

# THE ROLE OF RESONANT LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

*Bahar Taner, Prof.Dr.*  
*Berna Aysen, Teaching Assistant*  
Mersin University, Turkey

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## Abstract:

The changing role of leaders and resonant leadership which is one of the new leadership approaches is investigated. It is observed that compassion, one of the three components of resonant leadership is getting an increasing attention recently in literature. A model is developed focusing on the interaction between compassion and resonant leadership within the context of the relevant variables.

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**Key Words:** Transformational Leadership, Resonant Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Compassion

## Introduction

In general, leadership can be described as the process of directing a group of people or followers in order to attain the goals (Northouse, 2010:12). Leadership, like many other concepts, is affected by the rapid change we experience in our world. It is inevitable for leaders to change and to have different views than before especially when globalisation affects nearly every aspect of our lives; when the environmental change is deeply felt at all organizational levels; when innovation stands out and when effective and efficient use of information and human resource has strategic importance. From this aspect, the relationship between leaders and followers is getting more complex since it is important for organizations to benefit from knowledge, skill and talent of its employees. However, because of the reasons described, leadership cannot be limited to just affecting and directing people only.

Like leadership, employees are changing: their knowledge, skills and talents are increasing causing their demands to change as well. They focus on success, they demand more and more from their jobs. They are not committed only to their organizations, but also to their profession. Their perception of management is quite different than before.

All these reasons listed, in turn, changed the role of the leaders. As a result, the employees are not only the 'affected' and 'following' group anymore. The relationship of leaders and employees is at a different level, now they are in interaction. This changing role is considered as transformational leadership. Transformational leaders generate acceptance and awareness of the group's goal and mission, broaden their interests, and make employees regard the interests of the group or organization superior to their own self-interests. These leaders can achieve their goals either by inspiring their followers through their charisma or by activating them through addressing to their feelings (Bass, 1990:19-21).

Right along with transformational leadership, it is also observed that the studies on organizational communication started to focus on feelings and interaction rather than the rational and systematic side of organizational life (Miller, 2007:223). Emotional intelligence (EQ) concept was first introduced by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 and reached an academic content by Daniel Goleman<sup>(\*)</sup>. Goleman described emotional intelligence as having self awareness, self management, in other words knowing what is felt and why it is felt. He also mentioned that it includes empathy and social skills, too. ([www.quixoteconsulting.com/ Training\\_descriptions/PDFs/emotional\\_intelligence.pdf](http://www.quixoteconsulting.com/Training_descriptions/PDFs/emotional_intelligence.pdf)).

In accordance with the requirements of the information age, new leadership approaches emphasizing feelings and interaction are emerging within the scope of transformational leadership.

One of these new approaches is “resonant leadership“ which is based on the emotional intelligence concept. Resonant leadership has three dimensions which will be discussed in the following sections: mindfulness, hope and compassion. Actually it can be thought that all leaders must somehow possess these features. But the feature that distinguishes resonant leaders from others is being able to use these through their emotional intelligence (Lutzo, 2005).

Everybody is exposed to painful events throughout their lives such as the death of a relative, natural disasters, financial problems, illness or organizational problems like downsizing (Madden, Duchon, Madden and Plowman, 2012:689; Lilius et al., 2008:193; Frost, 1999:128). Although there is the expectation of not bringing the feelings to work, people take their pain and grief with them wherever they go (Frost et al., 2005:843). When it is thought that the time spent at work covers a big part of our daily lives, it can be stated that the organizations are important places for healing or mitigating the pains. Although one might think that there is generally pain and grief in organizations, they can also be considered as places of healing, where care and compassion is given and taken (Kanov et al., 2004:809).

