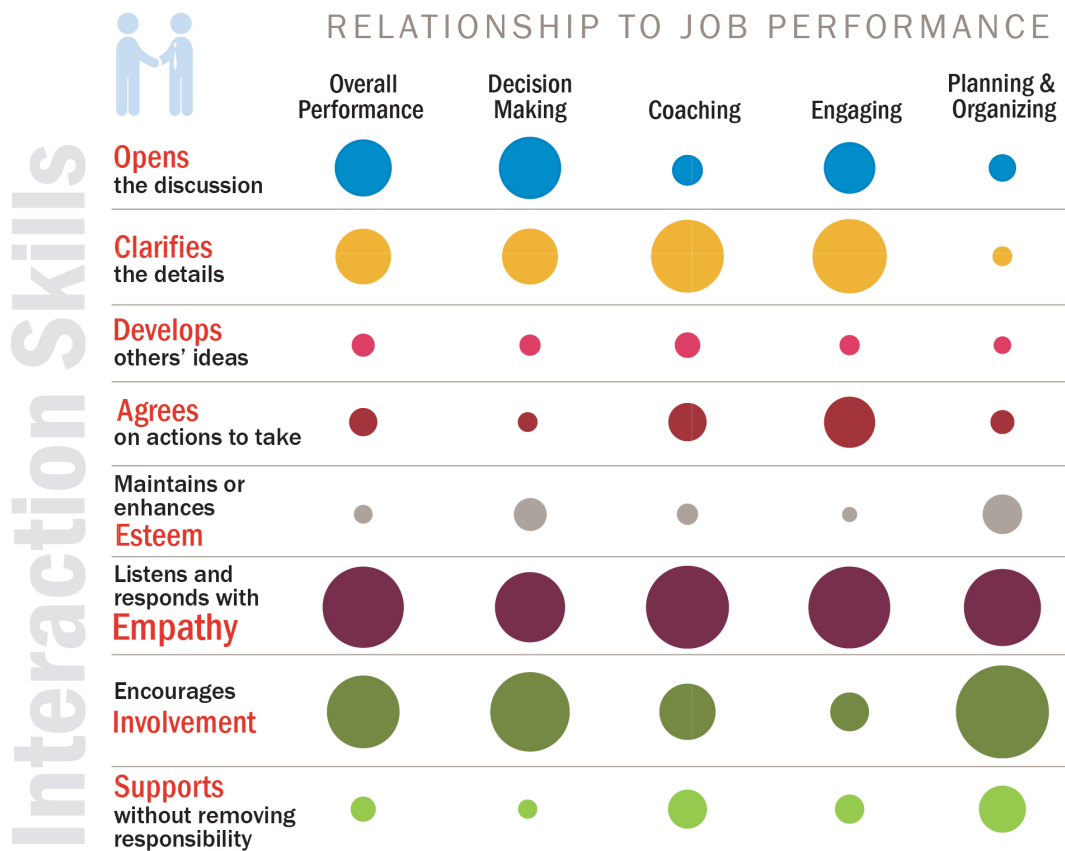


Is Empathy Boss?

The Science Behind Soft Skills— What Really Drives Performance?



Relationship Between Interaction Skills and Job Performance



Larger circles = Stronger linkage between the interaction skill and job performance domain.

Empathy Still Matters: In Every Way

No matter what your favorite definition of leadership is (there are 462 million Google® entries), we believe it's largely dependent on a single ingredient: mastering successful conversations. By the end of each day, leaders likely have had multiple conversations with a range of their constituents. Each of these interactions will collectively determine their ultimate success as a leader.

For more than four decades, DDI has been developing millions of leaders in a set of eight interaction skills. These fall within two broad categories: providing structure to conversations (practical skills) and engaging others (personal skills). While all the skills are critical, we wanted to determine which have the highest impact on overall performance for early stage leaders and whether this conclusion would vary based on the purpose of the conversation.

[EVIDENCE]

We first collected data from our standardized first-level leadership assessment process on each of the interaction skills. We then asked the managers of these leaders to independently evaluate the participants on four specific leadership domains—decision making, coaching, engaging, and planning and organizing—as well as on their overall job performance. The managers had no knowledge of the assessment scores of their direct reports prior to making their own performance ratings. In the “Relationship” graphic, we’ve illustrated that the bigger the circle, the stronger the relationship.

Overwhelmingly, empathy tops the list as the most critical driver of overall performance. It also consistently relates to higher performance in each of the four leadership domains. Note, however, that only 40 percent of the frontline leaders we assessed were proficient or strong in empathy, the second lowest skill as shown in the “Effectiveness in Interaction Skills” graphic.

We consider empathy to be an EQ anchor skill, an important factor in leadership success. Close behind empathy on our list is involvement. Involving others is nearly equal to empathy in its impact on overall performance, and it highly relates to higher leader performance on two of the five domains: decision making and planning. No surprise here: Involving the right constituents in key decisions and planning leads to better outcomes. Again, only about half of the assessed leaders had high scores in this area.



Action

- .01 Using the eight interaction skills drives leadership success and, in turn, better performance. We've conducted numerous studies on the impact of these skills on productivity, revenue growth, and employee engagement. The bad news: The majority of assessed leaders have substantial room for improvement. But the good news is that all the skills can be developed (some easier than others) through skill-based development.
- .02 Use validated selection techniques for leadership selection and promotion decisions. the payoff will be well worth the involvement.
- .03 While there are differences in the relative importance of the eight skills, they are most effective when used in combination. For instance, a leader uses empathy throughout a project meeting to help those involved feel less stressed and more engaged; but, if next steps aren't clarified or agreed on, the meeting would be considered a failure.

Effectiveness in Interaction Skills

Opens the discussion	77%
Clarifies the details.....	47%
Develops others' ideas	49%
Agrees on actions to take	54%
Maintains or enhances Esteem	33%
Listens and responds with Empathy	40%
Encourages Involvement	50%
Supports without removing responsibility	71%

Percentage of People Who Demonstrate Effectiveness in These Skills.