception (Stein & Book, 2002).

Despite the fact that empathy is regarded as a powerful social ability (Goleman, 2011), Stein and Book (2001) found that it was not being used to its full potential. People often equate empathy with being kind, rather than what empathy actually entails. Additionally, when someone wishes to exhibit empathy for another individual, they encounter opposition because empathy is often misconstrued with pity. Finally, many mistakenly believe that showing empathy will make them likeable and sympathetic to the viewpoints of others.

Empathy defined over the years

Year	Author	Findings
1978	Feshbach	The cognitive process of recognising another person's emotion is a component of empathy.
1990	Salovey & Mayer	The capacity and predisposition to perceive and relive the emotions of those who are experiencing emotional distress
2000	Hoffman	A successful reaction more suitable for another's situation than one's own
2001	Fedrickson	Positive feelings encourage social bonding, which increases people's willingness to interact and connect with others.
2004	Heaney & Watt	Interpersonal behavior
2018	Hall and Schwartz	It is believed that empathy is a multidimensional term that can be divided into dimensions, facets, components, types,subscales, substrates, processes, aspects, etc.
2009	Shamay- Tsoory, S. G Aharon-Peretz & Perry	Empathy is a reaction or response to being aware of anotherperson's experiences.
2015	Lindsey, King, Hebl, and Levine	Empathy is a dispositional construct that describes the abilityto comprehend the feelings and experiences of other people.

From these several definitions, it can be concluded that empathy is a complex and multidimensional construct made up of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. It has also been suggested that empathy is a key predictor of prosocial behavior and effectiveness in the workplace (Taylor, L.K etal,2020). Empathy is considered the top leadership trait necessary for success and effectiveness. However, past research has not really focused much on the mediating function of mental health. In order to understand how empathyaffects job productivity, this research aims to explain the mediating role of mental health.

However, tangible human interaction has decreased significantly in the digital age. Therefore, employers must comprehend the significance of digital empathy because of this. Gaining an understanding of the digital empathy language will increase output at the office.

Digital empathy is the ability of an individual to understand and recognize the impact of one's online interaction on the other people's feelings. (Park, 2019). Digital empathy includes not only recognizing the feelings and behavior of the other people but also showing empathy towards the people to understand them through online communication. Covid-19 pandemic made work from home regulations a new normal that required quicker solutions and faster system adjustments to different work systems. Considering the change, it gave rise to the significance of employees' emotional and mental well-being.

EMPATHY AND WORKPLACE

Since emotional intelligence is a construct, it is challenging to research it without dissecting it into its constituent parts, of which empathy is one. Organizational and industrial psychology researches workers. In the discipline of I/O psychology, relationships among employees, leadership, management, and culture are all investigated. Learning to identify emotions and how co-workers acquire these abilities at work is one way to analyse relationships. Empathic feelings might be beneficial at work. Relationship development is very important in workplace to improve the work productivity. Learning to identify emotions and how co-workers acquire these abilities at work is one way to analyse relationships. (Longmire & Harrison, 2018). There is a rising need for labour research because many businesses now place a greater emphasis on people than on investments to get a competitive advantage. (Barbuto & Gottfredson, 2016).

Post the global pandemic of Covid 19, the mental well-being of workforce is at stake because communications have largely shifted to the digital world. The effects of this global pandemic can be considered not only in terms of what is infected but also in terms of what is affected, causing a variety of physical health issues, economic harm, as well as complexities in terms of psychology, society, and health(Burki,2020). Covid 19 created a psychological crisis affecting the mental well-being of people. It is critical for people affected to look for social support and connections in order to manage the severe psychological distress brought on by the COVID- 19 epidemic. However, physical separation, decreased mobility, isolation, quarantine, and other pandemic-related disturbances have resulted in limitations on basic human connections, such as those shared with family and friends. The COVID-19 epidemic has accelerated human-

AI interactions, such as the development of numerous AI chatbots. With a chatbots 24/7 company and assistance, humans may deal with their difficulties without bearing any moral responsibility. Companies adopted the fantastic home-based business concept as well. Despite the company's success in increasing its revenue share, work productivity fell.

