

# EMPATHY WALK - REFLECTION



I ask for what I desire as we begin this topic



I pray that my entire being become open to God's grace



I imagine these texts being addressed to me, and note my response

**Grace: that I find courage to reach out to others and meet them with empathy**

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad.”

Luke 24:13-17

And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’

Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’

Jesus Walks on Water - Matthew 14:25-31

“I have seen many people with their masks down, and I have never yet seen any who was not infinitely more attractive and beautiful unmasked than masked. The ugliness we often see in the naked soul is far more than made up by its native beauty, which is more wonderful and attractive than any other creation of God. When a man finally opens up the depths of himself to me I cannot help but love what I see. So I believe it is with God. When a man comes before Him in utter honesty, nakedly himself, there is a response on the part of God which opens channels of contact between God and man”

Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, 199–200

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Whom do I walk with in my life? Jesus, alone, a partner? Do I find courage to open myself to them?
2. How can my conversations with others become a conversation of three, held in the presence of Christ, who is there in the Spirit?

# EMPATHY WALK - INPUT

## INTRODUCTION

The practice of the Empathy Walk was developed by Professor Edgard Schein who experimented with the concept during his leadership courses at MIT Sloan School. Beside his contribution to the fields of organizational culture, learning and leadership over the past 50 years, Schein has written numerous books including *Process Consultation Revisited* and *Helping and Humble Inquiry*. What started as a classroom exercise in the 1960s became a process currently used by schools of Design Thinking in Stanford and Potsdam as well as U.Lab (an action learning journey that is an application of the Theory U process and book written by Otto Scharmer).

## MAIN IDEAS

The purpose of an empathy walk is to develop empathy for someone very different from ourselves and develop our skills in establishing a relationship across a significant boundary. The process involves 1) pairing up with someone considered to be most different from ourselves (in terms of occupation, social structure, status, nationality,...), 2) establishing a relationship with that person so that we can spend a few hours getting to know them and learning about their world, and 3) reporting back to the group what we learned.

## Procedure

- Spend some time exploring (thinking and researching) what kind of person would live in a world that is most different from the one you are in—a person that may be very different from you. Be creative, let your imagination run.
- Having decided what kind of person to look for, figure out how you could actually find and meet such a person in the next week in your city or neighbourhood.
- Make contact with this person and go meet them.
- Plan to spend several hours getting to know the person you picked and try to get into that person's world enough to get a feel for what it would be like to be in that person's world.
- How you go about this, what you say to the person, what kind of time you actually spend, etc. is all up to you. There are no rules or guidelines. Be creative. The idea here is to get away from your computer, go out into the world, and practice empathy, relationship building, and deep listening with someone.
- When you are finished, write a short reflective journaling entry on what you learned.

## Why Empathy?

It is suggested that the word empathy was first coined in English in 1909 by Edward Titchner to translate the term *Einfühlung* in Germany which means “feeling into”.

## *Em-in, Path-Feeling*

Empathy refers to the capacity to:

- comprehend another person's actions and emotions
- identify with the thoughts and emotional states within others
- understand a person's (emotional) reaction
- place oneself in another's position
- be aware of another's problems, without experiencing them
- see where others are coming from

At the cognitive level, empathy requires an ability to have an objective understanding of what others are saying (their perspective, their mental state) and the ability to take the role of another person to understand. (Herbert Mead, 1934 and Piaget, 1932). At the affective level, having empathy necessitates a reactivity to others (feeling ourselves into them, Titchner, 1924). When we do so, the outcome is an affective response that is more appropriate to their situation.

### **The Benefits of Empathy Walks**

Research shows that empathy connects people (Barret Lennard, 1997) and is highly fluid, meaning that it can potentially increase as easily as it decreases. Through a combination of deep listening and honest sharing Empathy Walks can trigger understanding of other people's experiences and support mutual relationships in diverse and stressful environments. The Empathy walk is also highly useful for leadership as it stretches individuals beyond their comfort zone, help them practice important interpersonal skills and exposes them to colliding perspectives which help them develop their meaning-making. In this context, it can be seen as a powerful vertical-learning practice that helps participants to:

- Practice deep listening and presence
- Communicate without judging and with respect
- Observe and infer how the other person feels
- Gain new perspectives
- Develop emotional intelligence
- Increase awareness of and care for others
- Gain a real appreciation of someone else's pain or struggle (which may often be hard to hear).
- Uncover common intentions/grounds and build bridges

### **Helpful considerations when engaging on an empathy walk**

- For a more mutual process, it helps to divide the time equally, it does not have to be exact timings and if someone is in need of extending their time for some important reason it is good to let them speak. Nevertheless, here is a suggestion on how to structure the time:
  - 20-25 minutes one person speaks and the other listens
  - 5-10 minutes the other person asks questions
  - 10 minutes of silence to interiorise and reflect in what you have heard (this is a good exercise also to get used to silence in presence of others)
  - 20-25 minute the other person speaks
  - 5-10 minutes the one who spoke first now asks questions
  - 10 minutes of silence
  - You can finally dedicate 10 minutes for final comments and questions

- When a person is speaking, the other is invited to maintain silence and listen deeply. At most, he may ask for clarification of meaning if needed.
- The experience of being listened to is very powerful. Empathy walks are not a place for justification, conflictive conversations or debates.
- Before switching roles, participants are invited to take a short interval of silence to allow things to settle.
- Sharing the fruits of the walk with others is highly recommended. If this practice is taking place within an organization (or within a formation), each pair can share with the team the learning and insights that arose. If the empathy walk is done individually, both participants are invited to note down their insights in their journal.
- In a faith-based context, Empathy Walks are opportunities for spiritual conversations and discernment, where “one-on-one conversations can become a conversation of three, held in the presence of Christ, who is there in the Spirit.” (Lambert). Refer to the Worksheet on spiritual conversations.

## EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Developing empathy for someone who is very different from yourself
2. Develop the skills in establishing a relationship across a significant boundary

*“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?”*

***Henry David Thoreau***

# EMPATHY WALK - RESOURCES

## GENERAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Link
Empathy Walks: Walking together to understand better				<a href="#">Link</a>
The Impact of an Empathy Walk	Nick Van der Velde	TEDxWesternU	2018	<a href="#">Link</a>
Learning to Help Through Humble Inquiry and Implications for Management Research, Practice, and Education: An Interview With Edgar H. Schein	Frank Lambrechts, Rene Bouwen, Styn Grieten, Jolien Huybrechts and Edgard Schein	Academy of Management		<a href="#">Link</a>
How to develop empathy for someone who annoys you	Rebecca Knight	Harvard Business Reviv	2018	<a href="#">Link</a>
Brené Brown on empathy	RSA Short	Youtube		<a href="#">Link</a>
The power of empathy	Helen Riess	TEDxMiddlebury	2013	<a href="#">Link</a>
Check in, check out	Fred Kofman	The Systems Thinker		<a href="#">Link</a>

## QUOTES

- “Empathy forms the very basis of all human interaction” - Kolhut, 1980
- “Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Everyday, I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. But by sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything will be alright.” - Søren Kierkegaard
- "Movement creates movement - a sense of possibility and change," - William Pullen
- “I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it.” – Maya Angelou
- “Whenever you are about to find fault with someone, ask yourself the following question: What fault of mine most nearly resembles the one I am about to criticize?” – Marcus Aurelius, Meditations.
- “If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” - To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee