

Building Healthier Workplace Cultures Through Empathic Leadership

Anette Birgersson and
Christin Santiago, CTRS

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Who We Are



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The AND Leadership Model

A Dialectical Relational Leadership
(DRL) Framework



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Why AND Leadership?

- Dialectics = AND (not either/or)
 - Support AND accountability
 - Care AND clarity
 - Autonomy AND structure

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Dialectics in DBT -The Power of AND both/and thinking, not either/or

ACCEPTANCE
Validation
Care
Support
Regulate Emotions
Understanding
Psychological Safety

The AND
Leader
Holds Both

CHANGE
Performance
Standards
Accountability
Direction

- Dropping one side destabilizes systems
- Dialectics creates dynamic organizational balance

[Koerner, 2012; Linehan, 2000; Wang et al., 2023]

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Core Assumption

- Change does not begin with correction. It begins with regulation, understanding, and shared agency

Before influencing behavior we must:

- Lower defensiveness
- Reduce shame
- Restore autonomy
- Build relational safety

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Theoretical Foundations

- DBT Validation
 - Emotional regulation & dialectics
- Motivational Interviewing
 - Autonomy & change talk
- Empathic Leadership
 - Psychological safety
- Empowerment Theory
 - Agency & shared power

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Steps for Validation

- 1. Pay Attention**
 - Be fully present
 - Listen without interrupting
 - Put distractions away
- 2. Reflect Back**
 - Paraphrase what you heard
 - Show you are trying to understand
- 3. Read Unspoken Emotions**
 - Notice tone, body language, energy
 - Gently name what may be underneath
- 4. Understand in Context**
 - Make sense of the reaction
 - Link feelings to stressors, workload, history
- 5. Normalize Emotional Experience**
 - "Given the situation, that makes sense."
 - Separate emotion from behavior
- 6. Radical Genuineness**
 - Be real, not scripted
 - Respond as one human to another

(Linehan, 2025; McMillen et al., 2023)

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Motivational Interviewing

MI Leadership Stance

- Partnership (work with, not on)
- Acceptance (respect autonomy)
- Compassion (act in their best interest)
- Evocation (draw out internal motivation)

4 Leadership Processes

- Engage → Build trust
- Focus → Clarify direction
- Evoke → Strengthen change talk
- Plan → Co-create next steps

Core Skills

- Open questions
- Affirm strengths
- Reflect meaning
- Summarize direction

The AND Translation

Not:
"Here's what you need to do."
But:
"What do you think would improve this?"
"What kind of team do we want to be?"
"What would success look like?"

(Arbuckle et al., 2020)

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Empathic Leadership

EMPATHY

- Active listening
- Emotional attunement
- Psychological safety
- Understanding impact of stress
- Compassionate communication

AND

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Clear expectations
- Transparent boundaries
- Performance standards
- Fair consequences
- Role clarity

Not: "Being nice all the time."
But: Caring clearly and communicating expectations.
Not: Avoiding difficult conversations.
But: Having them with respect and calm authority.

(Goleman, 1998; Edmondson & Lei, 2014)

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Empowerment Theory

COMPETENCE

Skill
Development
Self-Efficacy
Growth

AGENCY

Voice
Choice
Influence

STRUCTURE

Clear
Expectations
Boundaries
Standards

Not: "Do whatever you want."
But: "Here's the standard — how do you want to approach it?"

(Zimmerman, 2000; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995)

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Five Phases

1. Stabilize through validation
2. Evoke autonomy
3. Model relational authority
4. Build agency
5. Integrate dialectics

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Phase 1: Stabilize Through Validation

- Goal: Reduce emotional arousal & shame
 - Listen actively
 - Reflect accurately
 - Normalize emotional responses
 - Validate emotion without validating harmful behavior
- Key Question: As a leader, what does the emotion I'm seeing tell me?

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Phase 2: Evoke Autonomy

- Goal: Strengthen intrinsic motivation
 - Express empathy
 - Develop discrepancy
 - Support self-efficacy
- Key question: 'What kind of person do you want to be?'

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Phase 3: Model Relational Authority

- Warmth AND structure
 - Transparent expectations
 - Clear boundaries
 - Non-shaming accountability
- Key Question: How can I show I care about you AND convey we must still meet the standard?

(Kock et al., 2025)

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Phase 4: Build Agency

- Shift from compliance to ownership
 - Shared decision-making
 - Skill-building
 - Strength identification
 - Encourage initiative & voice
- Key Question: How can I support you to feel safe enough to take a risk and own the outcome together?

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Phase 5: Maintain the Dialectical Balance

- Acceptance AND change
 - Validation AND accountability
 - Support AND structure
 - Flexibility AND consistency
- Key Question: How do I balance what I want AND what I have?

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How Change Happens

- Validation → Regulation
- Regulation → Reflection
- Reflection → Motivation
- Motivation → Agency
- Agency → Sustainable Performance

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Leadership & Management Application

- Leaders regulate systems before solving problems
 - Use MI-style questions to evoke ownership
 - Create psychological safety with clear standards
 - Empower teams while maintaining accountability

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Effective in High-Stress Systems

- Reduces burnout
- Increases psychological safety
- Prevents power struggles
- Strengthens ethical decision-making
- Improves collaboration

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Why It Works

- Validation reduces threat activation
- Autonomy increases intrinsic motivation
- Clear structure reduces uncertainty
- Empowerment increases competence & belonging
- Togetherness
 - Sustainable performance under stress

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The AND Leader

- Leadership is not control.
 - It is relational regulation combined with accountable structure.
 - Care AND clarity.
 - Support AND standards.
 - Acceptance AND change.

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Exercise: Practicing the AND Stance

- Step 1: Identify a real leadership tension in your work.
 - Example: Supporting a stressed employee while maintaining performance standards.
- Step 2: Write two statements:
 - • Acceptance statement (validation)
 - • Change statement (accountability)
- Step 3: Combine them into one dialectical AND statement.
 - Example: 'I understand this workload feels overwhelming AND we still need to meet this deadline.'

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Conclusion



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