Pain and grief creates financial, psychological and social costs to organizations and employees (Dutton, Lilius and Kanov, 2007:110). According to Zaslow (2002), firms are experiencing cost of \$ 75 million yearly because of absenteeism and low efficiency of their employees caused by their sorrow (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov and Maitlis, 2011a:874; Lilius et al., 2008:194). Therefore, the effect of compassion will not only be at the emotional level, but also financial. Additionally, compassion is a concept which seems to be discussed a lot in literature lately. For example, the journal ‘American Management Review’ assigned the last issue of 2012 totally to compassion. Because of the reasons stated, the compassion dimension of resonant leadership is studied in detail in this paper.

In today’s materialistic and individualized world, everybody needs compassion from time to time in their lives. Therefore the importance of compassion from both the individual and organizational aspects and some organizational practices to apply resonant leadership effectively are suggested in this study.

### **What is Resonant Leadership ?**

Today’s leaders face a much more unstable and uncertain world in comparison to the past few years. Social systems that met the needs of families, societies or nations for a long time have not been functioning well anymore. Local conflicts are nowadays being observed at the global level (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:1). However, like all the other changes, such big changes include opportunities as well. To be able to benefit from these opportunities, leaders defined as resonant have proven to have the ability to act properly even in uncertain conditions and give inspiration to people working with them, their institutions, and other groups. In that respect, resonant leaders, a sub category of transformative leaders, set new goals in challenging conditions and give hope instead of acting discouragingly or alarmingly. These leaders activate others in a powerful, passionate and targeted way and work in resonance with them. In other words, they communicate very well. At this phase, emotional intelligence plays an important role in constituting and retaining such relationships (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:3).

Resonance literally means the intensification and prolongation of sound by vibration (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/resonance>) . Resonant leaders, when they are in harmony with others, think, feel and head towards their targets in the same way with them. They are emotionally in tune with the people around them (Lutzo, 2005). According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), resonant leaders are great leaders. They are believers, they conserve their values and live passionately. Resonant leaders communicate well with people they are working with, which enables them to work harmoniously and share their ideas and feelings about what to do and why to do. Leaders who can create resonance improve their emotional intelligence either instinctively or by working hard. In other words, they have improved themselves in issues such as self-awareness (realizing their own emotions, knowing their strong sides and limitations), self-management (being able to control their emotions, flexibility and adaptability), social awareness (empathy, organizational interest and responsibility) and relationship management (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:4).

In addition to the ability to know and manage themselves, emotionally intelligent people manage other people’s emotions and have strong and dependable relationships with them. They know that emotions are contagious and their own emotions affect others’ emotions and accordingly their

performance. They are aware that people can be activated by fear or anger, but this type of activation will not be effective in the long term and the employees will feel less worthy, and hence will create an organizational climate in which they do not focus on organizational targets effectively (McKee and Smith, 2006:26). Such leaders develop empathy and behave according to the information they gather by looking at the issues from different perspectives. By addressing emotions of others, they give them hope and encourage them to do their best and cooperate with others (Boyatzis ve McKee, 2005:4; McKee and Smith, 2006:26). They are not defensive. They are broadminded and aim to improve and learn about themselves. They are also ready to change their behaviors.

To get an effective performance in organizations, resonant leaders blend financial, social and intellectual capital in an effective way. However, the most important thing is that leaders succeed in behaving that way. Naturally, to be a great leader, it is necessary to know and understand the market, technology, people, and other factors affecting the organization. However, knowing all about these is not adequate for an effective and sustainable leadership. It is just at this point that the notion of being resonant matters. Being resonant enables leaders to use their expertise for the performance of the organization. It also enables leaders and others both in and out of the organization to support each other (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:5). Resonant leaders through their positive way of thinking and clear vision inspire others by helping them to have strong emotions.

However, it is very difficult to have and sustain resonant relationships in today's demanding and stressful world. Good leaders who have been able to reach resonance have had to sacrifice a lot. In fact, this is the truth underlying leadership. This notion, also called Compromise Syndrome, may cause leaders' ability to empathize and being open to others to lessen and sometimes affect their cognitive functions and decision making abilities negatively. Getting over this situation requires a process in which mind, body, heart and soul take part. A person should be first aware of himself despite tough conditions and long working hours. This means renewal (McKee and Smith, 2006:26).

