

A Dale Carnegie White Paper

The Power of Empathy:

A Key Soft Skill for the
Future of Work



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Key Findings

- Empathy is a core leadership competency, not just a “nice to have” soft skill.
- Balancing empathy and accountability can create high-performing, resilient cultures.
- Leader empathy shapes how employees perceive the organization as a whole.
- Empathy significantly increases retention, job satisfaction, and the likelihood of team success.
- Consistent, human-centered communication makes empathy tangible and credible.
- Empathetic leadership drives higher performance and stronger business outcomes.
- Despite its proven impact, empathy remains a largely untapped area of opportunity and competitive advantage.

Empathy, a key pillar of emotional intelligence, is not just a soft skill; it’s a strategic capability that underpins resilience, collaboration, and long-term success.

In today’s rapidly evolving work environment, the ability to understand and respond to others’ emotions is essential.

As organizations face complex challenges, from hybrid work and digital transformation to rising employee expectations, empathy has emerged as a vital leadership and workforce competency. It bridges emotional awareness and meaningful human connection, fostering conditions that lead to stronger performance and improved organizational outcomes.

This white paper explores **the strategic role of empathy** and examines:

- Its function as a core component of emotional intelligence.
- The balance between empathy and accountability.
- The influence of leader empathy on organizational culture.
- How empathy is expressed and reinforced through communication.
- Its impact on retention, satisfaction, and team effectiveness.
- Generational and gender-based perspectives on organizational empathy.
- Common barriers to practicing empathy in the workplace.

Drawing on our global research into organizational health, we also offer **actionable strategies for embedding empathy into leadership and organizational culture**, providing leaders with a clear roadmap to building more empathetic, resilient, and high-performing organizations.

We begin by examining empathy not just as a trait, but as a core component of emotional intelligence—the bedrock of emotionally aware leadership.



3,375 respondents
18 countries

Empathy: A Vital Component of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Empathy is more than a “nice-to-have,” it’s a game-changer for today’s workplace. At its core, empathy is “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another.”¹ In simpler terms, it’s the ability to recognize and respond to what others are feeling; an essential tool for leaders managing diverse teams and complex dynamics.

In fast-paced, diverse work environments, stepping into someone else’s shoes isn’t just about kindness; it’s a critical driver of organizational effectiveness and employee motivation—and the lens through which emotionally intelligent leaders interpret, respond, and make meaningful connection to others.

¹ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Empathy. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*.

Note: Value differences referenced throughout are statistically significant unless otherwise noted.

In environments where empathy is actively practiced, communication is clearer, and teams collaborate more effectively. The importance of this cannot be overlooked as communication and teamwork were the top two essential soft skills identified by study participants for the future of work. These important dynamics point to a more emotionally intelligent workplace where people feel seen, heard, and valued, which fuels a culture of sustained performance and trust.

As part of the broader concept of emotional intelligence—which encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and influence emotions in oneself and others—empathy plays a central role in forming genuine emotional connections with those around us. It's been widely recognized as both a core characteristic of emotionally intelligent behavior and a prerequisite for helping others grow and succeed. Without empathy, emotional intelligence loses its effectiveness as empathy is what makes EI actionable; it transforms emotional awareness into meaningful leadership responses.

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While empathy is central to EI and critical for fostering connection and trust, it must be thoughtfully balanced with another essential leadership trait: accountability. When overemphasized or misapplied, empathy can unintentionally blur expectations or hinder performance—which makes striking the right balance both a challenge and a necessity.

Balancing Empathy with Accountability

While empathy improves many critical outcomes, it cannot stand alone.

At first glance, empathy and accountability might appear to pull in opposite directions; one rooted on understanding, the other on outcomes. But the most effective leaders integrate and balance both, recognizing them as compliments to one another, not contradictions. They don't shy away from hard truths, rather, they deliver them with clarity, respect, and humanity—fostering a culture where people feel supported and challenged to grow.

Accountability, at its core, means taking ownership of commitments, behaviors, and results. When grounded in empathy people feel heard, but they also know what's expected.

Without clear expectations, empathy alone can risk creating confusion, underperformance, and weak business outcomes. Go too far in the other direction—where there's accountability without empathy—and leaders can create rigid, fear-driven cultures marked by low morale and burnout.

The best leaders blend both. They honor the human experience while setting and upholding high standards. This balance enables honest dialogue, personal growth, and lasting resilience.

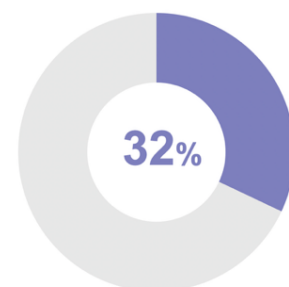
But how well are organizations achieving this balance?

