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I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people. – Mahatma Gandhi

Leaders and their conceptions of leadership may both shape the organizations they lead and impact the societies in which they exist. Consider an example of a leader and the way in which that leader has transformed their organization and/or influenced society in a positive way. Explain what can be learned about effective leadership from this example.

【2025 年度入賞者】

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第 1 位 Kanna YAMAMOTO (山本 栞菜)

From Authority to Empathy: The Leadership of Satya Nadella at Microsoft

“I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.” — Mahatma Gandhi

This quotation captures a fundamental transformation in leadership: from command and control toward inclusion, collaboration, and human-centered leadership. In the 21st-century global business environment, effective leadership depends less on domination and more on enabling others to grow, innovate, and contribute. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft since 2014, exemplifies this shift. Under his guidance, Microsoft’s corporate culture changed profoundly, driven by empathy, a growth mindset, and collaborative practices. His leadership demonstrates that modern organizational success relies on trust, connection, and the ability to empower people, rather than authority or hierarchical power alone.

Before Nadella’s appointment, Microsoft faced criticism for a competitive culture and siloed divisions, in which departments often worked in isolation and employees hesitated to share ideas (Ignatius, 2015). This environment created barriers to innovation, slowed decision-making, and limited collaboration across teams. Upon assuming leadership, Nadella emphasized a move from a “know-it-all” culture to a “learn-it-all” culture (Hogan, 2024). He encouraged employees to embrace curiosity, continuous learning, and openness to diverse perspectives, fostering a mindset that values learning and adaptability over simply displaying expertise. Understanding others’ viewpoints and creating a safe environment for sharing ideas were identified as essential for innovation, problem-solving, and sustaining long-term growth (Nadella, 2017). For example, Microsoft encouraged cross-team projects and knowledge-sharing platforms such as Teams to facilitate collaboration and problem-solving.

These cultural changes fostered psychological safety, a concept introduced by Edmondson (1999), which allows team members to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences or ridicule. Employees were encouraged to ask questions, experiment with new approaches, and learn from failures improved both individual and team performance. Consequently, Microsoft shifted from internal competition to

cooperation, from rigidity to adaptability, and began to regain momentum in cloud computing, AI development, and other growth areas. By promoting an inclusive culture, Nadella also strengthened employee engagement, collaboration across divisions, and organizational resilience in changing technological environments.

Nadella's leadership style aligns closely with transformational leadership theory, as introduced by Bass (1985). Transformational leaders inspire followers by articulating a compelling vision, challenging assumptions, and encouraging personal and professional development. Nadella's vision "to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more" redefined Microsoft's purpose around empowerment, inclusivity, and innovation (Cusumano, 2016). At the same time, his approach reflects principles of servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), which prioritize serving and enabling others rather than commanding them. Servant-leaders focus on the growth and well-being of their teams, creating environments that support creativity, collaboration, and mutual trust. According to Prakash, Bisla, & Rastogi (2021), Nadella's authentic leadership positively influenced team climates, creativity, and collaboration, demonstrating that leadership can simultaneously drive organizational performance and employee satisfaction. His leadership influenced not only Microsoft's technology strategies but also its human and cultural dynamics, proving that people-centered approaches can enhance both innovation and ethical organizational behavior.

Moreover, Nadella's leadership had broader societal and strategic implications. He promoted empathy as a foundation for innovation and social responsibility, including ethical AI development, inclusive product design, and corporate accessibility initiatives (Microsoft, 2019). For instance, Microsoft's AI systems were designed to minimize bias and enhance accessibility for users with disabilities, reflecting a commitment to social responsibility alongside business performance. This approach aligns with stakeholder-theory thinking (Freeman, 1984), which asserts leaders have responsibilities to multiple groups beyond shareholders, including employees, customers, partners, and society at large. The cultural transformation produced tangible outcomes: higher employee engagement, improved innovation metrics, and a stronger reputation for Microsoft as a collaborative, forward-thinking, and socially responsible company (Geek Wire, 2024). These results suggest empathy-based leadership can be both ethically and strategically effective, demonstrating that organizational culture and business performance are deeply intertwined.

Three lessons emerge regarding effective leadership. First, empathy is a strategic asset. Recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives fosters trust, collaboration, and

creative problem-solving. Second, psychological safety and organizational learning are crucial. Employees perform best when they feel secure, respected, and encouraged to experiment (Edmondson, 1999; Prakash et al., 2021). Third, leadership is relational rather than positional. Influence and legitimacy arise from enabling others, fostering collaboration, and building trust rather than relying solely on authority. Modern leadership therefore requires cultivating relationships, facilitating growth, and empowering people as the core mechanism for organizational success. These lessons highlight how leaders can achieve both ethical integrity and business effectiveness.