Therefore, today's leaders must change their focus to collaborating successfully with members of diverse, cross-functional teams. As a result, the requirement to be people-centric has grown, particularly over the past two years due to the rise of digital hybrid workplaces. Because of remote working, which has made it even more necessary to go beyond traditional management development systems and competencies, the pandemic has increased the need to attract and train talent that can lead their organisations through both good and bad times. This has resulted in the need to develop newer and more modern ways of success-oriented skills.

Workplace Empathy is a channel through which employees are able to build authentic and empathetic bonds with one another that promotes sound relationships and productivity. As per the Centre for Creative Leadership research, with the need of leaders being more person- focused stated empathy has a direct relation with the employee productivity. Post pandemic has reinforced this relation between productivity and empathy due to unexpected changes that has further accelerated the need for diversity.

Leaders regard empathetic relations today at workplaces as one of the factors of high performance. Managers who are highly empathetic towards their team members were likely recognized as outstanding performers by their supervisors. Empathy has a positive impact with work productivity and overall job satisfaction as it strengthens leadership, sound

relationshipsand efficient work productivity.

When workers sense that they are heard, appreciated, and embraced in an enjoyable and empowering workplace, their commitment and contentment skyrocket. Leaders who practice empathy establish a constructive ambiance where team members can openly communicate, contribute ideas, express concerns, and tackle obstacles. Through attentive listening, recognizing emotions, and adjusting to changing requirements, leaders with empathy enhance team spirit, motivation, and encourage cooperation and synergy, even in remote customer service roles that demand assistance. This leads to heightened efficiency, reduced turnover, and a workplace culture marked by integrity and ethics.

Statistics show that empathy was considered as one of the significant factors for an effective workplace and post pandemic the impact is more visible now as compared to any other time. The 2019 workplace empathy study states that employees resigned from the jobs because of unempathetic employers making empathy as vital force in the workplace. However, with the world moving towards more of digitalization, there is a lack of social connection and minimal interaction among employees.

NEED FOR DIGITAL EMPATHY

In a world increasingly shaped by digital technology, the concept of "digital empathy" is gaining prominence. Digital empathy involves integrating the fundamental principles of empathy—compassion, cognition, and emotion—into technical designs and communications to enhance the overall user experience. This phenomenon has arisen due to our growing reliance on online communication and is characterized by the expression of traditional empathic qualities, such as concern and caring for others, through computer-mediated interactions.

Critics argue that digital empathy falls short as a substitute for face-to-face human interaction. They claim that our dependence on technology has contributed to a decline in social-emotional skills, suggesting that the younger generations, raised amidst technology, are becoming less empathetic. The "online disinhibition effect," wherein people tend to behave differently online than in face-to-face interactions, is cited as a major challenge to expressing empathy in the digital realm.

Conversely, proponents of digital empathy contend that it is not only feasible but also a crucial aspect of our evolving digital landscape. Digital empathy finds application in various domains, including digital employee experience (DEX), healthcare, financial services, and education. In healthcare, tools designed with digital empathy aim to understand and respond in a manner consistent with traditional empathetic characteristics. In education, digital technologies are employed to teach empathy, with research indicating that video production projects can enhance empathy among students.

Despite the criticisms, it is imperative to recognize the permanence of technology and digital communications. The focus should shift from questioning whether empathy can be conveyed digitally to exploring how technology can be optimally utilized to augment our capacity for empathy. Achieving this goal requires continuous research, deliberate design, and mindful usage of technology to ensure that digital empathy becomes a positive and enriching component of our collective digital experience.

Given the significance of this issue, ongoing exploration into how technology can better promote empathy is essential. As society adapts and evolves alongside technology, our comprehension and application of digital empathy will likewise progress.