In their study, Boyatzis and McKee concluded that three concepts are needed to ensure and sustain resonance. These concepts are mindfulness, hope, and compassion.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness means leading a life by developing a complete and conscious awareness for oneself, others, environment, and work. Indeed, it means perceiving ourselves and the world around clearly, 'being awake and aware' (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:9).

Hope: Hope enables us to believe that our goals are achievable and to motivate and inspire others to reach those goals while trying to realize our goals (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:9). Thus, it becomes possible to be hopeful and inspiring in this indefinite world of business. People may dream about a better and achievable future, believe they will attain it and develop an optimistic point of view.

Compassion: Compassion helps people to include their emotions during the process of thinking, deciding and acting by understanding others' wishes and needs. They empathize by putting themselves in others' position. It is one of the characteristics of the resonant leaders to treat both the ones they serve and the ones who serve them with empathy and compassion when they face difficulties or when they have opportunities (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005:9).

### **Compassion**

Arguments about compassion date back to early ages. Although religions have different philosophical views, the notion of compassion is observed to have an importance in all religious books and discourse. It is not only mentioned in the holy books of three big religions but also in Buddhism. Moreover, Dalai Lama regards compassion equal to being human. (Frost, et al. 2005:845; Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline and Maitlis, 2011b:5; Kanov et al., 2004:809). According to Armstrong (2011), compassion is in the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual practices, advising us to treat others in the same way we want to be treated. (Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton and Margolis; 2012:506). Aristotle defined compassion as the emotion directed at others' suffering and indicated three necessary factors: perceiving others' suffering seriously, believing this suffering is not deserved, and believing that a person can suffer from the same thing (Frost et al., 2005:845). Even Adam Smith, described as the saint of self-interest from time to time, mentioned positive effects of compassion in his articles (Rynes et al., 2012:506).

Studies about compassion in management started with the article by Peter J. Frost in 1999. Compassion meant sharing suffering with others, wishing that events causing that suffering will not happen again, and trying to find ways to help sufferers. It is lexically defined as wishing to soothe

others' worries, being affectionate and sympathizing with them (Frost, 1999:128). The thought 'it could have been me' is the basis and one empathizes the other by thinking that he/she could have been subjected to that unfortunate event (Snow, 1991:197). Besides, scholars studying the same issue state that compassion comprises interest (via communication and behavior) and connection to others held by empathy. Compassion enables us to help others and helping others makes us happy. Kornfield (1993) specified compassion as 'the heart's answer to pain' (Miller, 2007:226).

At the individual level, compassion is comprised of a three part process that includes noticing, feeling and responding (acting) (Dutton, Worline, Frost and Lilius, 2006:60; Kanov et al., 2004:812). Compassion exists only if all of these three steps occur.

At 'noticing', it is required to become aware of other's emotional state by being open and attentive (Frost et al., 2005:847). 'Noticing' has special importance since it is the first step of this three part process. According to Clark (1997), we evolve awareness mainly for people similar to us or when we experienced similar pain or grief. Like Frost (2003) stated, sometimes we are so busy with our daily lives that we are unable to notice what is happening in front of us (Kanov et al., 2004:813). Being unable to notice another's pain will inhibit compassion to occur, although there is capacity of feeling and responding.

Feeling is the second step of compassion. The intensity of feelings can differ from person to person. According to Clark (1997), feeling can be in various forms: worry, anger on behalf of other or feeling guilty for not being able to do more (Kanov et al., 2004:813). At this step, the significance of empathy has to be mentioned. When we feel empathy, we put ourselves in suffering person's position and look from his or her perspective (Frost et al., 2005:847). However, noticing somebody's pain does not always lead to feel compassionate. We can see him/her suffering, but may not feel anything, we can even think that he or she deserved it (Kanov et al., 2004:813). Therefore, in order for this 'feeling' step to happen, we must take the situation causing pain as serious (Snow, 1991:198). From this view, it can be said that noticing may not always lead to feeling, compassionate feelings may not evolve depending on the situation and conditions.

