# WHAT, WHOM AND HOW EMPATHY WORKS IN VUCA WORLD: APPLIED SOCAIL PSYCHOLOGY AND OGRANIZATION PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

VUCA World is a rapidly changing, highly complex, ambiguous, and unpredictable global trend, allowing individuals to experience incomplete information, misunderstandings, and inability to predict outcomes or plans. It may also cause stress, needs for special attention from the people around you, and it may be difficult to adjust to activities together. In this article, mechanism of empathy will be presented in detail by using the perspectives of social and organizational psychology. To clarify the relationship, if individuals have an empathy, they can recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to the feelings, perspectives, thoughts and lifestyles of those involved, it will lead them to succeed in the performance of assigned roles and fulfill emotional and social intelligence. Effective teams can communicate with each other effectively and the organization is sustainable in its operations. Empathy is an essential skill for everyone in the VUCA World, whether for a leader who has a deep understanding of their followers, colleagues who require a deep understanding of each other and employees who need to have a deep understanding of customers. The mechanism of empathy is caused by Empathy-Relevant Situation and directed by heredity, disciplines of upbringing, conformity with socialization, organizational leadership, organizational design, and culture of the society in which the individual lives.

Keywords: Empathy, Organizational Psychology, Social Psychology, VUCA World

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Introduction

The VUCA World, a common word these days, is made up of the first consonants of four words: V–Volatility, U–Uncertainty, C-Complexity and A-Ambiguity to describe activities that happen in the world right now. It is regarded as a state of high volatility, change within a short time, high uncertainty, uneasy to predict the up-coming situation and highly complex, and ambiguity with difficulty to predict outcomes. Many factors are needed to be taken into account in the decision-making. Such conditions cause the organizations, teams or individuals not to receive complete information, a lot of irrelevant information or probably misunderstanding (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). It takes more effort and time to deal with the information until it becomes stressful, burnout and difficult to adapt in a timely manner due to the need of trying to accept a working style that can be done anywhere, anytime or no longer employing a full-time staff. Those involved must try to meet complex demands, to improve themselves to keep up with rapid changes and to lessen the dissimilarity from vast possession of information technology. (Dima, Schmitz, & Simon, 2021).

According to the impacts of VUCA World, Bennett & Lemoine (2014) and Barman & Potsangbam (2017) proposed guidelines for countermeasures by identifying key attributes that helped organizations, working teams, individuals, adjusted or carried out various activities in responsibility for efficiency and effectiveness as follows: 1) Critical understanding of the situations by stopping, looking at and listening to global trends of uncertainty, roles and responsibilities of those involved, expectations and relationship styles at different levels, 2) Agility in carrying out activities by adapting the capabilities and resources available to the goals and contexts at the moment based on the belief that " The earlier you start, the faster you can correct the mistakes.", 3) Flexibly exposure, search and collect data from new and diverse sources to provide enough useful information to make decisions and reduce uncertain occurrences, 4) Willingness and patience in learning new things or solving problems as a form of challenges that one can manage, 5) Creating an internal approach that simplifies multiple steps while creating external networks to stay aware of the environment and stop using one method or formula for everything, 6) Communicating honestly and consistently, especially to reflect one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors for others to know and communicate for mutual understanding and building trusts, and 7) Experimenting to confirm which strategies or activities are still beneficial or unsuitable to use in this situation or future situations.

In addition, Louchart (2020) further pointed out that the aforementioned traits could be achieved through the circumstantial awareness and the balanced management of the thoughts and feelings of oneself and those involved. An important aspect of this awareness and management is empathy since this trait encourages individuals to interact with their surroundings, leading to an openness to diversity, in-depth information and perception of thoughts, feelings, and emotions with the correct understanding, flexibility, adaptation in life and working together to get success. This observation supported by Singh's research findings (2014) that revealed when employees had a deep understanding of others, they would be cautious in making decisions to see the value of themselves and others, to be satisfied in communicating with others, leading to reduce anxiety, tension and fear in complex or vague environments during challenging or new activities. Especially, when the organizations have leaders with a deep understanding

of others, they will help build and maintain a good relationship with the followers.

Accordingly, many scholars and researchers have proposed "Empathy" is one of the qualities that the personnel at all levels in the organizations should have and support personnel development courses on empathy in order to reduce conflicts from ambiguity, prejudice between individuals, teams or organizations and be able to reach or meet the needs of target customers in today's changing and uncertain situations (Dima, Schmitz, & Simon, 2021). Due to the importance of empathy to VUCA world, this article aims to present in detail about the mechanism of empathy. It uses the perspectives of social and organizational psychology to construct the conceptual framework of this paper to link the fact that if individuals have a deep understanding of others, they will be able to perceive, understand and respond to the feelings, perspectives, and feelings, think and frame the lives of those involved appropriately, leading to the success in the performance of the assigned roles. Also, the organization is sustainable in its operation.