In conclusion, Satya Nadella's leadership at Microsoft illustrates Gandhi's observation that leadership today centers on getting along with people. By reshaping organizational culture through empathy, continuous learning, and collaboration, Nadella demonstrates human-centered leadership is ethically and strategically effective. Organizations and societies benefit when leaders prioritize connection, empowerment, and shared purpose over domination and control. Nadella's example offers a practical model for contemporary leaders seeking to foster innovation, inclusive workplaces, and high-performing teams while maintaining ethical and socially responsible practices.

(797 words)

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第2位 Heeseo YOON

Empathetic Leadership: How Jacinda Ardern Transformed Crisis into Cohesion

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people." This statement by Mahatma Gandhi illustrates that leadership is centered not on authority or power, but on relationships and empathy. Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and acknowledge others' experiences, providing emotional support and a sense of safety (Long & Schultz, 1973), has become increasingly important (Kock et al., 2018). In this context, former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared, "I'm proudly an empathetic, compassionate leader" (BBC News, 2018), exemplifying the practice of empathetic leadership. This essay analyzes how Ardern's empathetic leadership transformed a national crisis into a process of healing and social cohesion, highlighting empathy as a core component of effective leadership today.

During the Christchurch Mosque attacks in 2019, Ardern fostered societal integration through empathy and inclusivity. The anti-Muslim hate attacks on the Christchurch Mosques, which claimed 51 lives, represented a national tragedy that fundamentally threatened New Zealand's multicultural identity (New Zealand Police, 2019). Rather than pursuing a purely political or punitive approach, Ardern adopted an empathetic strategy that promoted national unity and social healing, emphasizing the statement, "We are one, they are us" (Ardern,

2019). This affirmed the Muslim community as equal members of society while rejecting violence and hatred. Her response involved two key strategies: expressing empathy through symbolic actions, such as wearing a hijab and prioritizing victim-centered media coverage, and institutional measures through the establishment of the Christchurch Call.

First, Ardern's empathetic leadership facilitated social healing and fostered a shift in public discourse from hatred to recovery. Immediately after the attacks, she visited the Muslim community wearing a black hijab and embraced grieving families to express condolences (Wahlquist, 2019). These gestures were interpreted not as mere sympathy but as expressions of mutual respect and solidarity, inspiring others—including female journalists and police officers—to wear hijabs, thereby sparking a ripple effect of empathetic action (Malik, 2019). Moreover, Ardern redirected media and public attention from the perpetrator to the victims and the community's recovery. She strongly resisted naming the attacker (Ardern, 2019), and a report indicates that only 7.1% of coverage mentioned the perpetrator, reflecting her influence (Every-Palmer et al., 2020). Ultimately, these symbolic acts and narrative control immediately bridged communal divides, solidifying a national identity centered on compassion and respect.

Second, Ardern institutionalized empathetic values and extended international solidarity. The attacker livestreamed the assault on social media, spreading extremist content and creating fear and imitation risks among citizens (Every-Palmer et al., 2020). The

Christchurch Call, an international initiative, involved governments and tech companies collaborating to curb online violent extremism (The Christchurch Call, 2019; New Zealand Government, 2019). Its primary goal was to prevent the propagation of hateful content and the recurrence of similar terror attacks. This illustrates that empathetic leadership can transcend immediate emotional appeals and establish sustainable structures for peace at an institutional level.

Consequently, her response received both domestic and international acclaim. The UN Secretary-General praised Ardern's rapid and decisive action against hate (United Nations, 2019), and public approval ratings rose by 7%, reaching the highest since her election (Rahim, 2019). Trust in government and society increased particularly within the Muslim community, and national pride in New Zealand's tolerance and diversity was strengthened (John, 2025). Furthermore, her message spread globally through social media, promoting communal compassion and cohesion, thereby enhancing societal resilience (Carroll, 2019).

The Ardern case demonstrates that effective leadership entails fostering integration and collaboration through empathy and inclusivity rather than authority. Building upon this example, leaders need to understand the emotions of their constituents and translate empathy into action to build trust and cooperation, which serve as key drivers of organizational engagement and resilience.

First, empathetic leadership is effective in enhancing organizational commitment, thereby significantly improving engagement. An analysis of interviews with 23 leaders revealed that empathy is a critical factor in building trust and communication, increasing engagement and motivation, reducing burnout, and cultivating a collaborative culture (Mehra & Srivastava, 2024). Additionally, it buffers work-life stress and contributes to employee well-being (Dutton et al., 2002).

Moreover, leadership characterized by empathy and compassion benefits recipients, givers, and observers, which is a dynamic that enhances organizational resilience. Leaders who practice compassion experience “compassion satisfaction,” enhancing prosocial identity and self-awareness (Dutton et al., 2014). Simultaneously, observers also experience emotional uplift, which strengthens trust, collaboration, and bonding within the organization. This virtuous cycle enhances organizational efficiency and resilience, demonstrating that leadership that practically enacts empathy and inclusivity is the most effective means of promoting growth and recovery across an organization.