Responding is the last step that involves an action towards easing other's pain or supporting him/her (Frost et al., 2005:847; Dutton et al., 2006:60; Kanov et al., 2004:814). It is responding, acting or trying to help which makes compassion and empathy different from each other (Atkins and Parker, 2012:525). Responding may be in different ways like emotional support, advice or help in a way (Miller, 2007:227). Visiting someone who lost a relative at his or her home and sharing his pain; consoling a colleague who is just divorced or undertaking an ill colleagues' workload are examples of different ways of helping. However it is important to undertake these with the feeling of compassion. One can behave this way just because of the society's expectation and the need of being accepted (Kanov et al., 2004:814). Sometimes compassion can be felt, but people cannot respond because of unfamiliar environment or since the situation does not allow people to act in that way (Atkins and Parker, 2012:525; Kanov et al., 2004:814). For example, a new employee may hesitate to act compassionately on his first day of a new job, although he feels compassion towards his colleague who lost his mother.

### **Organizational Compassion**

Organizational compassion can be defined as collectively noticing, feeling and responding of members of a system to pain and suffering of other members in the same system. In order to be able to talk about collective responding, it must be legitimated and coordinated among people. This kind of coordination and legitimacy can be achieved through organizational values, practices or standards. So, inspecting organizational compassion will also show the capacity for collective noticing, feeling and responding (Kanov et al., 2004:810).

### **Collective Noticing**

It is the acceptance of the existence of pain and grief in a system, by the members of that system with a shared value. Of course the role of individuals are important, since organizations cannot notice pain. In other words, collective noticing is a social process beginning with noticing a colleague's pain individually and ending with developing awareness by all organization members (Lilius et al., 2011b:8). However it also has to be mentioned that organizations play a critical role in this process since they affect their members through several systems and practices (Kanov et al., 2004:816). Even the architecture is important since it affects the accessibility. Organizational systems and technology can be considered also as significant because they enable the communication of pain

in the system. For example, working in an open office is more suitable for creating awareness, compared to single offices. It can be said that organizations having these kinds of features have collective noticing capacity, relatively (Kanov et al., 2004:817). Similarly, announcing an employee's loss or similar pain by e-mail or systematically with help of technology is a way to increase the capacity of collective noticing.

### **Collective Feeling**

Collective feeling can be observed in organizations where people can easily express their feelings and share their work experiences and private life. However, the atmosphere must be suitable for sharing the emotions freely and openly. Organizational practices, organizational culture and leadership play a critical role in creating this kind of atmosphere (Kanov et al., 2004:818). An example of organizational practices could be the meetings where not only issues related to work but also emotions are discussed. According to Meyerson (1994), sharing and expressing the feelings will evoke collective emotions (Kanov et al., 2004:818). So feeling, the second step of compassion, will become collective by spreading from person to person.

At this stage, the importance of organizational culture cannot be ignored. The atmospheres where pain and grief can easily be expressed enables people to create empathy. As a result, compassion will be intensified and quicker and effective healing is expected to occur.

Leadership will contribute to collective feeling stage as well by being a role model. Following their leader's behavior, employees will behave more compassionately towards their colleagues who experience pain or suffer (Kanov et al., 2004:819). Resonant leaders will have a natural role in creating organizational compassion since they already got resonance through compassion. At this point the importance of leader's personality has to be mentioned. There are many researches showing that personal traits are associated with leadership emergence and effectiveness. Therefore it is worth to mention that personality will have an indirect effect on organizational compassion by affecting leadership behavior.

