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The Recipients' Views on Empathy in Everyday Work Situations –

Insights from an Exploratory Interview Study

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Theoretical Background
- Current Study and Methodology
- Results
- Discussion

Introduction

Empathy - “Standing in Someone Else’s Shoes?”



Pixabay

Theoretical Background

Scientific Perspective on Empathy

Research Disciplines



- Social Science (e.g., Gerdes & Segal, 2011)
- Pedagogy (e.g., Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009)
- Neuroscience (e.g., Singer & Decety, 2011)
- Organizational Science (e.g., Clark et al., 2019)

Relevance



- Success factor for constructive and respectful interactions (e.g., Singer et al., 2015)

Definitions



- Various definitions and conceptualization attempts (e.g., Batson, 2009, Cuff et al., 2014, Davis, 1994)

Theoretical Background

Empathy in Organizational Research

Cognitive Empathy

„knowing and understanding other persons' inner states“



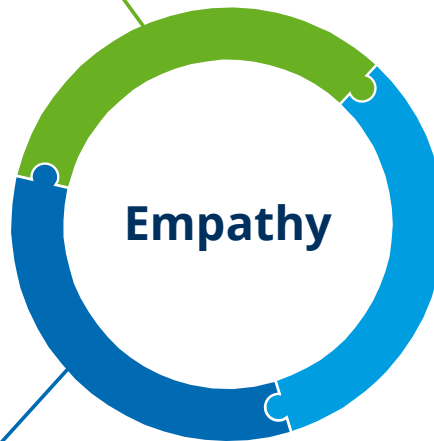
Behavioural Empathy

„acting empathically towards other persons“



Affective Empathy

„feeling the same emotions as other persons“



Clark et al., 2019

Current Study and Methodology

Research Interest

Focus

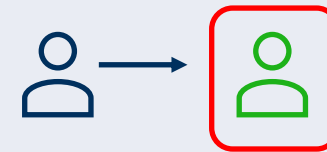
- Behavioural empathy
- Business-administrative context
- Recipients' perspective

Exploratory approach

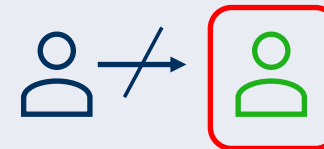
What are the characteristics of empathy-relevant communication situations from the subjective perspective of empathy recipients in the business-administrative context?

Empathy-relevant communication situations

1) Presence of Empathy (PoE)

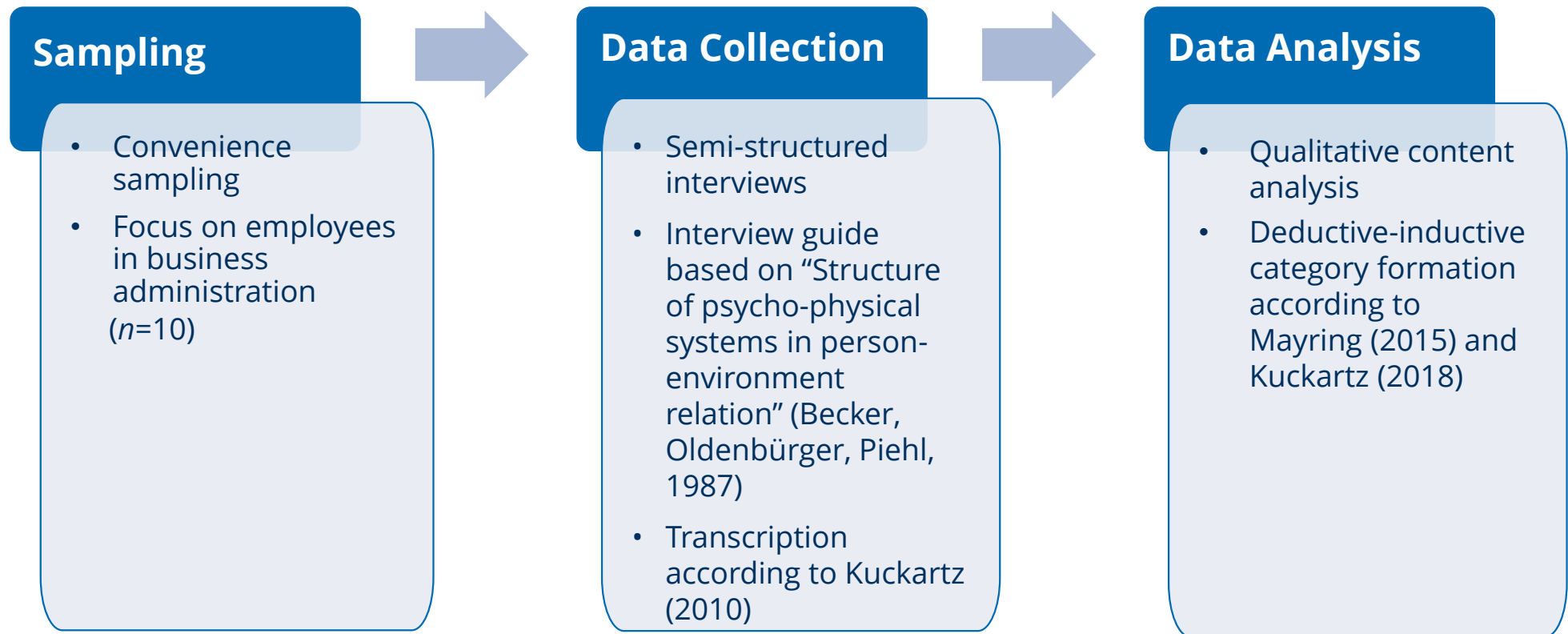


2) Lack of Empathy (LoE)



Current Study and Methodology

Research Process



Results

Main Categories

Occasions	• What were the reasons for the PoE and LoE situations?
Frame Conditions	• Which factors influenced the PoE and LoE situation?
Emotions	• How do recipients feel before, during and after PoE and LoE?
Consequences	• What consequences aroused from PoE and LoE?
Goals	• How does the desired ideal course of a PoE and LoE situation looks like?
Expectations	• Considering existing circumstances: how do recipients expect PoE and LoE situations to be?
Measures to achieve goals	• What steps or plans do recipients already initiated or intend to implement in the future in order to achieve their goals?