Due to the convergence of societal communication trends and technology use, the significance of the digital empathy construct has grown over time. Technology alters how we communicate, but when we communicate digitally, we also need to consider empathy, or "digital empathy." The concept of digital empathy implies that an individual knows how his online interaction can affect other people's feelings and recognize what the interaction of other participants is" (Park, 2019). Therefore, face-to-face communication instantly picks up on the feelings and behavioursof the other person through verbal and nonverbal cues, whereas online communication depends on a person's capacity to express empathy for the

other person and pick up on his feelings. Working from home was less prevalent before the COVID 19 pandemic, but the pandemic demands quick fixes and even faster system adaptations, in this case rapid adaption to new types of labour. Employees do not like working from home, according to previous research, because there is not interactive communication, there is no equipment or a dedicated workspace, and it's difficult to distinguish between work and personal obligations. This raises the question of how to balance working from home, boost productivity, and lessen employees' feelings of isolation. Therefore, improving employee productivity needs to understand that "people are social beings who meet their needs in everyday communication with other people", and that the most common way to meet social interactions is communication. The ability to recognize emotions is thought of as a major component of emotional competence because it is responsible for empathy and the capacity to understand human reactions and predict subsequent reactions. Additionally, when communicating face-to-face, emotions are predominantly visible on the interlocutor's face and less so on the body. However, in remote working, employees did not feel the emotions of the interlocutor that they felt lonely and isolated compared to the fact that most of them lacked face-to-face communication thereby affecting their work productivity.

Pandemic came with a realization amongst employers that compassion and the ability to connect with others is the need of the hour in both personal and professional life. Workplace empathy, in digital form became an essential component of emotional intelligence further promoting effective leadership, improving human relations and effective communication resulting in workplace productivity.

Decreased communication physically lead to emotional and physical exhaustion, thereby leading to increased stress and burnout. World Health organization defined chronic workplace stress that was not successfully managed. Therefore, according to Harvard Business review,

the responsibility for managing stress and burnout has shifted away from individuals/employees now towards the organization and hence, it is the responsibility of the organization to help their employees manage stress and burnout.

One of the difficulties has been the deterioration of the work-life balance at home, which has sparked the emergence of mental health problems such as social isolation and loneliness. Additional financial stress and job insecurity have contributed to an upsurge in mental health issues.

A global poll by Qualtrics found that 57.2 percent of respondents reported an increase in concern and stress, and 41.6 percent of respondents said their mental health has gotten worse since the start of Covid-19. Therefore, empathy can be a significant component in resolving these major problems because it reaffirms the employees and gives them a sense of belonging. Hence, managers should be more empathetic to their employees to improve their mental well-being.

EMPATHY AND MENTAL WELLBEING

With the pressure of the sudden adaptation to the new ways of working, manage employees, achieve flexibility in work, increased motivation and monitor how the new way of working would affect employee productivity, there was an outbreak on understanding the well-being and mental health of the employees. The employees were expected to define and understand tasks through online virtual modes of communication. Working conditions was another aspect that was dependent on the flexibility, internet as well as the independent workspaces available at home. All this required a dose of empathy for self as well as others around us thriving through the same change. (Škoda, Baksa, Luić, 2021).

According to recent research, working from home has a negative impact on employees' health because there is insufficient interactive communication, inadequate workspace and equipment, and a lack of ability to establish clear boundaries between personal and professional life (Chung, Seo, Forbes, Birkett, 2020). This raises the question of how productivity can be increased when working from home because employees are required to be constantly connected to the internet and intelligent. Therefore, understanding the mental wellness of employees has become important for employers, in the world of digital communication.

The new normal post pandemic demanded work isolation forcing many employees to stay away from their workplace. The forced digitalized world acts as socio-psychological stressors affecting significantly the mental well-being of employees. Since employees are the true assets of any organization, ensuring their health and wellness should be the top priority for every management around the world. This includes taking care of their financial, physical, and emotional needs.

Sally Wellborn, former senior vice president of global benefits for Walmart Stores commented, "Whether they are working on the front lines or working at home, employees are urgently in need of accessible, equitable mental health benefits now more than ever. Employers must include mental health support as a key component of their business continuity strategy as they struggle with post-pandemic business continuity, or else they run the danger of having a significant negative impact on employee health and productivity. Even while it is said that many firms have been proactive in managing their employees' financial and health-related difficulties, they appear to have fallen short in responding to their emotional requirements, which might occasionally jeopardize both the employees and the organization. Since emotionally expressive leaders were actually more effective, they ought to give their workers support during this difficult period and show consideration for their worry, anxiety, and other issues. They can, for example, concentrate on the humanization of work and show a lot of empathy for their employees (Groves, 2006). Thus, empathy plays a key role in social and emotional wellbeing. Empathy is therefore a process of specific understanding, emotional relating, and focused interaction" (Altmann & Roth, 2013). Therefore, it suggests that empathy acts a construct in building mental well-being. Previous researches has suggested that empathetic managers help to gain better leadership. Many corporate executives believe that in order to recover from challenging times, significant change is required. It has been confirmed that demonstrating compassionate leadership during a crisis can be a powerful tool to greatly reduce the impact of the disaster. (Raina, R 2021).