### **Collective Responding**

Collective responding points out legitimated, but most important coordinated behavior. The coordination mentioned can be executed by someone or a group, and can be developed suddenly because of an unexpected event (Kanov et al., 2004:820). An example could be offering condolences to a colleague who lost his relative by visiting him or her collectively during working hours. Like at the feeling stage, organizational culture and leadership play a significant role in spreading and legitimating it. Additionally, some organizational systems may support this kind of collective behavior. For example, publishing stories of the employees in a hospital who behaved compassionately against patients may increase the probability of others to feel compassion for patients, clients or colleagues. Being able to transfer off days or bonuses to colleagues who need these, can be an example of legitimated and coordinated behavior (Kanov et al., 2004:820).

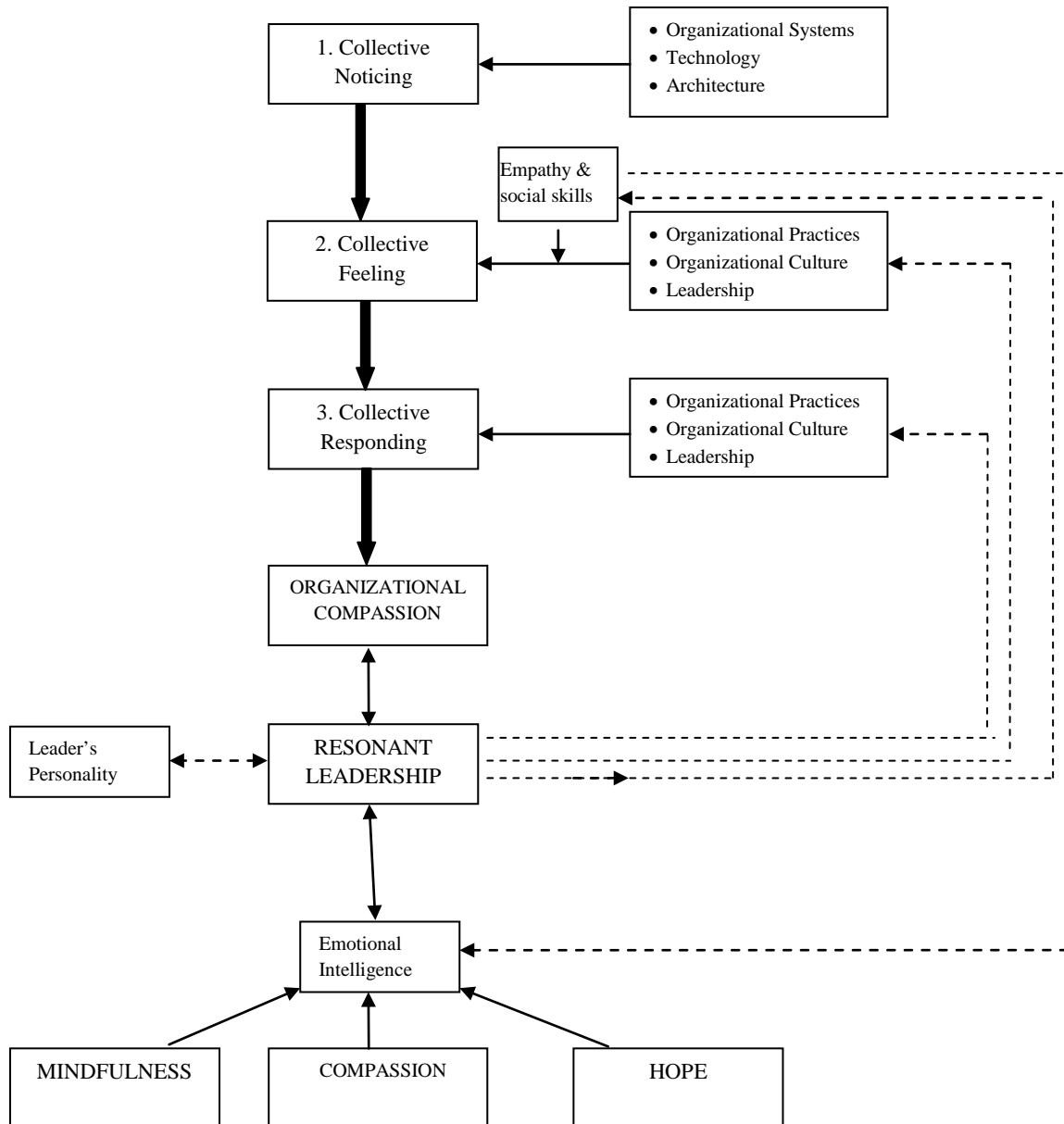
Besides this, celebrations in organizations, charity atmosphere or applying collective decision making methods may enhance the quality of relationships among the employees and increase the probability of feeling compassion (Lilius et al., 2011a:891). At the same time, behaving or being behaved with compassion may create positive spiral; thus cause similar behaviors to become widespread and increase its positive effects (Dutton and Workman, 2011:402). Moreover, it may have an emotional effect on the person observing it by referring to his feelings (Frost, 1999:128). But there is one important point not to forget: in order for organizational compassion to occur, all of these stages must be executed collectively, have to be legitimated and coordinated.