Results

Occasions

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Technical discussions	Handover talk	12 (6 6)	8 (5 5)
Personal issue talks	Talk about exam preparation	8 (4 4)	4 (3 2)
Cyclically recurring meetings	Weekly team Jour Fixe	5 (2 3)	4 (2 3)
Feedback meetings	Feedback talk after inadequate performance	4 (1 3)	3 (1 3)
Corridor discussions	Talk in the open-space office	1 (0 1)	1 (0 1)

- Various occasions
- Empathy as part of everyday communication

Results

Frame Conditions

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Frame conditions in the sender's area of responsibility	Dialog partner's interest	49 (21 28)	9 (9 9)
External conditions	Appropriate time frame	39 (19 20)	10 (9 9)
Frame conditions in both dialog partners' area of responsibility	Job-related dependencies	20 (14 6)	8 (7 5)
Frame conditions in the recipient's area of responsibility	Interviewee's body language	12 (8 4)	5 (5 3)
Frame conditions in a third party's area of responsibility	Negative relationship between the sender and third parties	1 (0 1)	1 (0 1)



- Passive role → dependent on influencing factors beyond their control

Results

Consequences

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
C. affecting recipients	Improved working conditions	24 (18 6)	10 (9 6)
C. affecting both dialog partners	Improved basis for follow-up conversations	15 (10 5)	8 (8 4)
Entrepreneurial c.	Entrepreneurial failure	11(3 8)	7 (3 7)
C. affecting senders	Diminished experienced appreciation	7 (1 6)	4 (1 4)
C. affecting both dialog partners and third parties	Deteriorated working climate	6 (2 4)	6 (2 4)
C. affecting recipients and third parties	Improved interaction	4 (2 2)	4 (2 2)
C. affecting senders and third parties	Improved relationship	2 (1 1)	1 (1 1)

C. = consequences



- PoE improves further interactions
- LoE promotes entrepreneurial failure

Results

Emotions

Before empathy-relevant communication situations

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Positive emotions before empathy-relevant communication situations	Confidence	4 (3 1)	3 (3 1)
Neutral emotions before empathy-relevant communication situations	Curiosity	10 (5 5)	7 (5 5)
Negative emotions before empathy-relevant communication situations	Frustration	11 (5 6)	7 (5 6)



- Divers emotions

Results

Emotions

During empathy-relevant communication situations

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Positive emotions during empathy-relevant communication situations	Relaxation	10 (10 0)	10 (10 0)
Neutral emotions during empathy-relevant communication situations	Excitement	5 (2 3)	4 (2 3)
Negative emotions during empathy-relevant communication situations	Fear	9 (1 8)	9 (1 8)



- Positive emotions during PoE
- Negative emotions during LoE

Results

Emotions

After empathy-relevant communication situations

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Positive emotions after empathy-relevant communication situations	Contentment	10 (9 1)	9 (9 1)
Neutral emotions after empathy-relevant communication situations	Astonishment	1 (0 1)	1 (0 1)
Negative emotions after empathy-relevant communication situations	Disappointment	10 (0 10)	10 (0 10)



- Positive emotions mainly outlast PoE situations
- Negative emotions outlast LoE situations

Results

Goals

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Interpersonal goals	Creation of a trusting atmosphere	23 (16 7)	8 (7 7)
Technical goals	Reception of feedback on task completion	11 (11 0)	5 (5 0)
Personal goals	Stress reduction	6 (2 4)	4 (2 3)

- High relevance of interpersonal goals
- Ideal conception: reasonable, understanding, open, and respectful interactions

Results

Expectations

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Interpersonal expectations	Further turbulences	10 (4 6)	6 (4 6)
Technical expectations	Appropriate handover	7 (4 3)	5 (4 3)
Personal expectations	Consideration of private circumstances	4 (3 1)	3 (3 1)



- Considering existing circumstances
- Rather pessimistic expectations

Results

Measures to achieve goals

Subcategory	Example	Assigned coding units (PoE LoE)	Interviewees addressing the subcategory (PoE LoE)
Prevention activities	Creating a confidential atmosphere for discussions	21 (6 15)	8 (3 8)
Consensus orientation	Striving for objectivity	17 (8 9)	6 (2 5)
Confrontation	Arranging follow-up meetings	13 (2 11)	7 (2 6)
Tactical-situational strategies	Addressing topics depending on the sender's mood	12 (2 10)	7 (2 6)
Reflection	Reflection on the conversation	5 (2 1)	3 (1 3)
Mediation	Consulting a mediator	3 (0 3)	2 (0 2)
Avoidance	Overlooking the sender in future discussions	3 (0 3)	2 (0 2)
Subordination	Attempting to meet the sender's expectations	1 (1 0)	(1 0)



- Many ideas ⚡ self-imposed passivity?

Discussion

Contribution



In-depth view on empathy in everyday work situations from the recipients' perspectives

Limitations



- Small sample size
- Focus on Germany

Implications



- Further recognition of recipients' views in research
- Practical hand tools for recipients
- Strengthening recipients' awareness on their active role in empathic communications

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