Our research found that only about 1 in 3 participants (32%) strongly agreed that accountability is consistently upheld in their workplace. This gap presents a clear opportunity: as organizations invest in building more empathetic cultures, they must also reinforce clear, visible systems of accountability.

But systems alone aren't enough. Accountability and empathy ultimately come to life through people; especially those in leadership roles. Leaders set the tone not only through what they say, but through how they act. Employees don't assess empathy or accountability in the abstract; they feel it firsthand through interactions with managers, supervisors, and leaders.

Figure 1

Fewer than one-third of participants strongly agree there is accountability in their company.



Source: Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

In this way, leadership behavior becomes the clearest and most powerful expression of an organization's culture.

Leader Empathy = Organizational Empathy

Employees experience organizational culture primarily through the actions of their leaders. Leader empathy—or the lack thereof—directly shapes how people perceive company values and the broader work environment.

In this context, we can view empathy in the workplace as operating at two levels:

- **Individual empathy** - How one person relates with another: such as between a leader and an employee.
- **Organizational empathy** – The extent to which empathy is reflected in the organization's culture, policies, and practices.

While these may seem like distinct concepts, employees rarely draw a sharp line between them. In fact, research shows that the empathy demonstrated by an employee's direct leader or manager is seen as a reflection of the organization itself—such as a leader regularly checking in on workload and well-being during high-pressure periods.

In short, leader empathy becomes organizational empathy in the eyes of employees.



When empathy is lacking at the leadership level, employees often perceive the organization as lacking empathy as well.

So, although individual and organizational empathy are conceptually different, they overlap significantly in practice. A leader's behavior not only influences team dynamics but also shapes how employees interpret the company's values and priorities. When empathy is lacking at the leadership level, employees often perceive the organization as lacking empathy as well.

The Influence of Leaders Is Powerful—and Consequential

A single negative leadership experience can shape how employees perceive company culture. When a manager is seen as uncaring or detached, even the most well-intentioned company-wide initiatives may be dismissed as inauthentic.

Our global study highlights this leadership-empathy gap:

- Only 27% of employees strongly agreed that their immediate leader cares about them as a person.
- Just 21% strongly agreed that their leader cares about how life outside of work affects their role.



Only 1 in 4 Strongly agree that the person they report to cares about them as a person

These findings underscore how few employees experience meaningful empathy from their direct leaders—a dynamic that influences how they perceive the organization's values.

But this is more than interpersonal dynamics; it poses a serious retention risk. As perceived organizational empathy increases, so does an employee's intent to stay. When empathy is missing, employees are more likely to disengage and eventually leave the company. As such, organizations cannot afford to overlook leader empathy: in the eyes of employees, **leadership behavior doesn't just influence culture—it defines it.**

Retention: Want to Keep Quality Employees, Be More Empathetic

Our research shows that the level of empathy employees feel from their organization has a significant impact on their intent to stay or leave. In other words, empathy isn't just a "feel-good" factor—it's a key driver of loyalty and long-term commitment.

Empathy as a Retention Strategy

Workplace empathy means showing genuine care for employees as people, not just as performers. It goes beyond acknowledging emotions to demonstrating a deeper concern for their well-being. This may seem counterintuitive in fast-paced, performance-driven environments, but the data is clear: when employees feel genuinely cared for, they are far more likely to stay.

Empathy plays a defining role in whether employees stay or leave, and leadership is where it matters most. Employees may hear about company values, but they feel those values through daily interactions with their managers. When leaders recognize both contributions and personal realities, they earn trust—and trust is what keeps people committed. And that trust doesn't just protect morale—it protects the bottom line. Estimates from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) place the cost of replacing an employee at **50% to 200% of their annual salary**, depending on the role.² When you consider the scale of that expense across a workforce, it's clear: empathy isn't just good leadership—it delivers a measurable return on investment.

