



WIOA Summit. April 28, 2022

LEADING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A BALANCING ACT

ACCOUNTABILITY, EMPATHY, AND FAIRNESS

Workshop Description

Since March 2020, leaders have found themselves in a tug-of-war between head and heart. While accountability to stakeholders remained constant, everything else was in-flux. Leading in times of crisis requires the ability to lead with empathy, necessitating additional flexibility, understanding and support so employees can do their best work in less than ideal circumstances. However, empathetic treatment in the workplace can be perceived by others as preferential, favoritism, unfair, or inequitable.

So, what's a leader to do? How do you accommodate the needs of traumatized employees? Reduce work quality and quantity expectations? If so, what is the impact on outcomes and accountability? Redistribute workloads? If so, how is that perceived by others, how is productivity/morale impacted? Workshop participants will have the opportunity to explore these and other questions in a group activity and consider the delicate balance between empathy and fairness in group settings with high levels of accountability.

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Agenda

- I. What we have been through
- II. Leading in times of crisis
- III. The “Balancing Act” – an activity
- IV. Wrap up
- V. References

Rock Cairns defy
laws of gravity!

Just as what we
were able to do in
the past two
years also defies
logic!



What we have experienced....

COVID-19

**Social
Unrest**

**Political
Unrest**

**Police
Brutality**

**Increasing
Inequity
Gaps**

**Presidential
Election**

"There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full" (Henry A. Kissinger).

Since 2020, "we faced an absolute onslaught of challenges that would otherwise have been major news for the whole year - only to have them recede into our memory after the next outrageous development" (Cradit, 2021).

When Everything Changed!

COVID-19

The pandemic created extraordinary challenges for leaders, employers and practitioners.

In the chat, briefly share some of the of your challenges.

Students = Clients = Customers



When Everything Changed!

COVID-19

Leaders

- ...were forced to rethink the nature and degree of change necessary to **support** staff/employees, and clients/customers/students in adopting new technologies and technical skills to navigate in a **virtual environment**
- ...saw a need to address the **emotional well-being** of employees and customers who were themselves apprehensive and fearful about the future of as the pandemic continued
- ...were being tested in ways that they have not been in the past.

Personal & Professional Challenges

COVID-19

- Shelter in place mandates and social isolation
- Anxiety about safety of loved ones
- Concern about illness and death
- Becoming homeschool teachers or caretakers for family members
- Uncertainty about duration of the pandemic
- Concerns about loss of income and economic recovery

Personal & Professional Challenges

COVID-19

- Pivot to working remotely and providing services virtually was very stressful
 - Decisions made quickly
 - Required transformative learning, and adaptive work
 - Fundamental changes in attitude, morals, and beliefs
 - Necessitated process developments, new approaches ...new ways of doing business.
 - Digital divide: wide range of technology access and skills among staff, faculty and students

Leadership in Times of Crisis

- “Effective leadership in the face of *wicked problems* calls for a very different set of virtues than those traditionally associated with “strong” leadership.... These virtues include confidence and humility, decisiveness and curiosity, honesty and empathy, courage and patience” (Karelaia & Van der Heyden, 2020, p. 19)

Empathy Defined

- Caring for the feelings of others and having compassion for their real-life trials and challenges (Evans, 2020).
- The ability to understand and appreciate another person's experiences while providing emotional support and a feeling of security (Kock, 2019, p. 217).
- Other-oriented emotional responses that are congruent with the welfare of the target of one's emotional focus (Batson, 1991, as cited in Blader, 2014).
- Attempting to understand the perspective of another by personalizing his or her narrative to oneself; in essence, it is “**putting yourself in someone else's shoes**” (Rasmussen, 2020, p. 27).

Sympathy vs. Empathy

Merriam-Webster

- **Sympathy:** “the feeling that you care about and are sorry about someone else’s trouble, grief, misfortune, etc.”
- **Empathy:** “the feeling that you understand and share another person’s experiences and emotions” or “the ability to share someone else’s feelings”.