In conclusion, Jacinda Ardern responded to the Christchurch Mosque attacks with empathy and inclusivity toward victims and the community, extending these values to institutional and international levels. Her example illustrates that effective leadership today is defined by the ability to connect emotionally with others and foster cohesion.

(800 words)

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Leading with Empathy

Jacinda Ardern's People-First model of crisis leadership

In today's world of uncertainty and challenges, leadership is shifting from authority and control to empathy, communication, and uniting people. Especially in crises, traditional authoritative leadership is being replaced by more human-centered, empathetic approaches. A leader's empathy is crucial in guiding a team through adversity. Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, stands out with her "people-first" leadership model. She demonstrated exceptional leadership in crises, combining emotional connection with rational decision-making, earning global recognition. This essay will analyze Ardern's leadership by focusing on two case studies: the Christchurch Mosque shooting and her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also explore how her empathy provides valuable insights for the development of future leadership.

The Christchurch Mosque Shooting Incident

On March 15, 2019, a terrorist attack occurred at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, resulting in 51 deaths and dozens of injuries. This shocking incident attracted widespread global attention. In the face of such a severe crisis, Jacinda Ardern demonstrated a leadership style marked by empathy and decisiveness. Following the incident, Ardern immediately rushed to the scene, standing in solidarity with the Muslim community and appearing in public wearing a Muslim headscarf. This gesture was not only a sincere expression of care for the victims and their families but also sent a powerful message of unity, inclusivity, and respect for multiculturalism to the people of New Zealand and the world. (Nagesh, 2019) Through her calm and warm demeanor, she provided emotional support to society, helping the country gradually move beyond fear and sorrow. However, Ardern's response was not limited to emotional support. In

the short period, she quickly pushed for strict gun control reforms (Gun Control: New Zealand Shows the Way, n.d.), banning the sale of semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity magazines, showcasing her strong political decision-making abilities. This also highlighted her ability to combine empathy with rational judgment and political execution. This event fully exemplified the "people-first" leadership style advocated by Ardern.

Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jacinda Ardern demonstrated exceptional leadership. She introduced the concept of a "Team of five million," (Beattie & Priestley, 2021) emphasizing that everyone was part of the collective effort to fight the pandemic, inspiring all citizens to take responsibility. To effectively control the virus, Ardern decisively implemented strict border controls, quickly shutting down all international flights and cutting off the virus's entry into New Zealand. She also announced a nationwide lockdown, requiring all citizens to stay at home (RNZ News, 2020a). Ardern not only controlled the pandemic with decisive policies but also maintained transparent communication with the public through daily briefings, keeping everyone informed about the latest developments and preventive measures. She regularly engaged with citizens in a direct and personal manner, using calm and approachable language during television briefings to help prevent panic (Walls, 2020). These concrete actions helped New Zealand successfully contain the virus in its early stages, and the public's trust and support formed a solid foundation for the country's success fight against the pandemic. By combining empathy with rational decision-making, Ardern demonstrated the true power of "People-First" leadership and became a model for global epidemic.

Global Influence and Leadership Lessons

Jacinda Ardern's leadership has received high praise from the international community, especially for her contributions to promoting female leadership and "soft power" ("In Awe of NZ: How World Media Reacted to New Zealand Eliminating Covid-

19,” 2020). She successfully broke the traditional stereotype of leadership being seen as "authoritative," demonstrating that female leaders can embody both warmth and decisiveness. Ardern's leadership style emphasizes the combination of empathy and rational decision-making, earning the trust and support of the public by demonstrating empathy, inclusivity, and clear communication.

From Ardern's leadership style, we can learn several key elements: empathy, clear communication, and emotional management. Her leadership approach proves that leaders must not only to understand others' emotions but also possess the ability to effectively convey information and manage emotions under high-pressure situations. Ardern provides insights for global leaders, especially in how to lead a team through crises by combining empathy with rational judgment in the future. (“Case Studies in Political Leadership,” 2025)

Conclusion

Overall, Jacinda Ardern's "people-first" leadership style demonstrates the crucial role of empathy in times of crisis. Her leadership during the Christchurch Mosque shooting and the COVID-19 pandemic shows that leaders must find a balance between emotion and reason, earning public trust and support through clear communication and decision-making. Ardern has not only set an example for female leaders but also provided valuable insights for global leadership. In the future, leaders will need to combine empathy with rational judgment to effectively guide teams through complex challenges. At the same time, Ardern's leadership style offers profound lessons for the development of human-centered and empathetic leadership. (799words)

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