The idea of mental health has developed significantly throughout time. It suggests a level of wellbeing in which the person "can fulfil himself with his strengths, conquer the challenges of everyday life, cope with stress" while making a constructive contribution to his community. Our moods and emotions, as well as our lifestyle and even our relationship to work, are all impacted by our mental health. There are several theories of mental health but they come from same five school of thoughts as explained in earlier researches. Recently with the new dynamics post Covid, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), is now being used to research employee well-being since it offers some intriguing insights into the motivation at work. According to SDT theory, fulfilment of these needs is essential for human development and wellbeing. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are regarded to be the main supports for wellbeing and good functioning. Social environments that encourage the fulfilment of these requirements enhance intrinsic motivation and, as a result, normal growth processes. Therefore, the paper tries to explain that to improve the mental wellbeing of employees, empathetic leadership helps. Numerous studies conducted after COVID-19 have reached a consensus that the majority of people have experienced mental health problems like loneliness, sadness, or a sense of abandonment. Employees require equal, accessible mental health benefits more urgently than ever, according to research conducted during the first phase of COVID-19. Previous studies have identified a number of variables that affect employees' mental health.

Factors affecting Mental Health so far:

Author	Journal	Findings	Factor affecting mental Health
Xiang et al. ,2019	Brain,	Due to the epidemic, people experience a negative feeling of safety, threat, and risk of infection.	Loneliness isolation due to from workplace.
Garfin et al.,2020	Science advances	Pandemic lead to overloading of information	Information uncertainty lead to depression

Qiu et al. ,2020	Psychia try clinical neurosc iences.	a n d	The dread of being quarantined and confined can be brought onby a pandemic.	Separation can lead to decreased mental well being
Chatt et erjee al, 2020	Asian	o f	Quarantine can lead to differentkind of problems	Feelings of fear, anger, anxiety and panic aboutworse possible outcome, boredom, loneliness, and guiltabout not being there for family.

MENTAL WELL-BEING AND PRODUCTIVITY

One of the main concerns that organisations are facing nowadays is the need to continuously improve employee productivity. Employee productivity is an assessment of the efficiency of aworker or group of workers. In actual terms, productivity is a component which directly affectsthe company's profits (Gummesson, 1998; Sels et al., 2006). Ferreira and Du Plessis (2009) indicated that productivity can be evaluated in terms of the time spent by an employee actively executing the job he or she was hired to do, in order to produce the desired outcomes expectedfrom an employee's job description.

Inspite of different approaches by many authors on workplace productivity, Research have focussed on one or two ways to measure productivity (Nollman, 2013). Employee productivity is the amount of time that an employee is physical present at the job, besides the capacity of being mentally present and working efficiently during the presence at the job. Sharma and Sharma (2014)

Work being an integral part of our existence occupies a major timeline. The workplace environment plays a major role in contributing to employees' mental health and productivity as the workspace accounts for an employees' strong sense of identity, brings purpose and offers financial stability (Modini et al., 2016). However, with an increasing focus on productivity and always needing to be available, especially as more people are working remotely, rates of stress and burnout have been on the increase (Indeed, 2021). Increased awareness of key challenges of mental health, there is a need to understand the relationship between productivity and mentalwell-being to ensure a stable workforce.

The companies investing in people's development and creating a conducive work environmentto increase productivity. Harvard Employee Mental Health Letter highlights that employee mental health at the workplace impacts the employee as well as the productivity of the organization. However, due to the stigma attached, mental health issues are neither reported nor treated and reduce output (Aquino, Perfecto & Jalagat, Revenio & Kazi, Afaq & Nadeem,Samia, 2020)

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its 2018 report defined mental health as a state of well-being when every individual realizes its potentials and manages normal stresses well, canbe productive, and fruitfully contribute to the community. More than half the world's

population are currently in work and 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder. Without effective support, mental disorders and other mental health conditions can affect a person's confidence and identity at work, capacity to work productively, absences and the easewith which to retain or gain work.