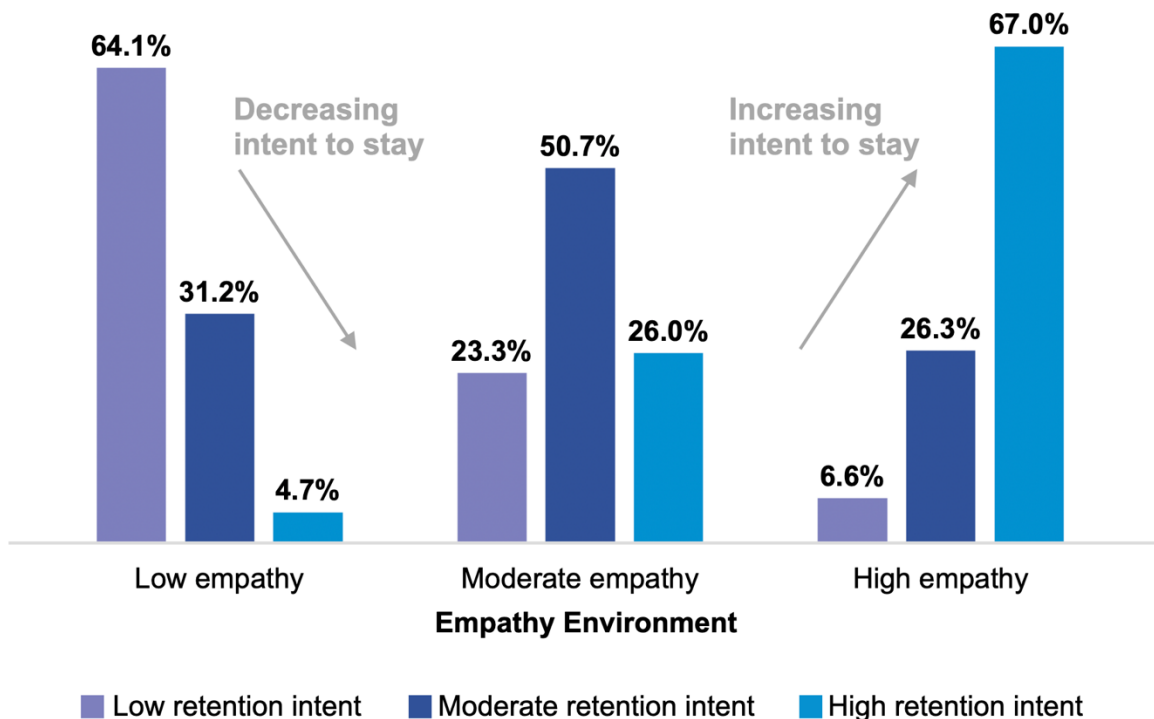
In a competitive talent landscape, where workforce shortages and evolving employee expectations are reshaping the employer-employee relationship, empathy isn't just a leadership ideal, it's a strategic retention tool. Developing empathy as a core leadership capability is essential for organizations that want to keep their best talent and sustain long-term success.

The Numbers Are Striking (Figure 2)

- **In low-empathy workplaces**, nearly two-thirds (64.1%) of employees report a low intent to stay, while just 4.7% report a high intent to stay.
- **In high-empathy workplaces**, the opposite is true; 67% report a high intent to stay, and only 6.6% say they are likely to leave.

Figure 2

Employees in high-empathy environments are far more likely to report a high intent to stay.



Source: Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

² Dyerly, R. (2025). *The myth of replaceability: Preparing for the loss of key employees*. Society for Human Resource Management.

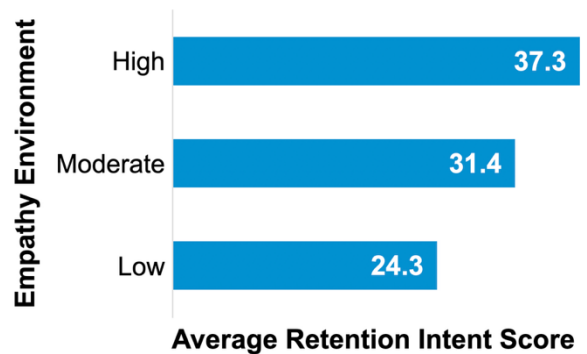
Figure 3 further illustrates the relationship between empathy and retention: as perceptions of organizational empathy rise, so do average retention scores. Employees in high-empathy cultures report an average retention score of 37.3 out of 45 (a 13-point advantage over low-empathy environments).

These differences aren't just statistically significant—they're strategically critical.

Organizations that build genuinely empathetic cultures aren't only boosting morale; they're safeguarding their talent pipelines. The bottom line: empathy plays a direct and defining role in employee retention.

It also strengthens retention indirectly by increasing job satisfaction, which further reinforces employees' intent to stay. Let's take a closer look at that connection.

Figure 3
Empathetic workplaces see higher average retention intent scores.



Note. Retention intent possible range: 9-45.
Source. Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

Job Satisfaction: Deeply Driven by Empathy; Strongly Tied to Retention

When employees feel their organization displays empathy, they report significantly higher job satisfaction. This may not be surprising insight, but it's a meaningful one. The more employees feel they matter beyond their work output, the more positively they view their overall work experience.

Figure 4
Employees report significantly higher job satisfaction with greater company empathy.



Source. Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

Our analysis revealed a strong link between perceived empathy and job satisfaction. As shown in Figure 4, satisfaction scores rise sharply as employees experience higher levels of empathy in the workplace.

This trend is especially compelling when considering the potential score range of 6 to 30, and that employees in low-empathy environments fall below the midpoint of 18. By contrast, employees in high-empathy environments report a striking 26.7. The nearly 10-point gap on a 24-point scale highlights just how deeply empathy shapes the employee experience.