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/empathy-vs-sympathy/>

Why Empathic Leadership Matters

- Places leader support for **follower psychological and safety needs** at the forefront (Kock et al, 2019, p. 229)
- Prioritizes **relationship building**, develops bonds of **trust**
- Enables leader to be more **democratic and perspective-seeking**
- Leader empathy **increases performance** by increasing follower job satisfaction and fostering innovation (Kock et al, 2019, p. 217).

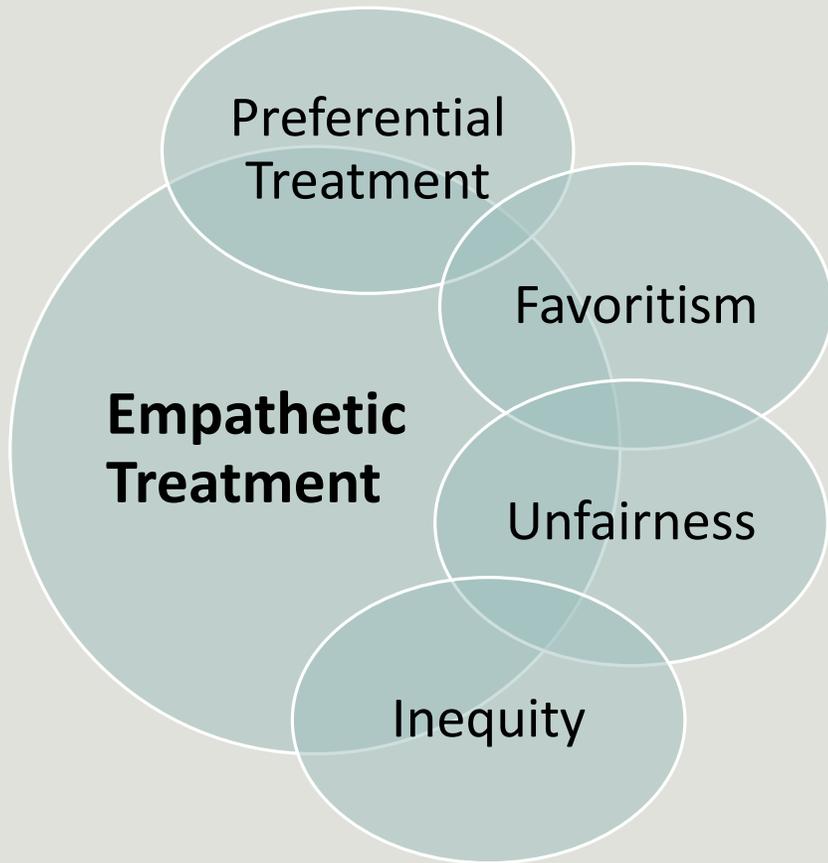
What Empathetic Leaders Do

- Empathetic leaders
 - Listen and avail of all opportunities to ask how they are doing, how you can help.....
 - Are fully present in conversations with employees.
 - Create bonds by showing that others matter.
 - Are flexible and understanding (while maintaining accountability).
- As we extend empathy to faculty and staff, they in turn feel supported in demonstrating and offering that same empathy to students. (Evans, 2020)

Empathy & Follower Performance

- Demonstrating empathy increases **job satisfaction** and feelings of **security** that support people trying **innovative** ways to accomplish daily tasks (Mahsud, 2010).
- When leaders demonstrate empathy, it creates “a powerful bond that encourages and sustains followers in endeavors needed for **improving workplace performance**” (Kock, 2019, p. 217)
- Empathetic leadership provides a model of how leader understanding and support improves follower behaviors and affective states. (Kock et al, 2019, p. 217)