Psychological and Mental well-being states being happy and life going well (Huppert, 2009). Mental well-being has now become one the focus points of social scientist, economist, and policymakers (Huppert, 2005) (Layard, 2005) (Marks, and Shah, 2005) (Mulgan, 2006). A research further determined that higher mental well-being leads to higher job performance- enhanced potential and better productivity (Oswald and Dorsett, 2014). Although few studies have established the associative linkages of psychological wellbeing and workplace performance, studies did not establish the extent to which the job performance varies with the level of psychological well- being at its dimensional level

(Daniels and Harris, 2000)

Mental wellbeing issues have a direct impact on the employees and businesses. Research conducted in different countries across the globe indicate that mental health issues leads to higher attrition. In the Netherlands, around 58% of the work-related disabilities are related to mental health (Grundemann, 1991). In the UK, it is estimated that around 30–40% of the sickness absence is attributable to some form of mental illness (O'Leary, 1993).

Mental health issues such as anxiety can cause someone to lose concentration, making it very difficult to multi-task and carry out day-to-day work activities. An employee's stamina could also be affected, making task deadlines difficult to meet. Someone with anxiety or depression may suffer from paranoia, meaning that even constructive criticism could be taken personally and cause them to doubt themselves and their work, damaging their confidence and abilities in the future.

It may not necessarily be the physical work side of things that is being affected, it could be the dynamics of the workforce, making the office less of a team and more of a competition. A sufferer of mental health issues may struggle to interact with others and therefore isolate himself or herself. This causes a huge blockage of communication, meaning that any potential issues that are not addressed could cause some long-lasting damage in the future. Equally, for those working from home due to COVID-19 who would usually bounce off colleagues, they've had to get used to working remotely, again discouraging communication and pushing them to work in silo.

Within any office, the culture, atmosphere and general dynamic is constantly changing, which, for someone struggling with their mental health, can be really difficult. The inability to adapt in an ever-changing environment can really slow down what should be a natural growth process within your business.

Occupational ill health, poor productivity and human error is one of the elements of work related stress that leads to increased sickness absence, high employee turnover and less productivity in the organization. This can further lead to physical ailments such as heart disease, back pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances or various minor illnesses; as well as psychological effects such as anxiety and depression, loss of concentration and poor decision making (Health and Safety Executive, UK; 2007)

Collins et al. (2005) used a 4-week survey to assess the prevalence and productivity effect of chronic conditions. They found that people reporting depression, anxiety, or emotional disorders had a 36.4 percent decrease in productivity at work.

Evidence has long suggested that poor mental health leads to productivity loss (Kessler and Frank, 1997; Lim et al., 2000; Hemp, 2004; Burton et al., 2008; Alonso et al., 2011; Evans- Lacko and Knapp, 2016; Bubonya et al., 2017), and economic loss (Marcotte and Wilcox-Gök, 2001; Stewart et al., 2003; Trautmann et al., 2016; Whiteford, 2021). However, these studies have examined a limited range of mental health symptoms, often focusing on mood disorders such as depression and anxiety, and typically consider mental health challenges as an all or nothing phenomenon, rather than looking across the spectrum of mental wellbeing in the general population. The data reported here provide a novel insight into the relationship between mental wellbeing and productivity by incorporating a comprehensive range of mental health symptoms spanning 10 mental health disorders and covering the spectrum of mental wellbeing risk status.

Major Contributions of Mental health on Productivity so far:

Year	Author	Journal	Contribution
1997	Kessler and Frank	Psychol Med	poor mental health leads to productivity loss

1998	Gummesson	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	productivity is a component which directly affects the company's profits
2013	Nollman	Master Thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale	Measures of employee productivity
2014	Sharma and Sharma	International Journal of Commerce, Business and Management	Employee productivity is the amount of time that an employee is physical present at the job, besides the capacity of being mentally present and working efficiently during the presence at the job
2016	Modini	AustraliasPsychiatry	The workplace environment plays a major role in contributing to an employees' mental health and productivity as the workspace accounts for an employees' strong sense of identity, brings purpose and offers financial stability
2020	Aquino, Perfecto & Jalagat, Revenio & Kazi, Afaq & Nadeem, Samia	Journal of Advanced Research in Dynamical and Control Systems	The companies investing in people's development and creating a conducive work environment to increase productivity. However, due to the stigma attached, mental health issues are neither reported nor treated and reduce output

Given the significance of empathy for mental health as described in earlier study and the abrupt change to the virtual world, the significance of digital empathy cannot be understated. As a result, the research suggests the following relationship between workplace productivity, mentalhealth, and digital empathy.