The Role of Job Satisfaction in Retention

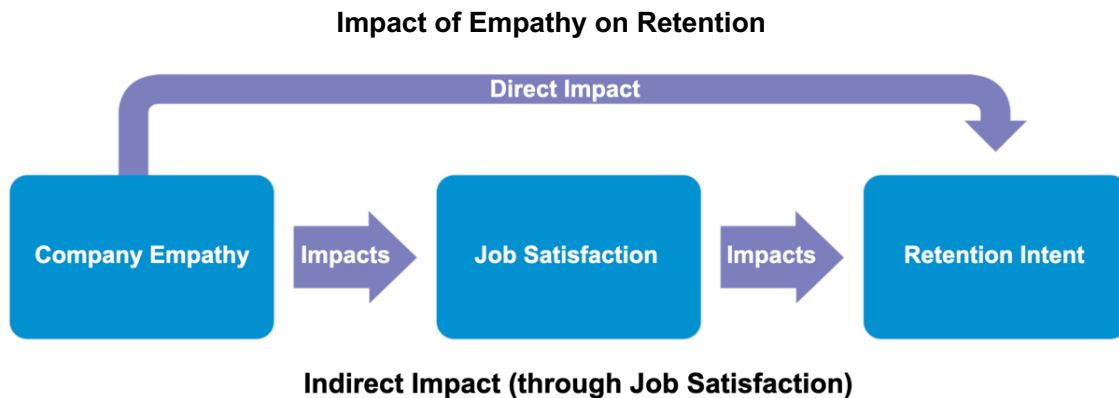
As outlined in the previous section, empathy has a direct impact on retention—but our research shows that it also plays a key indirect role as well through job satisfaction.

In this context, empathy drives retention in two possible ways:

- **Directly**, by strengthening emotional commitment to the organization.
- **Indirectly**, by improving job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens the intent to stay.

Figure 5

Empathy's impact on retention is both direct and indirect.



This dual impact underscores empathy's role in fostering loyalty and impacting the broader employee experience—particularly the day-to-day feelings that lead someone to question, “Should I stay or leave?”

Investing in Empathy to Boost Satisfaction and Retention

Empathy isn't simply a soft benefit; it's a cultural investment with measurable impact. Leaders, as visible expressions of company values, are uniquely positioned to influence how employees feel and engage. Embedding empathy into leadership behavior and organizational norms can:

- Enhance job satisfaction
- Increase retention and reduce turnover-related costs

And while many factors influence turnover, one message remains consistent across the data: **empathy matters.**

The good news? Empathy is within an organization's control. Investing in empathy training—particularly for people managers—is one of the most effective ways to improve employee experience, satisfaction, and long-term retention. The more empathy employees feel from their leaders and workplace, the more likely they are to envision a future with the organization.

While empathy has a powerful impact on individual experiences, its influence doesn't stop there. It also transforms how teams collaborate, perform, and thrive together.

Empathy Improves Team Outcomes

Empathy doesn't just benefit individuals; it impacts team success as well. Just as it supports retention and job satisfaction, empathy influences team success both directly and indirectly, in part, by creating the conditions for trust, communication, and shared purpose.

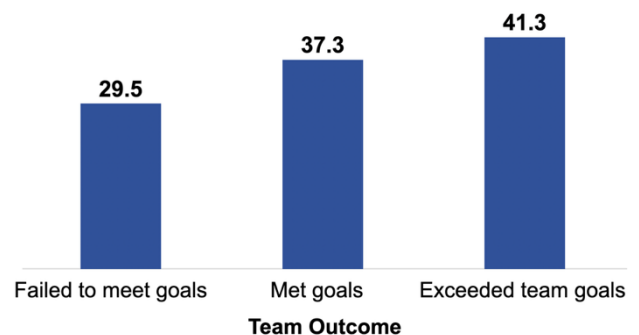
Figure 6 shows how team performance improves as the average level of empathy employees feel from their company increases (measured on a scale from 10 to 50). The pattern is clear: teams in high-empathy environments were significantly more likely to report meeting or exceeding their goals. The greater the perceived empathy, the more likely teams were to succeed.

When employees feel genuinely understood and supported by their organization, teams don't just meet

Figure 6

Teams in high empathy organizations outperform.

Perceived Organizational Empathy (average) and Team Goal Achievement



Source: Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

expectations—they excel. In today’s workplace, meeting goals is the baseline. Organizations that invest in building empathetic cultures position their teams to exceed that baseline and consistently outperform.

Small Shift, Big Gains

When organizations demonstrate empathy, team success becomes significantly more likely. Our study found that for each incremental increase in perceived organizational empathy, teams were 11% more likely to meet their goals—and 21% more likely to exceed them.