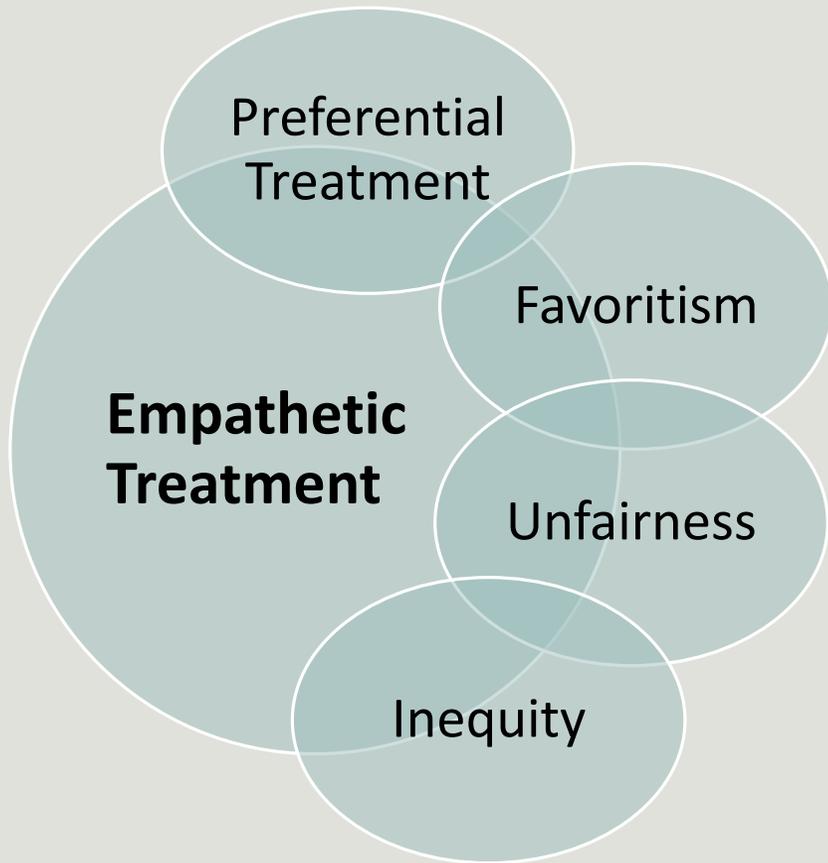
Empathy & Fairness



- Empathy shapes the perceived fairness of preferential treatment.
- Perceived fairness accounts for the effect of empathy on preferential treatment.
- Favoritism towards one group member may negatively impact and thus evoke negative reactions among other group members.
- People are more prone to notice inequity that disadvantages themselves.

(Blader, 2014)

Empathy & Fairness



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What does this mean for me?

- Are my staff members likely to regard equity or need as the appropriate and fair norm to distribute empathetic treatment in task and work contexts?

Empathy.... Socially Biased?

- Empathy is narrow in its scope and focus, rendering it innumerate and subject to bias.
- Do we demonstrate empathy more liberally to those we like, those who are like us..... thereby preventing equal investment in all people's well-being.
- Empathy-based preferential treatment can be tantamount to a violation of equity in group contexts.
- Equity is a hallmark of fairness in many group settings and is thus essential to fostering the motivation and commitment of group members.

(Bloom, 2017; Blader, 2014; Fowler, 2020)

Empathy.... Socially Biased?