Proposed Model: Digital Empathy and Workplace productivity
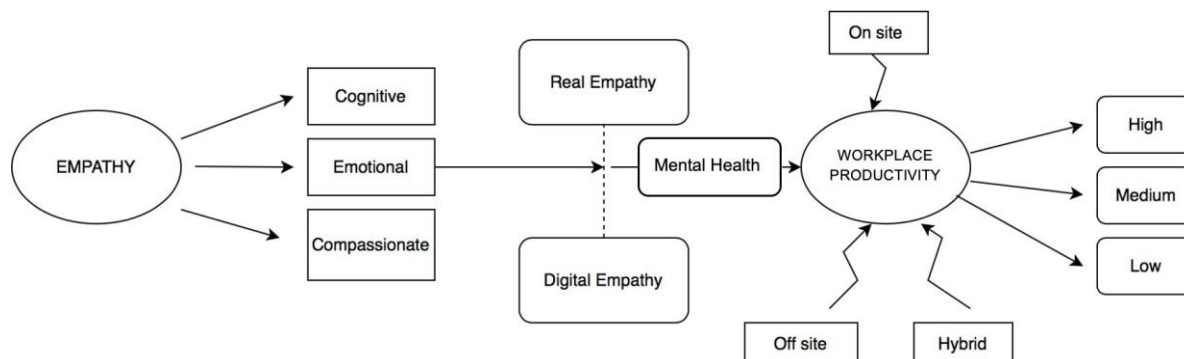
Empathy is a time-honored idea and a crucial component of emotional intelligence wherein a person is conscious of the emotions and actions of those around them. However, until commercial organizations began to diversify and a pandemic caused a major upheaval, empathy had no practical use. Individuals were then expected to be mindful of both their own and others' boundaries. Hence The concept mentions three basic levels of empathy: cognitive, emotional, and compassionate. Empathy is not just knowing others; it is also understanding oneself. The three categories of empathy change depending on the many situations that a person encounters in their personal and professional lives.

This further advances us to the following step, which might be either real empathy or digital empathy, depending on the communication channel. The real empathy was present in the time before COVID-19 when individuals were involved talking to each other in person, face to face. Real empathy, which encompasses interpersonal connections on all three levels/types of empathy, is thought to be more human in nature.

In the post-covid era, the organizational environment and culture are now attempting to adopt digital empathy methods that allow people to connect with one another through online platforms. Research on digital empathy is still scarce because people's behaviours can change depending on their specific remote workspaces.

Understanding the effect of digital empathy on workplace productivity is the objective of the proposed conceptual study and the model above. Productivity at work also depends on whether individuals are working on-site, remotely, or in a hybrid environment. Each level of workspace has its own advantages.

There is a gap between the direct influence on empathy and workplace productivity, according to research conducted by numerous researchers. Consequently, a moderating variable of mental well-being or mental health can be introduced to the equation to help determine how empathy and job productivity interact. Empathy is a component of emotional intelligence, which is the capacity to comprehend both oneself and others. Empathy therefore depends on a person's mental health, which might vary from person to person, work pressure on a given day, the outside environment, working conditions, etc. Therefore, we can conclude that empathy has an impact on workplace productivity with a moderating effect on an individual's mental well-being/mental health.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Since every level of management demands a different channel of communication and further necessitates an awareness of the diversity of people working under one roof, more research may be done in this area. An empirical study involving to understand the employee and employer's perception towards the role of digital empathy can be undertaken. Understanding the function of digital empathy and employee mental health can aid businesses in determining whether to stick with the current business model of remote working or return to the former physical place. Therefore, this research contributes in understanding the importance of mental well-being as an important construct in estimating the

productivity of employees.

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