### **Resonant Leadership- Organizational Compassion Relationship**

The figure showing the relationship between the resonant leadership and organizational compassion within the context of relevant variables is given below.

Organizational compassion is a three step process consisting of collective noticing, feeling and responding. The first step is collective noticing, where organizational systems, technology used and even the architecture of the building has an important role.

## Resonant Leadership- Organizational Compassion Relationship



The second step is collective feeling, with an important feature of developing empathy towards suffering person. Here, organizational practices and organizational culture have significant effects, and it is also the step at which the resonant leadership comes into play. Since resonant leaders, with their emotional intelligence and personal traits, should reach resonance and be in tune with employees through compassion, it can be easily said that they might automatically be a good role model for others and might increase the probability of collective feeling to take place. Leaders are also effective upon the organizational culture, therefore it would be plausible to state that they will have dual effect on collective feeling, resulting in the creation of common values accepted by all members in the system.

This situation will be valid also for the third step: collective responding, where again organizational culture and leadership, as well as organizational practices become prominent. Leaders may be a role model for others and increase the probability of collective responding. Since they will be effective on organizational culture, they might have again a dual effect on collective responding stage.

As a result, it is evident that leaders, especially resonant leaders have a critical role in creating organizational compassion. However, the opposite can also be possible: Organizational compassion may help leaders to be in tune with others and reach resonance.

## Conclusion

Leadership is affected by the rapid change in today's world. In this context, one can expect new leadership approaches to emerge. One of these new concepts is resonant leadership, which is based on emotional intelligence. Resonant leader is in tune with others by using his emotional intelligence. In this study, the interaction between the resonant leadership and compassion, one of its dimensions, is investigated in detail and a model is developed. The model indicates the necessary prerequisites for resonant leadership and organizational compassion to emerge within the context of all relevant variables. However it also has to be noted that the studies on both issues are quite new. Therefore there may be a need for this model to be revised in light of future research.

The objective of the study was to drive attention to both of the concepts of resonant leadership and organizational compassion. From this point of view, it is suggested that there is a major need to work on the effects of organizational compassion and resonant leadership upon the organizational climate, organizational citizenship, organizational commitment and on many other organizational issues since these concepts are critical for the successful performance of organizations.

(\*) Daniel Goleman, who had studied emotional intelligence, also worked on resonant leadership together with Annie McKee, and Richard Boyatzis in their book entitled 'Primal Leadership- Realizing The Power Of Emotional Intelligence' in 2002. Boyatzis and Mc Kee continued their studies on this subject and published a book entitled 'Resonant Leadership Renewing Yourself and Connecting with Others Through Mindfulness, Hope and Compassion' in 2005.

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