

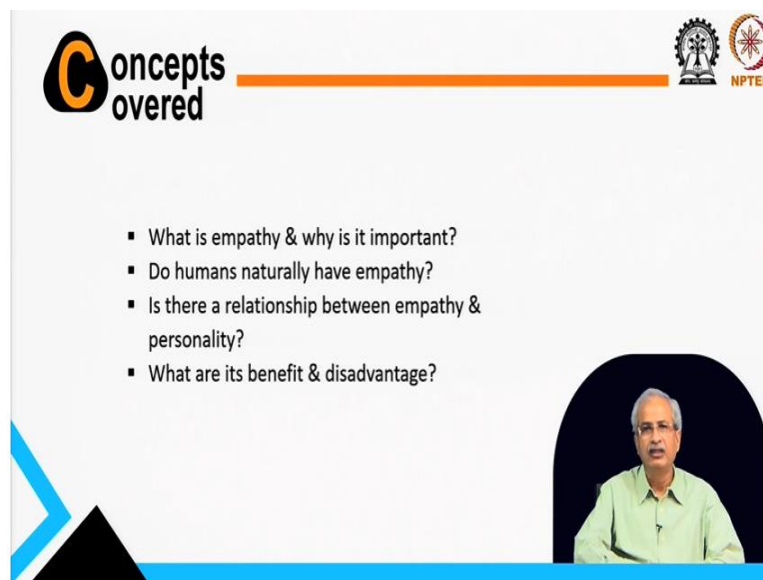
**The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing**  
**Prof. Manas Kumar Mandal**  
**Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness**  
**Indian Institute of Technology – Kharagpur**

**Module No # 03**  
**Lecture No # 11**  
**Empathy**

Welcome once again the other time we get to learn about the evolution of emotion and in particular the origin of happiness. But we understand that happiness probably has grown over our perception of pleasure, reward, motivation. We have graduated from pleasure to happiness to higher order positive feeling like empathy, compassion. Those are probably something developed at a much later point of time. And we understand that the compassion empathy is certain positive emotions which develop through experiences.

What neuropsychology says that with the development of our brain, we have started inhibiting the impact of negative emotions and biological pleasure and started getting higher order emotions like empathy so today's talk is on empathy.

**(Refer Slide Time: 01:59)**



The slide features the 'Concepts covered' logo in the top left corner, which consists of a stylized 'C' and the text 'Concepts covered'. In the top right corner, there are two logos: the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur logo and the NPTEL logo. A horizontal orange line separates the header from the main content. The main content area contains a bulleted list of four topics. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular video inset showing Prof. Manas Kumar Mandal, who is wearing a light green shirt. The slide has a blue and black decorative border at the bottom left.

- What is empathy & why is it important?
- Do humans naturally have empathy?
- Is there a relationship between empathy & personality?
- What are its benefit & disadvantage?

So, we need to know about the science of empathy. Many of us are actually talking about sympathy very frequently. But probably we do not realize the subtle difference between sympathy and empathy. We need to understand why it is important for all of us and not only for survival also for civilizations. Questions therefore do we have empathy as a natural process or we have graduated over the years to develop this fine-grained happiness which is called empathy.

Some people have got empathy, some people do not have that much of empathy, is there a personality angle in empathy, who are having more empathy, who are having less empathy is also a debatable issue. We would try to understand about it and if we have the empathy what are the benefits of having empathy? And what are the benefits of not having empathy or what are the disadvantages of empathy? These, questions will deal but first let us try to understand what are the terminologies that we are going to have in our discussion?

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:31)**



So, empathy of course will try to understand better pictorially I have tried to help you understand there. Because sympathy is something you feel but you do not put yourself to somebody else's shoes in order to get the feeling of it. So, sympathy and empathy are slightly different thing. In sympathy we say that well I feel for you but you do not get yourself into their shoes. But when we talk about empathy you are already there so sympathy empathy will try to understand.

Compassion is another issue, when we talk about compassion it is just not empathy, its higher form of empathy which means that you not only feel for someone you are not only there with someone's pain. You also help and assist them to get rid of whatever difficulties pain they may be having so, that is compassion. We will talk about something called psychopathy. Somebody who; does not have empathy and narcissism who are empathic only for themselves.

They have got nothing to do with empathy for others. These are the terminologies we will be using frequently therefore it is important for you that you get converse with.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:04)**

## How do we respond to such situations?

- A co-worker overwhelmed
- A friend fails a test
- An employee with a bad day
- Client struggling with loss
- A patient in pain
- Friend enduring a break-up
- Sick spouse of a colleague



Now let us try to understand certain situations, how do you react to such situations? I would strongly recommend you to imagine certain situations where you had sympathy or you may not have sympathy, you may have empathy. In terms of pathy we use four terminologies we called apathy, we call antipathy, we call sympathy, we called empathy. Before we actually look into those situations let us try to understand these concepts as well.

When we talk about apathy it means, I am an emotionless person, I do not have any positive feeling or even negative feeling for somebody. So, if I am devoid of having any feeling it is called apathy. When you called about antipathy means I am having a negative feeling towards someone not the positive one which is called antipathy. Then comes sympathy that you feel for someone but you do not feel in the way that someone very close to the person who is and during pain is feeling for him like a mother and child.

If a child is in pain mother has the empathy but if the child has the pain and if a stranger is there in your house, he or she will also be having some kind of sympathy but not probably having that, empathy as it should have been. So, empathy is definitely a higher form of human positive feeling you may call that to understand happiness it is important that we understand empathy as well.

So, I have given several situations a co-worker is over overwhelmed, somebody is having problem in your workplace. Or your friend has failed a test, anybody who has got a bad day, your client who is struggling with the loss, a patient in pain, a friend is having a breakup, somebody is sick in home, all these situations we keep on facing. Under such situations how do

we react? Some, react with empathy, others react with sympathy, some react with apathy, as well we will talk about them slightly later.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:46)**

Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from their point of view, rather than from your own

EMPATHY VERSUS SYMPATHY	
Ability to identify and understand another person's situations and feelings	Feelings of sorrow and pity for someone else's misfortune
Can understand another's situation	Cannot understand another's situation
May have similar experience in the past	Does not have similar experience
Understanding and acceptance are evoked	Pity, sorrow and concern are evoked

<https://pediaa.com/difference-between-empathy-and-sympathy/>

NPTEL

Speaker: A man in a green shirt is speaking.

So, let us try to get the definitional aspect of empathy it is basically the experience of understanding another person's, thoughts and feelings and condition from their point of view not your point of view. More often we try to feel as they feel if they feel who is having the pain, we call it sympathy. But when you talk about empathy you feel the pain of others so when you feel the pain of others you become empathic.

So, you understand somebody else's situations much better but when you have got sympathy you may not be understanding somebody else's situation that better. If somebody is in pain you understand the pain you have got sympathy for that but you do not understand why he or she is under pain. The empathy probably comes through our experience also because if I have faced a similar situation probably, I will have empathy better.

If somebody does not face such kind of situations will not probably have that kind of empathy or as what we say is definitionally this is what is empathy will not get it. So, pity, sorrow concerns these things are evoked but when you in sympathy. But when you talk about empathy you accept, you understand somebody's situations. So you are just not negatively detached from the person who is getting these experiences. So, there is a fundamental subtle difference between sympathy, and empathy we would like to empathy a slightly better manner.

**(Refer Slide Time: 09:36)**

## Why empathy is important?

- Empathy: Experiencing someone else's feelings
- 'Putting your feet in someone else's shoes'
- 'I understand your pain' vs 'I feel your pain'
- Reflecting before reacting, Giving others more space, communicating at the same level
- The subject matter has become important post-covid



Now question is why empathy is so important in our daily life, because empathy is experiencing somebody else's feeling. As I said you put your feet in somebody else's shoes, then you understand how it hurts. So, it is about I understand your pain versus I feel your pain when you feel somebody else's pain. If a mother feels the pain of a child's headache, then it is empathy. But if I understand that somebody is suffering from headache without having that pain in me its called sympathy.

So, empathy is important because it gives you more space before actually reacting somebody who is sympathetic will react instantly. But somebody who has got the empathy probably he or she will extend the power of non-action will remain in silence will get some space will not utter words of kindness. But will actually try to assimilate and align himself or arms herself with the pain the person is enduring.

So post-COVID this has become so important because so many people have actually suffered during covid times, lot of families have actually lost some of their near and dear ones, we all have suffered some kind of proximity stress and we really did not realize why I am with my family members yet I am suffering. We developed many kinds of belongingness barrier and we also suffered from compassion fatigue.