WHAT IS EMPATHY?

The term "Empathy" currently studied from the point of view by psychologists, cannot have only an exact definition. Ewin et al. (2021) point out that the definition of empathy can be defined in 43 different ways, and there are some different components of empathy of others, some of them have two components: deep understanding of others cognitively and emotionally, etc. However, most researchers agree on the definition that empathy is a response based on the perception of someone else's thoughts, feelings, or experiences. While some researchers define it as a process to understand the emotions and thoughts of others by imagining themselves to be in the same

situation in which the others are. From this common point of definition, it can be said that "empathy" is a mechanism that occurs within the individual at the levels of emotional and cognitive perception. These two levels of mechanisms work together to enable individuals to understand their perspectives, lifestyles, emotions, and needs of others. Such definitions are in line with "The Encyclopedia of Social Psychology," which states that empathy involves understanding the feelings, perceptions, perspectives, thoughts and lifestyles of others in order to provide information or share experiences in determining how an individual would feel if he or she were that person or in that situation of what kind of thoughts he or she would have. However, empathy is not sympathy. Since a person with empathy is aware of the others' feelings as well, a sympathy person becomes sensitive to others without careful consideration and will both consider and judge others' situations by their own perspectives or past experiences (Ewin et al., 2021). In addition, empathy does not need to be expressed by agreeing or complying with every individual action. If it is against the facts or norms of society and empathizing with others, it is not a reflection of being a good person. Since the definition of a good person involves judging the others' behavior based on morals, ethics, values and norms of society that can vary from place to place. Whereas, an empathy will not be judged only understanding and responding accordingly (Singh, 2014).

The components of empathy can be divided into two types (Braderry, 2020; Ewin et al., 2021; Wambsganss, 2021):

1. Emotional Empathy refers to the ability to understand the others' emotions and to respond appropriately by expressing that one's perception of well-being of those who are in a positive situation or

personal distress of those who are uneasy, afraid, worried in negative situations. It can be distinguished that the perceived feelings belong to others, do not mix their own suffering or similar experiences with the suffering of others, and show a ready attitude to help when others need it or at the right time. Therefore, the character of this person has emotional empathy. If it is a written communication, a person with emotional empathy will decide to use truthful words as facts to convey meanings that match the feelings in the mind (both positive or negative ways) while maintaining basic communication etiquette. An exclamation mark (!) or a corresponding icon is also used to emphasize that emotion, and that emotionally empathetic individuals express their feelings with the interlocutor, but at the same time, it distinguishes their feelings in relation to other people's affairs. Emotional empathy is also expressed through describing the feelings of others that ones are aware of others' feelings towards other people's situations, such as "feeling devastated in this situation. It happened so fast that it was really hard to get over." Not just saying "yes" or "I feel the same".

2. Cognitive empathy is the ability to imagine and respond to the emotions appropriately, by showing that one's own feelings in response to perceiving another's plights of thoughts, emotions or situations in a rational way. Consequently, the personality traits of intellectually empathetic individuals tend to clarify the others' points of view without distorting the certain matter, being careful not to judge the others' opinions, willing to give others the opportunities that are offered different perspectives and listened to details with the intention of capturing the issue and reconciling the messages according to the intentions of the messenger. At the same time, if they wish to express their opinions, they will convince others to induce observations, ask questions to open up to their views and more importantly avoid forcing or directing others to accept their suggestions without mentioning in the discussion together in advance. In addition to the emotional and cognitive empathy, todays some scholars have proposed additional features of somatic empathy to underscore the definition in response to empathy. Somatic empathy refers to the ability to physically react in response to the thoughts and feelings of others (Braderry, 2020). For example, when an individual meets someone in an embarrassing situation, physical understanding will manifest as a bodily response, such as trembling or blushing a process within the individual that works together on both the emotional and cognitive level of the relevant situations.

WHO SHOLD HAVE EMPATHY?

1. Everyone should have empathy. Empathy is one of the future core competencies to differentiate between humanity and artificial intelligence, Wambsganss (2021), and is a fundamental skill for engaging in activities with others in society. Social psychologists have suggested that individuals who have empathy will take into account how others feel in different situations so that they can respond appropriately and control their emotions well, which is so called Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence becomes socially connected with others and tends to help others through understanding (Bradberry, 2020), in consistent with the study on that the individuals with high scores of empathy were more likely to show prosocial behaviors than those with low scores. Such prosocial behaviors lead a person to have a good relationship with others (Harscher et al., 2018). In addition, empathy has a positive influence on working in a variety of fields such as medicine and public health

where working with multidisciplinary personnel requires empathy in order to work together smoothly amidst the pressure of expectation coworker or patient concerns (Adamson et al., 2018). As well as, in any service sector, service providers need to have an empathy of others in order to coordinate and create customer satisfaction (Maria, 2019; Bhuian, 2021). Moreover, in supportive sector, the information and communication technology supporters also find that employees need to have an empathy of others in order to make careful decisions based on who will take over the job and change their perspectives on the situation up in collaboration from "I have my problem/My problem", "He has his problem/His problem" to "We have our problems/Our problems" (Costello & Donnellan, 2007).

2. Leader should have empathy. Leaders need to have an empathy of their followers in order to encourage a positive collaborative environment. They are known as highly productive leaders. The leaders who have an empathy of their followers are easily approachable and open their mind to accept the followers' feelings through facial expressions, voice tones and physical contacts. These convey that those leaders will have an empathy of the problems and needs of the followers and support their followers to overcome the obstacles on their own till these become self-esteem and self-efficacy, freedom of autonomy decision-making, satisfied and proud of their achievements and ready to show socially contributing behaviors to their colleagues. It will affect the level of personnel well-being. Success at the team level becomes sustainable efficiency of the organization (Arghode et al. 2020).

HOW EMPATHY WOKRS IN VUCA WORLD?

Despite the changing world of rapid volatility, uncertainty, complexity and agility, VUCA will negatively affect the commitment, morale and performance of individuals in both the manufacturing and service sectors. At the same time, the conditions of VUCA World also urge organizations to be alert to the responses, try to find the consumers' needs and behaviors in depth, understand or learn from their own and others' mistakes, including adjust the thinking methods of personnel and the management practices of leaders to be more agile and take advantage of information technology to facilitate greater convenience (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Dima, Schmitz, & Simon, 2021). The introduction of VUCA World's challenges as a driving force for positive behaviors is consistent with the Empathy-Relevant Situation (Devis, 1996) concept that in difficult situations or situations leading to negative emotions, it will stimulate the needs for extra attention, which is the starting point for empathy. As Hess (2021) explains, the process of empathy usually begins with the awareness of the situation by observing or thinking as if it were in the same situation. Then, they try to unwind the obstacles by listening to reflections, respecting the others' opinions, or giving others the comfort of expressing their thoughts and feelings without judgment, as well as providing counseling with an understanding of personal differentiation. From the above process of empathy, it can be noted that there are psychological factors involved in this process. The mechanism of this process can be explained as follows.

1. At the individual level. Certain research has shown that empathy can be genetically transmitted. For example, a study by (Uzefovsky, & Knafo-Noam, 2017) shows that Monozygotic twins tend to have similar levels of empathy, whereas Dizygotic twins may or may not have the same levels of empathy. For further explanation, heredity results in a person's abilities to perceive the others' emotions. If a person has a high level

of abilities to perceive the others' emotions, it tends to have an emotional empathy of others as well. In addition to genetics, the research by Artha & Etikariena (2019) reveals that empathy can be learned and developed through training, observation, imitation, scenario use, and self-experience. Discipline parental style that emphasizes rational explanations tends to lead the children to a deeper level of empathy for others than to discipline the children to obey or not to get a reasonable explanation (Devis, 2016).

2. Group and organization level. Pertaining to the influence of a group on a person, such as obtaining a nickname from society (Social Labeling), will make a person try to maintain an image in the public views, consistent with the social expectations or images over that person, the positive image of empathy is the social expected behavior. A person who has been nicknamed by such a society will try to express it in order to be accepted by the society (Jackson, 1986). And if this still continues, the empathetic image will become an individual self-image. In addition, conformity another social influence that Nook et al. (2016) reveal that levels of group empathy motivate individuals to have a deeper understanding of others, too. When the majority of members emphasize empathy value of someone, especially emotional empathy, it will affect that person more likely to show empathy to understand the others more deeply. Including when knowing that a person of higher status has an empathy, he or she may imitate (Mirroring) or change themselves according to those who are higher or set the norm of the group (norm) to make themselves feel part of the group and be accepted by the group. This is the nature of socialization.

Such a phenomenon, if considered at the organizational level, can be compared to the influence between a leader and a follower through the mechanism of exchanges, emotions, feelings, perspectives on things (Leader-Member Exchange). If a leader has an empathic leadership, it will encourage the followers to have a deep understanding of others along with the growth of thoughts and emotions and they can work effectively (Mohammad Noor & Hairul, 2015). The organization can promote a level of empathy for employees by job design that they must coordinate or participate in solving problems until getting success mutually. By designing an event like this, the employees have the opportunity to help or learn how to show their empathy during the job (Clark, Robertson, & Young, 2018).