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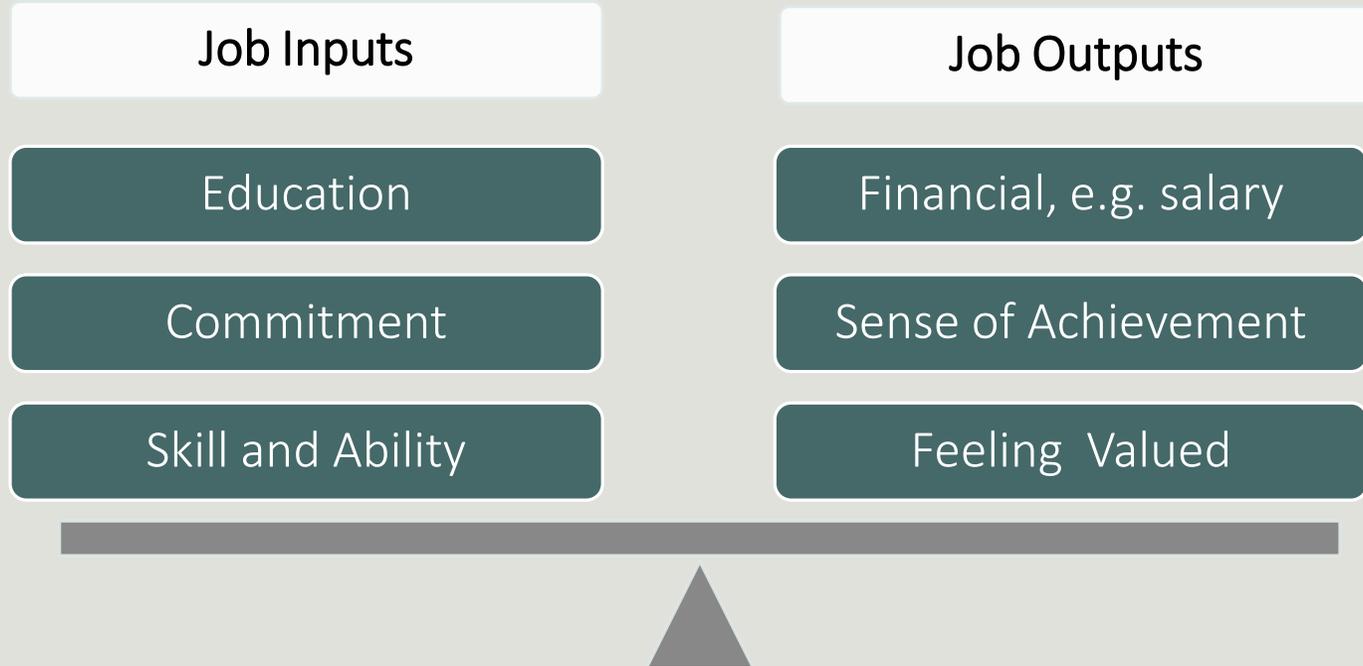
What does this mean for me?

- What are the consequences when I demonstrate empathetic feelings toward a distressed group member?
- How are group dynamics effected?

Equity Theory

<u>Inputs</u>	<u>Equity</u>	<u>Outputs</u>
Effort, loyalty, hard work, commitment, skill, ability, adaptability, flexibility, tolerance, determination, heart and soul, enthusiasm, trust in superiors, support of colleagues and subordinates, personal sacrifice, etc.	<p>People need to feel that there is a fair balance between inputs and outputs.</p> <p>Crucially fairness is measured by comparing one's own balance or the ratio between inputs and outputs, with the ratio enjoyed or endured by relevant others.</p>	<p>Financial - pay, salary, expenses, perks, benefits, pension arrangements, bonus and commission</p> <p>Intangibles - recognition, reputation, praise and thanks, interest, responsibility, stimulus, travel, training, development, sense of achievement and advancement, promotion, etc.</p>