So proximity stress, belongingness barrier, compassion fatigue all these things have come up during the covid time two and half years we all have endured through that process we probably started understanding how to feel somebody else's pain.

**(Refer Slide Time 11:57)**

## The Science of Empathy: Mirror neurons

...a specialized group of brain cells that are responsible for empathy

...these cells enable people to mirror emotions, to share another person's pain, fear, or joy



Let us try to understand the science of empathy, now my idea of talking to you about the neuroscience behind it not in great detail but to tell you that whether there is a biological vertical for this construct of empathy. Because many people those who deal with the subject matter try to understand empathy, happiness only through the subjective perspective. Since we are dealing with the science of happiness its important that we also understand the biological particle behind it.

Now there are certain specialized cells in the body in our brain which are called mirror neurons. The function of the mirror neuron is to copy others, is to imitate others, to initially for all our social interactions. We found that the evolution of such cells in the brain was mandatory. Because if somebody is eating a banana and if I am hungry, I will feel that I must also take a banana and that feeling component which has come through self-imitation is activated by the triggering impact of the mirror neuron.

So, mirror neuron has got certain cells and these cells enable people to copy others to share somebody else's pain fear and joy, initially these cells probably have started working just to imitate others. But later on, we started imitating their feeling as well so when we started imitating when we started getting their feel of pain, fear, joy probably the mirror neuron had gone through a huge change in our deep functional system of our brain.

**(Refer Slide Time: 14:07)**

## The Science of Empathy

- Observation of action automatically triggers simulation of that action
- Mirror neurons provide a neural basis for imitation & empathy (inner imitation)



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/vitality/201407/the-neuroscience-vitality-tip-2-mirror-neurons>



There are controversies about it whether the mirror neurons are actually doing this work or not. But certain neuroscientists are very sure that mirror neuron actually govern us through the process of social interaction, because observation of action automatically triggers the simulation of action. If you look at others and if you feel their pain suppose if you have got a headache and if I am a very closed associate of yours.

Suppose mother and child I will go back to my earlier example, if the child has got headache the mother also feels like having a headache. And neuroscientist have found that the neurochemicals for which the headache is being now felt by the child, similar such secretions also take place in mother's brain as well and therefore the mother also gets the feel that how the child is getting a headache.

So, mirror neurons provide a neural basis for imitation and inner imitation. So, initially probably it has started with imitation and thereafter it actually stimulated our inner imitation or empathy and that is the way probably the mirror neurons have evolved in our brain.

**(Refer Slide Time: 15:34)**

## The Science of Empathy: Emotional contagion

Many people pick up the emotions of those around them

- One crying infant will set off a wave of crying in a hospital ward
- One person loudly expressing anxiety in the workplace can spread it to other workers



So, the science of empathy is seen understood in our day-to-day affair. To give you an example that in a kinder garden class, if one child is crying, we find that every child is crying. In a workplace if we find that one person is anxious or looking at something at a, with certain degree of anxiety or fearfulness others also become fearful and develop anxiety it will become contagious it is called emotional contagion.

Now it becomes infectious so certain emotions are infectious and in our day-to-day affair we have seen that if one person is yawning the other person also starts yawning, even if you see somebody yawning at the television you start yawning. And this has been found to be in the animals as well in monkeys as well that they start imitating as well. So it has got also an evolutionary impact and probably monkeys have got certain rudimentary forms of mirror neurons.

We have got certain higher forms of it which we call as inner imitation. So, the science of empathy and emotional contagion they are very relevant to understand happiness.

**(Refer Slide Time: 16:59)**

## Empathy & Personality disorder

- Psychopaths, sociopaths, and narcissists are thought to have what science calls “empathy deficient disorders.”
- They lack the ability to feel empathy caused by an under-active mirror neuron system.



Some kind of persons are also there who do not have empathy or they have empathy only for themselves. As I said that empathy is related to personality, some people some personalities have got more empathy, some people have got less empathy. Some researches have suggested that introverts have got more empathy, some people have suggested that well extroverts also have got empathy, but not to the extent as introverts do have.

But certain pathological groups who have got personality disorders they are found to be empathy deficient. Like sociopath, psychopaths, narcissist they are considered to be empathy deficient psychopaths are generally called moral moron. They will show all kinds of sympathy but will never empathy for you they can cheat you at any point of time. We have heard about several such psychopathic cases or sociopathic cases in the society who are serial killers pathological liars and they can lie without having any guilt.