In addition, an organizational culture emphasizing empathy (Empathic Organizational Culture) that covers both the management level who understands employees and the employees who understand their colleagues and customers will be a good opportunity for individuals to practice and show their empathy. If a person has the value of empathy with others in accordance with the organizational culture (Person-Organization Fit), it will help encourage individuals with the attributes that will affect their own working performance, team effectiveness and organizational sustainability (Arghode et al., 2020). Including cultural dimensions according to Hofstede's concept. It ensures that the collectivism and individualism have a profound effect on the empathy of people in society. Individuals in collective cultures have a greater depth of empathy than individuals in individual cultures (Yoon, 2014).

From the mechanism of empathy in VUCA World mentioned above. Therefore, it can be concluded as shown in Figure 1.
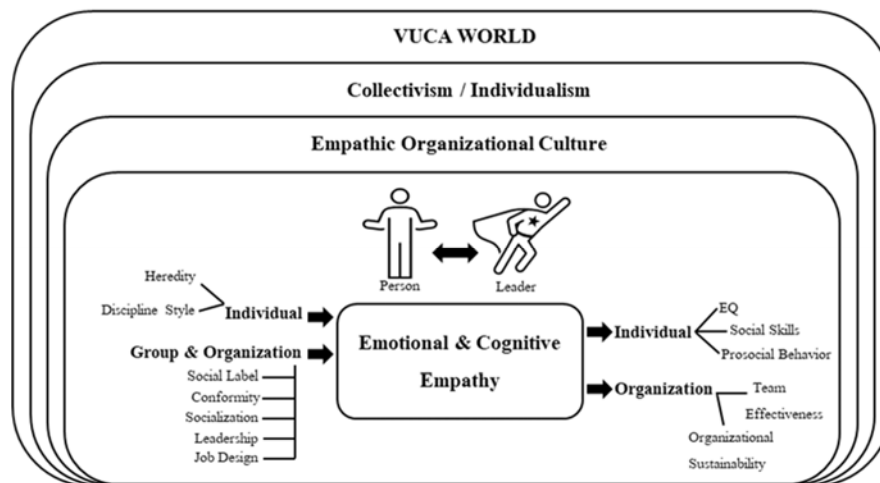
Figure 1: The mechanism of empathy in VUCA World.

Source: Author of the article.

Conclusion

In the midst of uncertainty, complexity and rapid change, people need a deep understanding as a helper to overcome their anxiety and to have the right approach to dealing with each other. Empathy is the process of recognizing, understanding, and responding to the thoughts and feelings of others by assuming that they are in the situation and feeling or reflecting on the situation and not engaging in his views or experiences. With and still recognizing that one is not another person, an empathy arises from the emotional and intellectual components that work together (Inter-Related) and cannot be separated from each other.

Empathy is an essential quality necessary to coexist in a society that all people need, regardless of their levels of employees because it encourages individuals to be more emotionally competent, social skills and more likely to help others, helps build good relationships among the employees to work with others and helps their teams and organization be sustainably productive. This mechanism of empathy can be explained by the concept of Empathy-Relevant Situation, in conjunction with psychosocial factors such

as heredity, discipline of upbringing, social conformity, culture of the society in which the person lives, etc., including organizational psychological factors such as organizational leadership, job design, and organizational culture, etc.

However, although a lot of studies have shown that empathy is essential to working in VUCA World, the study of Holt & Marques (2012) reveals that business administration students have the least interest in working. When empathy is compared to other effective leadership factors, they think that it is an expression of a leader's weakness or a leader's pity. It is often associated with ethical decision-making and is believed to be a problem or a drag business benefits. In this situation, if the perception of empathy is deeply studied and the intervention programs are developed for the target group who still misunderstand the empathy for others, it will help personnel who enter the work to have a correct understanding of desirable characteristics leading to increase the effectiveness of the team, the organization and the society in the future.

In addition, in the study of the samples of medical and public health personnel with a high level of

empathy, they were more likely to experience Burnout and Empathy Fatigues because they face with a working environment in the midst of human hardship and death. Also, they need to show empathy for their colleagues and the patient so often that they may lack self-awareness, put pressure on themselves or use unhealthy long-term self-healing methods (Harscher et al, 2018). It is; therefore, interesting to study further on the mechanisms of empathy that negatively affect the individual. The findings will reveal the mechanism of empathy for others in all dimensions. The in-depth study of the definitions, components, mechanisms and factors related to self-empathy should be further undertaken because the previous studies have often used the concept of self-compassion as a guide to study. The findings may be different in details, including studies on self-care of people with empathy for themselves and others, help expand the clearer scope of knowledge about empathy and make a guideline for adjustment in consistence with the VUCA World.

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