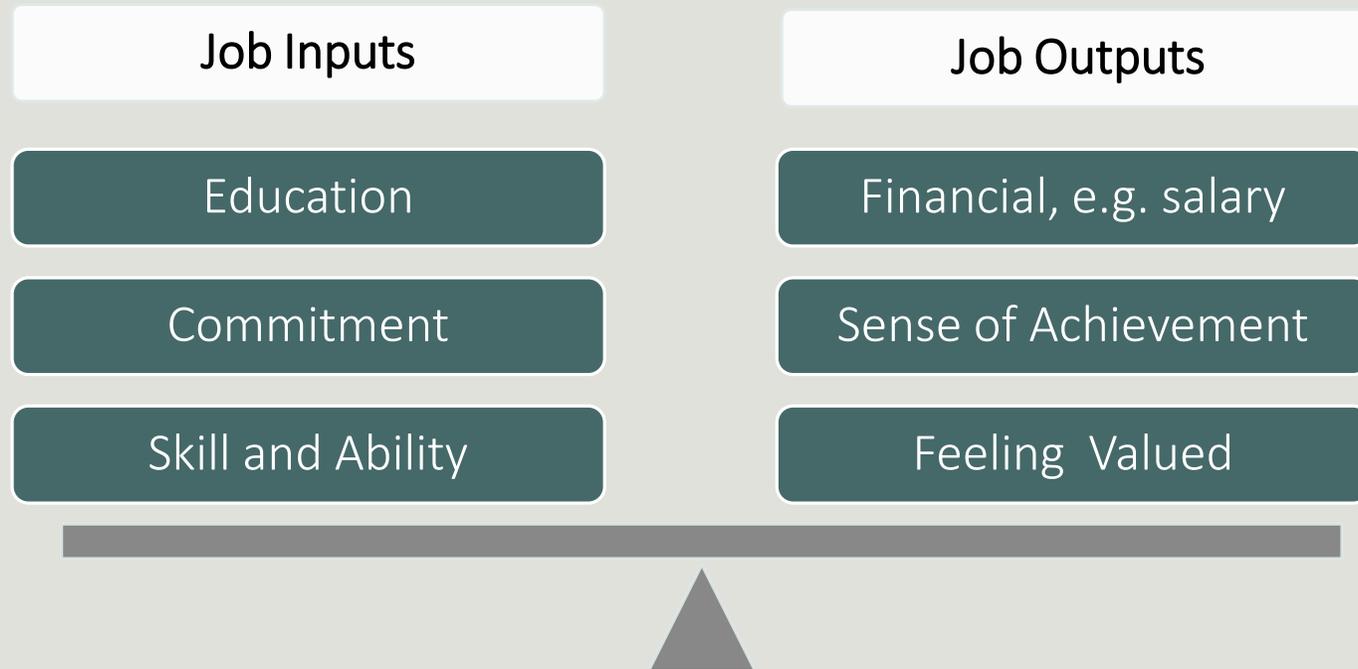
Equity Theory



“Members continually assess the personal return they receive for the investment they put into the organization.”

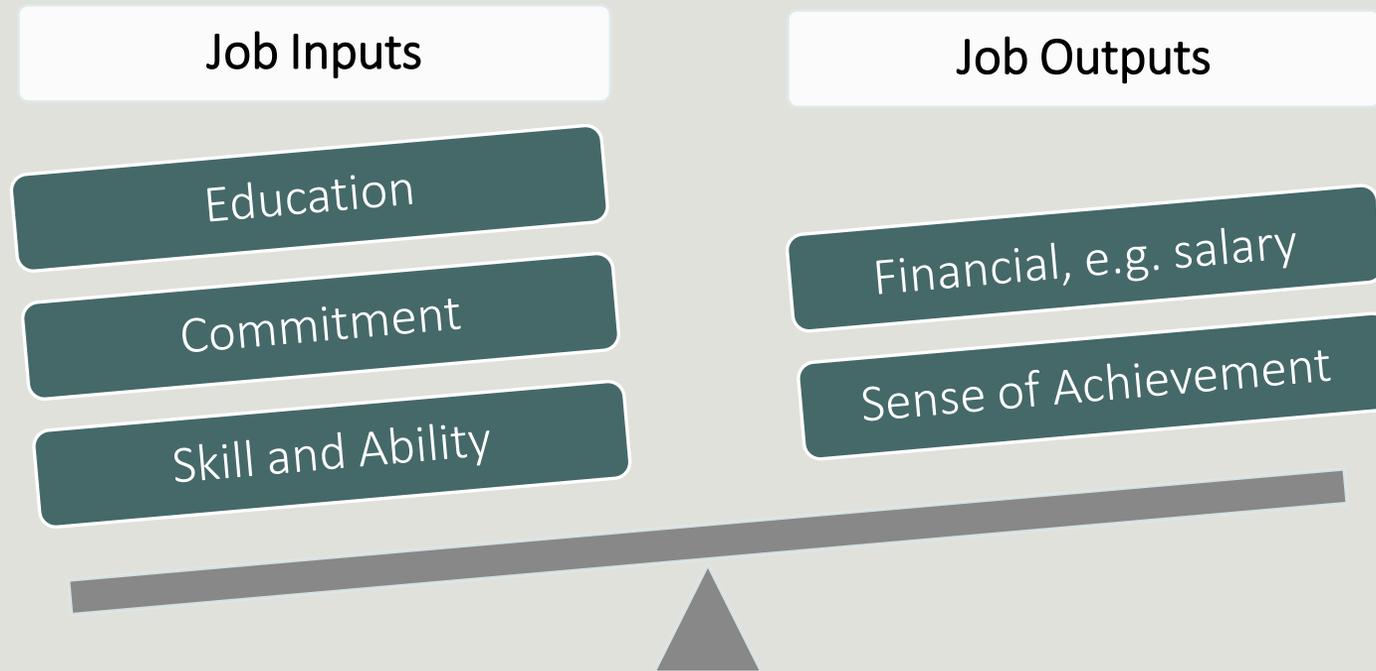
(Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 299).