So, the question of having empathy for those people who are psychopathic or sociopathic is a ruled out therefore they are called empathy deficient disorder. Likewise, those who; are narcissists, narcissist are those people who only indulge in self-love. So people are having only self-love, as their empathy they will not be able to empathize for others as well. So they lack the ability to feel empathy caused by underactive mirror neuron system that is the neuroscientists have been saying.

So we find that empathy and personality have got certain links and these links are important for us to understand empathy in a better way.

**(Refer Slide Time: 19:16)**

## Benefits of empathy at workplace

- Invisible connections: understanding other's thoughts, feeling is vital for resolving conflicts
- Team unity: cultivate trust among members & foster dedication
- Creativity: members learn from each other, generate new ideas



Empathy also have got lot of benefits of workplace if people have got empathy they will develop invisible connections. And you do not need to speak too many things you do not need to tell somebody that I love you or you love him or her. You will understand each others thought through an inner call and your feeling would be very vital in that sense. Your feeling would be understood and that feeling even through silence would be very noisy, and that will help resolve conflict in a very natural manner.

And if people have got empathy in workplace they will always fight against issue they will not fight against each other. So, empathy in today's environment is considered to be extremely important. In many organizations the HR professionals have started understanding science of happiness in a bigger way and a better way. Much of our workplaces industries they realized that not having empathy probably is one of the reasons why keep on people keep on changing their workplace even if they are incentivized with lot of money they go out.

In the recent generations it has been noticed, particularly in the millennials and the zoomers. They are more interested in an empathic organization where they would like to work rather than an organization where they will get more money. Because empathy is considered to be a vital for all those new generations who feel that a personal touch is very important in the workplace.

We have also noticed that many of the chief executives in the companies they have started spending one day in their employee's house just to show their empathy. So, it brings team unity, it cultivates trust among members, it fosters dedication, you do not need to tell in too many words that you have to serve the organization. Because empathy is such a thing its very loud through silence.


Therefore, when team unity is to be brought empathy is one such concept or I would say a construct people must understand. Creativity of course is something which is spurred, which are triggered by empathy. Simply because that when you are empathic to somebody, when you learn from somebody's emotions, you also learn from somebody's ideas, you are not resistant to somebody's thoughts, feelings, ideas.

Therefore, we will learn from each other so that concept of learning from each other generates new thoughts you become creative in the process.

**(Refer Slide Time: 22:31)**

Against Empathy...

- Empathy can cloud our judgment, encourage bias
- There is cognitive cost required by empathy
- Empathy requires a leader to be vulnerable, humble
- Practicing empathy is time consuming & an investment



But there are certain rules which are against empathy as well, certain people suggest that empathy can cloud your emotion. Because if your emotion is more heavy than your cognition then it will cloud your judgment, you would not be able to take judgment, you would not be able to take logical reasoning, analysis, a better manner. So, it encourages bias if you are empathic and you cannot be empathic for everybody you become empathic for certain people.

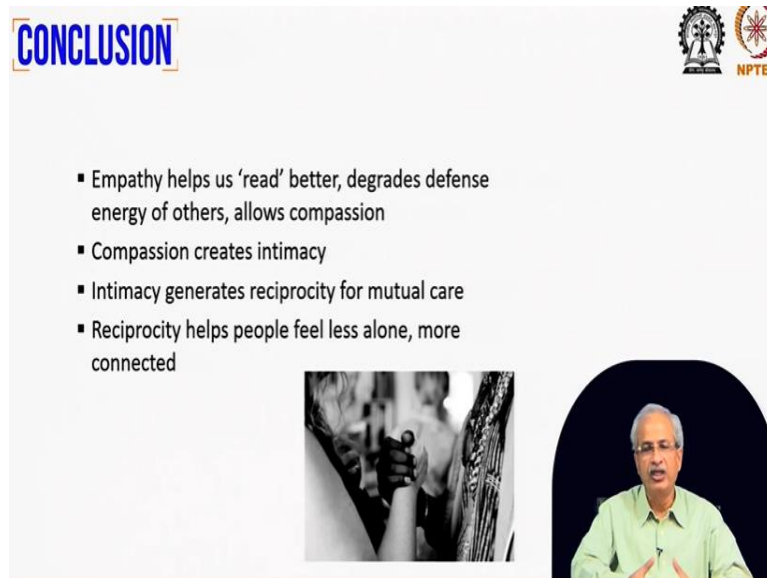
So, you have started showing some kind of biases for them and since you are giving priority of emotion over cognition, you are actually having a cognitive cost. I mean you are losing your cognition in the process in order to give rise to your empathy. So empathy requires a leader to be vulnerable I mean and humble I mean they are perceived to be humble they are perceived to be vulnerable and practicing empathy is very time consuming.

It is an investment it is not so easy therefore if you have to bring trust in the members of your team then you have to invest a lot of time. It can actually take you away from the real problems

what your workplace has been facing. So lot of people are also against empathy and in order to bring empathy some organizations make their company as more people-centric. But those who are not indulging into such practices they make it more production-intensive.

So, it depends on the type of organization, the type of team, the type of group, you have where you would like to imbibe empathy as a construct.

**(Refer Slide Time: 24:34)**



**CONCLUSION**

- Empathy helps us 'read' better, degrades defense energy of others, allows compassion
- Compassion creates intimacy
- Intimacy generates reciprocity for mutual care
- Reciprocity helps people feel less alone, more connected

The slide features two small images at the bottom: on the left, a black and white photo of a person's hands holding a small object; on the right, a video inset of a man in a green shirt speaking.

So, in conclusion we would like to say that empathy helps us read better, because reading others its not a very easy job. Most of us believe that we can very easily understand others, why we understand others better? Because we have not understood ourselves, but if you try to understand yourself first, and then you try to understand others, probably you will understand others better.

So, if you try to understand yourself first, then probably you have to be empathic first. If you are emphatic first then you will read others better, as what I said that you put yourself into somebody else's foot. Therefore, reading requires empathy, reading does not allow you to do unless you have given that character. It also degrades defense energy of others you do not fight with others simply because if you are empathic the other person in front of you understand that you have got certain trust, sentiment, love and affection for him.

Therefore, their ability to put up a resistance in front of you goes down and not only that it also allows compassion which is very important as I said compassion is a higher form of empathy where you not only feel for others you also try to do something who is suffering. The suffering

may come from any form it may be loss of a job, it may be physical pain, it may be a breakup, it may be an unforeseen situation, it may be an accident.

And we have seen that in lot of cases we find that people are suffering and people around them instead of having empathy, they simply try to derive pleasure out of it by clicking photographs. This has been seen more often these days, the other day I get a news in the newspaper in fact where a person was lying and bleeding and somebody else was taking photograph. So, it means we have become apathy to somebody's pain.

And since we have become empathic to somebody's pain. We can do anything that we like it is like a sociopathic action. Therefore, compassion creates intimacy, and intimacy generates reciprocity, intimacy you see that if you have got empathy, you will develop compassion. If you have got compassion you will develop intimacy and if you have got intimacy, you will generate reciprocity for mutual care.

And if you have got reciprocity, you will never feel alone you will feel more connected. So, our highest form of happiness comes from happiness. I mean social connectedness and that social connectedness is possible with its root in love affection and empathy. And that empathy as I said will generate compassion, compassion will generate intimacy, intimacy will generate reciprocity and reciprocity will actually help you feel connected with people around you.

So, these are the connectivities through which we must understand this construct and ultimately it leads to happiness.

**(Refer Slide Time: 28:24)**

**REFERENCES**

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/vitality/201407/the-neuroscience-vitality-tip-2-mirror-neurons>
- [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-putative-human-mirror-neuron-system-MNS-is-considered-to-occupy-the-inferior\\_fig1\\_277436181](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-putative-human-mirror-neuron-system-MNS-is-considered-to-occupy-the-inferior_fig1_277436181)

**MIRRORING**  
People  
The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others  
MARCO IACOBONI

NPTEL

So, its mirroring people how we mirror people. I would suggest you to go through this book of mirroring people and I have also suggested certain links which you may go through in order to understand the concept better. But to finally let you know that unless we understand the 4 constructs apathy, antipathy, empathy, sympathy. Probably the very meaning of sympathy, the very meaning of empathy which we interchangeably has been using over time will not be able to understand. And in this process will also confuse in which way empathy is related to our social connectedness thank you so much.