These findings highlight a powerful truth: while teams may reach their goals under various workplace conditions, outstanding performance is far more likely when empathy is consistently felt. Empathy doesn’t just help avoid underperformance—it enables excellence. When people feel seen, heard, and supported, they’re more motivated, more collaborative, and better equipped to deliver strong results.



With each small increase in perceived organizational empathy, teams were:
+11% more likely to meet their goals
+21% more likely to exceed them
 —compared with teams that fell short.

An empathetic culture isn’t just good for morale—it’s good for business.

But empathy must be more than intent—it needs to be communicated clearly and consistently. Without ongoing, human-centered communication, even the best intentions risk going unnoticed or being misinterpreted.

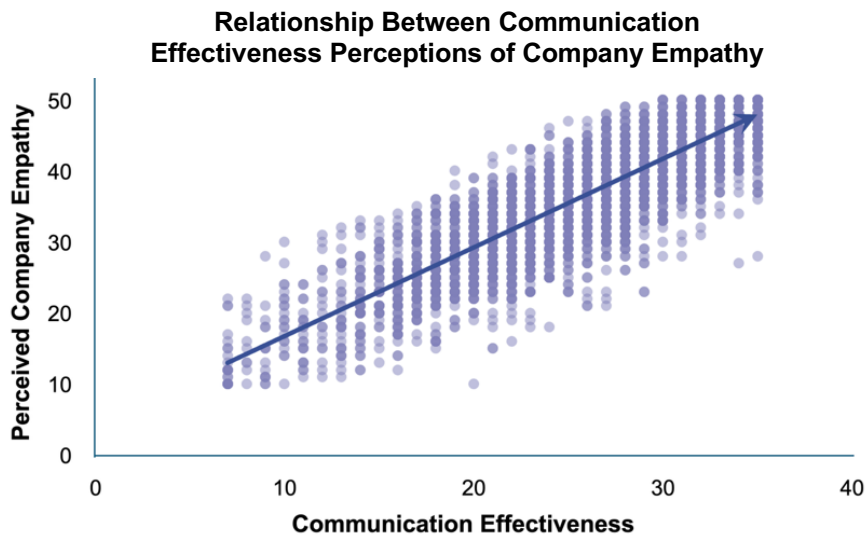
Communicating with Empathy: Making Leadership Values Visible

As a critical leadership capability, empathy is most powerfully expressed through communication.

Below, Figure 7 illustrates this clear relationship between communication effectiveness and employees’ perceptions of empathy within their company.

Figure 7

The quality of communication and the level of perceived empathy from a company are highly connected.



Source. Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

Employees don’t absorb values such as empathy, integrity, or collaboration through policies or handbooks; they experience them through interactions with their leaders. In these moments, communication becomes the

clearest expression of what the organization truly stands for. It's not just what leaders say, but how they say it, that makes empathy visible and real.

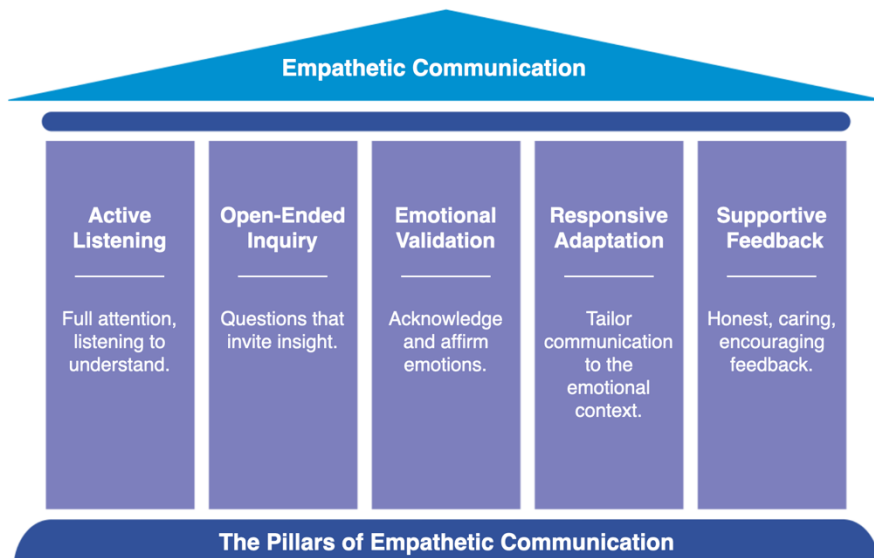
Empathetic communication involves more than just kind words. It involves active listening, genuine curiosity about others' experiences, and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives—validating emotions without immediately jumping to judgment or problem-solving. It's conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal signals such as tone, body language, timing, and even the choice of medium (e.g., face-to-face versus email). Each of these cues can amplify or diminish the perception of empathy.

To embed empathy into everyday leadership, communication must be intentional and supported by specific skill-building, including:

- Practicing active listening during meetings and conversations
- Asking open-ended questions that invite deeper dialogue
- Expressing understanding before offering solutions
- Recognizing and validating the emotions behind employees' words
- Tailoring communication to the emotional context of the situation

Figure 8

Empathy should be embedded in every communication strategy.



Building a culture of empathy, therefore, is inseparable from building a culture of empathetic communication. When leaders consistently model these behaviors, empathy moves from being an aspirational value to a lived organizational norm.

Importantly, how empathy is expressed and received can vary widely, including across gender, generation, and cultural backgrounds. To build inclusive cultures and emotionally intelligent workplaces, leaders must understand not only *what* empathy looks like, but also *how* it's experienced by different groups.

Gender, Generations, and Organizational Empathy

Empathy is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective leadership and a healthy workplace culture. Yet, the experience of empathy isn't consistent across employees, with meaningful differences emerging across gender and generational lines.

By Gender

While men and women in our study reported similar levels of personal empathy, their perceptions of empathy expressed by the company (whether from direct managers or the broader organization) differed significantly.

When asked how empathetic their workplace culture felt:

- **Men** rated their organizations as significantly more empathetic than women did.
- **Women** were less likely to view their workplace as having a strong culture of empathy.

Currently, men view the workplace as being more empathetic than women do, indicating the need for gender-sensitive approaches to emotional intelligence and leadership behaviors.

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These differences matter. They suggest that many women experience the workplace as less emotionally supportive or attuned—an important insight, especially as women’s participation in the global labor force continues to rise.³

By Generation

Generational differences in perceived empathy also emerged. Gen Z and Millennials were more likely to view their organizations as empathetic, while Gen X and Boomers reported significantly lower levels of perceived empathy.

As shown in Figure 9, our study revealed a noticeable decline in perceived organizational empathy beginning with employees over age 45. The generational divide reflects differing expectations and interpretations of what empathy looks like in the workplace.⁴

Younger employees may be more attuned to empathy, inclusion, and mental health, having come of age in a time when these values are more openly discussed and culturally encouraged. As a result, even moderate expressions of empathy may resonate more strongly with these groups. Additionally, early-career employees often benefit from onboarding, mentorship, and recognition—contexts in which empathetic behaviors tend to be more visible.

In contrast, older employees may interpret these same signals differently, potentially shaped by professional experience in more traditional or hierarchical workplace cultures where empathy was less emphasized or even viewed as a weakness. Some may also feel that current efforts aren’t intended for them or see them as superficial, which could contribute to a disconnect in how empathy is experienced across generations.

Why This Matters for Organizations

When certain groups feel less seen or supported, even unintentionally, it can negatively impact job satisfaction, retention intent, and overall well-being. These disparities point to a broader cultural reality: how empathy is expressed, recognized, or expected at work may differ based on an individual’s sociocultural lens—such as gender or generation—even if delivered the same way. To lead effectively, organizations should go beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and develop the emotional intelligence and cultural awareness to meet diverse needs and perspectives.

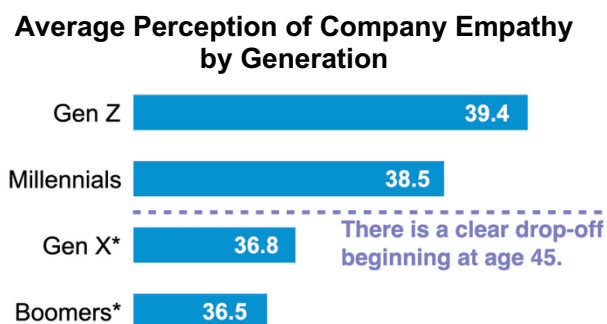
Importantly, these differences aren’t just challenges—they’re opportunities. By understanding how empathy is experienced differently across groups, organizations can tailor strategies in leadership development, manager training, and communication practices to ensure empathy more inclusive, credible, and impactful across the board.

The Good News: Empathy Benefits Everyone

While perceptions of organizational empathy may differ, its impact is consistent. Employees who view their workplace as empathetic, regardless of background or identity, report higher satisfaction and stronger commitment. A more empathetic culture improves retention, employee well-being, team performance, and overall organizational health.

Investing in empathy isn’t just the right thing to do; it’s a powerful, practical strategy for lasting success.

Figure 9
Perceptions of employer empathy differ across generations.



*Not significantly different from each other.
Note. Scores based on a 50-point scale.
Source. Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

³ World Bank. (n.d.). *Labor force, female (% of total labor force 1990-2024)*.

⁴ For additional discussion around generational differences in the workplace, see: Dale Carnegie & Associates. (2025). *AI in the workplace: Navigating generational and role-based perceptions*.

Challenges to Adapting Empathy in the Workplace

Empathy is more than a soft skill; it's a core component of emotional intelligence and a proven driver of performance. Yet our research reveals a gap between its recognized value and how organizations are developing it.