Equity Theory



“When people feel that they are being dealt with inequitably or unfairly, equity theory predicts that they will act to restore their feeling of equity” (Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 299).

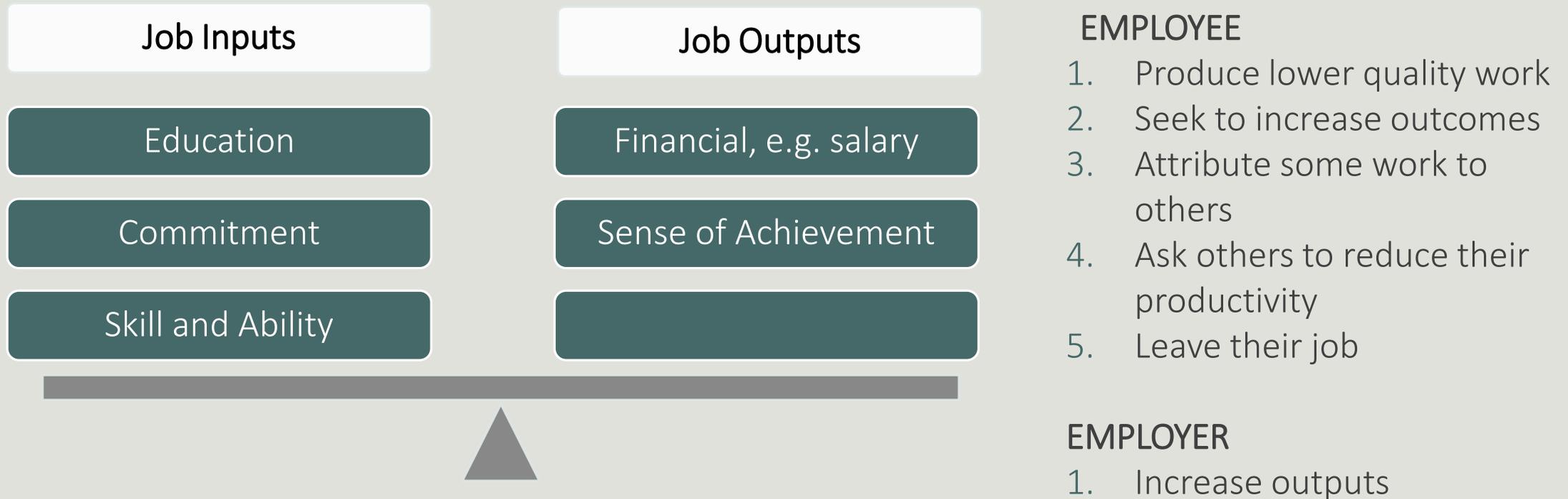
Equity Theory



“When people feel that they are being dealt with inequitably or unfairly, equity theory predicts that they will act to restore their feeling of equity” (Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 299).

Significant implications in times of crisis.

Restore Equity by...



Accountability

- **Definition:** being responsible for what you do, being able to give a satisfactory reason for it, or the degree to which this happens
- **Who are we accountable to?** Institution, funder, students, external stakeholders, our teams....
- **What are we accountable for?** Outcomes, meeting grant and host agency targets, fiscal stewardship, providing a quality experience to students/clients/customers.....
- **What is the role of accountability** in “moderating this impact of empathy on preferential treatment accountability exerts a strong influence on decision makers and since there is great variation in the extent to which accountability pressures are absent or present in most group contexts” (Blader, 2014).

Accountability

ref|ect

What does this mean for me?

- How do I balance empathy and fairness in work and group contexts?
- How do accountability expectations factor into my decisions to provide empathetic treatment?

And so, we find ourselves here.....

Let's see how our balancing act is coming along!



Activity

You lead a department of 40+ staff, three of whom report directly to you. Your department has seen a significant decrease in enrollment since March 2020.

Hilda has been working as an administrative assistant in the department for over ten years. She works primarily on pre-enrollment processes (student intakes, ID/address verification, scheduling placement tests, following up with no-show testers, student orientation, etc.). She is multilingual and works very well with students, but her English proficiency and technology skills

significantly impact her productivity. She often asks others to help her perform routine tasks and is not someone that her superiors reach out to with detailed or time-sensitive tasks.

Grace has been with the department less than a year and has become to be the go-to person for anything tech-related. She is talented, innovative, focused, reliable, and supportive of her colleagues, especially Hilda.

Grace and Hilda both have kids in the local elementary school.

Activity

In March 2020, when campus closed, Grace pivoted to remote work without a hitch while Hilda struggled to provide even the most basic support to her supervisor from a distance. When the college staggered reopening in the fall, Hilda was one of the first to be recalled because of her lack of productivity from home. Grace continued to work efficiently and effectively from home and returned to campus two days per week.

Last week, Hilda was visibly upset when she came into your office. She shared that her mother could no longer stay with her children as she needed to care for a sick relative. "I would like to work remotely again like Grace does".

You know that Hilda's productivity will plummet if she works from home. You are under a lot of pressure to increase enrollment, both from the institution and the funder, and Hilda is heavily involved in enrollment pipeline processes. You reach out to HR who indicates that each department is allowed to make remote work decisions based on the department and employee needs.

Activity

In your breakout room, identify a timekeeper, note-taker, and reporter.

You have 15 minutes to discuss the scenario presented and to decide whether to allow Hilda to work remotely.

What else do you need to know before making your decision?

Key Considerations:

- How will you balance **accountability** to the institution and the funder (e.g., increase enrollment) with your desire to be **empathetic** toward Hilda?
- Thinks about Blader's questions:
 - What are the consequences of demonstrating empathetic feelings toward Hilda? Perception of fairness?
 - How might group dynamics be effected?

Note: link to handout shared in the chat box

Activity – Report Out

1. What factors went into your decision? To what extent did you make the decision
 - based on Hilda's **performance** - the quality and quantity of her work?
 - by considering Hilda's **needs** / the needs of all employees?
 - by ensuring that the employees were treated **fairly** and equally?
2. To what extent did you find yourself thinking about
 - what/how Hilda was feeling?
 - what/how other staff members might feel?
3. Would you have made the exact same decision if Hilda was not in distress?
4. Would you be able to make the same decision for all your staff?
5. Why do you think giving special consideration (or not) to Hilda is the most fair thing to do?

Leadership in Crisis is NOT about

- Power, but rather the **privilege** of allowing one's influence to best serve others.
- Responsibility alone, but rather taking **ownership** of a mission that goes well beyond one's assigned duties.
- Hierarchy or rank, but rather how one shows their **human side** in authentic ways that encourages others to do the same.

Take a breath...

In reality, you
are doing this
already



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