Despite its importance, only 22% of employees report receiving emotional intelligence training in the past three years. Even fewer—just 14%—received training specifically focused on empathy. This lack of development isn't surprising: using the United States as an example, 37% of CEOs don't believe empathy has a place at work, despite a majority acknowledging that it's undervalued.⁵

This reflects a critical disconnect. While empathy is broadly recognized as a success factor, it often fails to receive the focused, structured attention required to turn it into a distinct, actionable leadership competency.

Further highlighting this gap, when asked which skills were most critical for the future of work, only 19% identified emotional intelligence, and just 15% named empathy. These low figures suggest that even as relational skills grow in relevance, they remain undervalued or underdeveloped in many organizations.

The gaps between the training employees receive, the skills they value, and the proven impact of empathy represents a missed opportunity. Despite growing awareness of empathy's role in leadership and team success, most organizations have yet to translate that awareness into meaningful, sustained action.

Closing this gap isn't just about improving interpersonal skills. It's about equipping leaders to navigate complexity, support diverse colleagues, and lead effectively in a rapidly evolving workplace.

Cultural and Structural Barriers to Empathy

Beyond training, several cultural and organizational barriers continue to limit the development of empathy at scale:

- **Misalignment Between Values and Behavior.** Even when organizations embed empathy into mission statements or leadership frameworks, day-to-day behaviors don't always reflect those values. When leaders act in ways that contradict stated principles or values, employees quickly notice and trust erodes, undermining any broader effort to build a cohesive, empathetic culture.
- **Lack of Training and Resources.** Many leaders and managers may want to incorporate empathy but lack the tools, confidence, or support to do so effectively. Without targeted, skills-based development, efforts to cultivate empathy can remain surface-level and inconsistent.
- **Cultural Resistance and Outdated Mindsets.** In some environments, empathy is still viewed as secondary to performance metrics or strategic execution. This outdated thinking discourages the development of relational competencies essential for collaboration, innovation, and retention.
- **Blind Spots Around How Empathy is Experienced.** Without recognizing the differences in how those in the organization experience empathy, companies risk reinforcing any existing inequities and unintentionally excluding certain groups.

Table 10

Despite its importance, empathy and the broader framework of EI are still undertrained.

	Received Training Past 3 Years	Seen as Critical to Future of Work
Emotional Intelligence	22%	19%
Empathy	14%	15%

Source. Dale Carnegie Research (2025).

⁵ Businessolver. (2024). 2024 State of workplace empathy report: Part 1.

Overcoming these barriers is essential for organizations seeking to create supportive, inclusive, and high-performing cultures. By closing training gaps, aligning leadership behavior with organizational values, and tailoring empathy to diverse experiences, companies can begin to unlock empathy's full transformative potential.

But alone isn't enough. Turning awareness into meaningful progress requires clear, practical action. In the next section, we outline a roadmap for embedding empathy into leadership development, communication practices, and organizational culture—ensuring it becomes not just an aspiration, but a lived, everyday experience at work.

Strategic Action Plan: Embedding Empathy into Leadership and Culture

Building a more empathetic workplace requires deliberate action at both the individual and organizational levels. Organizations that integrate empathy into leadership development, communication, and culture position themselves for higher retention, increased job satisfaction, and stronger performance. Below are eight strategies for embedding empathy into the core of organizational life:

① Develop Empathy-Centered Leadership and Management Training

■ Foundational Skill-Building and Onboarding

- Embed empathy training into onboarding for new leaders and managers to set expectations from day one.
- Equip leaders and managers with skills for active listening, emotional recognition, and compassionate feedback. Training should focus not just on **why** empathy matters, but demonstrate **how** to apply it consistently through presence, inquiry, and personalized support.

■ Identity Awareness and Real-World Application

- Include a focus on recognizing and understanding that empathy is not experienced the same way by all employees. Incorporate guidance on how identity factors (e.g., age, gender) can shape how empathy is experienced.
- Include scenario-based simulations or role-play to practice navigating emotionally complex conversations (e.g., performance reviews, conflict resolution).

② Incorporate Empathy Metrics into Leadership Evaluations

- Move beyond results-only assessments. Include empathy-related behaviors such as responsiveness, emotional support, and inclusive decision-making in leadership evaluations and 360-degree feedback processes. This creates accountability for *how* leaders lead, not just *what* they achieve.
- Use employee sentiment trends and direct report feedback as inputs into leadership performance reviews.
- Establish “red flag” indicators (e.g., recurring comments about lack of support or inclusion) to trigger coaching or intervention.

③ Create Structures for Employee Voice

- Establish both formal and informal channels for feedback and dialogue. Use tools like pulse surveys, listening sessions, and one-on-one check-ins to ensure leaders hear and respond to the emotional needs of their teams.
- Close the loop by publishing “You said, we did” summaries from feedback cycles to build trust in action.
- Use trained facilitators to lead listening sessions or focus groups—especially with underrepresented groups—and ensure feedback systems reflect diverse identity experiences.

4 Model Empathy at the Senior Leadership Level

- Culture change begins at the top. Senior leaders must consistently model empathy, especially during periods of stress or uncertainty. Authentic vulnerability and emotional openness set the tone for the rest of the organization.
- Encourage leaders to share personal stories that reflect vulnerability, failure, or growth as a way to humanize leadership.
- Set expectations for visible engagement (e.g., attending team huddles, hosting open forums) that show genuine curiosity and care.

5 Balance Empathy with Clear Expectations

- Foster a culture where empathy and accountability coexist. Leaders should consistently set clear goals, deliver constructive feedback, and maintain high standards—while also demonstrating understanding and support.
- Use regular check-ins and feedback loops to reinforce the balance between empathy and performance, helping employees feel both cared for and challenged.
- Offer leaders practical tools—like coaching guides or feedback scripts—that model empathetic language in performance management.
- Apply a structured framework during difficult conversations to guide tone, expectations, and emotional responsiveness.

6 Recognize and Celebrate Empathetic Behaviors

- Make empathy visible and valued by recognizing it in action. Use storytelling, peer recognition, or formal awards to highlight moments of compassionate leadership, support, or collaboration. Reinforcing empathetic behavior helps shift it from an individual trait to a cultural norm.
- Integrate empathy recognition into existing programs (e.g., values awards, shout-outs) so it doesn't feel like an add-on.
- Crowdsource examples of empathy in action through anonymous nominations or pulse feedback.

7 Invest in Ongoing Emotional Intelligence Development

- Treat empathy and emotional intelligence as continuous learning priorities—not one-off trainings.
- Offer coaching, peer learning, and skill-building programs that strengthen self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills across all levels of the organization.
- Use self-assessments or 360 tools to help leaders track progress.
- Align empathy and EI development with talent planning to prioritize empathetic and emotionally intelligent individuals for future roles in leadership.

8 Foster Empathetic Communication Practices

- Provide communication playbooks with practical guidance for sensitive scenarios (e.g., layoffs, personal crises, conflict).
- Train leaders and managers to interpret non-verbal cues and emotional signals—including in virtual and hybrid settings.
- Reinforce core practices such as:
 - Listening without interruption
 - Asking open-ended questions to deepen conversations
 - Validating emotions before offering solutions
 - Tailoring tone, timing, and format to emotional context
 - Giving feedback that is both honest and compassionate

Embedding empathy into the DNA of an organization takes more than good intentions—it demands a sustained commitment to actionable practices that make emotional connection a core part of how work gets done. These strategic steps help move empathy from abstract value to everyday reality, creating workplaces where people feel heard, valued, accountable, and empowered to thrive.

Conclusion

Empathy is no longer “just a soft skill”—it’s a critical capability that shapes organizational culture, leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and long-term performance. When embedded intentionally into leadership behaviors, daily communication, and organizational systems, empathy fuels retention, deepens collaboration, and supports sustainable performance.

Yet empathy alone is not enough. Without accountability, it can lose its impact or even undermine performance. To build truly high-performing workplaces, organizations must balance empathy with accountability, ensuring that compassion and performance expectations work hand in hand at every level.

As our research shows, the gap between recognizing the importance of empathy and putting it into practice remains one of the most pressing challenges—and one of the greatest opportunities. Organizations that invest in empathy-centered leadership, align behavior with values, and amplify the employee voice will be best positioned to thrive in an increasingly complex workplace.

By treating empathy as a strategic imperative—not just a cultural ideal—organizations create the conditions for people to thrive. Empathy isn’t a feel-good exercise or a distraction from performance; it’s a proven driver of key outcomes like retention, job satisfaction, team effectiveness, and engagement. These aren’t just culture wins—they’re business wins that directly impact the bottom line. Even reducing turnover alone can generate significant savings through lower replacement costs. In today’s environment, empathy is more than a leadership virtue—it’s a measurable, competitive advantage.

The future of work belongs to those who lead with both heart and discipline. Empathy is the foundation. Now is the time to act.

“ Try honestly to see things from the other person’s point of view. ”

-Dale Carnegie

About the Author

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Joining Dale Carnegie in 2023, Robert is responsible for ongoing research into current issues facing leaders, employees, and organizations worldwide. With over 25 years of experience, Robert brings a research-driven approach to help organizations and practitioners identify and address significant areas of impact for workplace improvement.

To learn more about how Dale Carnegie Training can help you define and develop a high-performing team culture in your people and organization, contact your local Dale Carnegie office today by visiting dalecarnegie.com to find the location nearest you.



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