

Applied Leadership and Management in the Workplace

Module Assignment Submission for A

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Introduction

Critical thinking is something we hear about all the time, but I don't think most people stop to consider what it really means or how much it affects our daily lives. Critical thinking is about questioning information, analysing different perspectives and making informed decisions rather than just going with the flow. In a world where social media produces so much information, some of it is true and some of it is not. It's more important than ever to think critically. Whether we are making decisions about politics, health or even just what news to believe, being able to assess information carefully can make a huge difference in how you view the world.

For me, critical thinking isn't just an academic skill, it's something I've had to use in real life. From navigating friendships to making and changing career goals, I've realized how important it is to look beyond the surface, ask the right questions and not just accept things at face value. For example, when I was choosing a new job venture, I had to weigh a lot of different factors—what I was passionate about, what opportunities this could open for me and definitely had to weigh out the income side of things. It would have been easy to just pick something based on what others thought was “easy” by sticking to my previous job role in the care sector, but by thinking critically about my options, I made a decision that actually felt right for me at that moment and even 2 years on.

This assignment is an opportunity to take a deeper dive into critical thinking, not just what it is, but how it applies to real life situations. I'll be looking at how it influences decision making, problem solving and even the way we communicate it with others. With so much misinformation online, it's becoming harder to distinguish between fact and opinion, and I think a lot of us don't even realize how easily we can be influenced. By developing stronger critical thinking skills, we can become more independent thinkers and avoid being misled by “fake news” online.

Realistically, critical thinking isn't just about analysing information, it's about being open minded, willing to challenge our own beliefs and making better choices based on logic and evidence. Through this assignment, I hope to explore how we can apply critical thinking in different areas of life, from education and media consumption to personal relationships and career decisions. In a world that often encourages quick judgments and emotional reactions, taking the time to think critically can be a game changer by just asking the right questions and thinking logically. Whether you work in one environment, work from home or even run and manage your own business, critical thinking applies to each and everyone's situation.

Critically evaluate the role of critical thinking in decision-making, and problem solving in the workplace

As a previous care worker, I saw firsthand how important critical thinking is in decision making and problem solving every single day. Working in care means dealing with real people, real emotions and real challenges, so being able to think things through properly is crucial. It's not just about following policies and procedures, it's about using your own judgment to make the best decisions for the people you support.

Critical thinking is essential for running a successful business despite gender and age.

When working in care, you constantly have to make decisions that can impact someone's wellbeing. Whether it's deciding how to respond to a resident who is distressed or figuring out how to balance everyone's needs on a busy shift. Critical thinking helps you make the best choices. Without it, you might just follow a routine without considering whether it's actually the right approach for a particular situation.

For example, if a resident refuses their medication, you can't just force them to take it or ignore the issue. You have to think critically, why are they refusing? Are they in pain? Are they confused? Have there been changes in their routine that might be affecting them? Instead of reacting emotionally or making assumptions, you need to assess the situation logically, consider all the factors and then make a decision that keeps the person safe while respecting their rights and dignity.

Care work is full of unexpected challenges, so problem solving is a key part of the job. There's never a "one size fits all" answer because every person you support has different needs. Critical thinking allows you to break down a problem, look at it from different angles, and come up with a solution that works for each specific resident.

Take staffing shortages, for example, which was more often than not. If you're short staffed, you can't just panic or give up. You have to think critically, how can we reorganise tasks to make sure everyone gets the care they need? What are the priorities? Is there a way to work more efficiently without compromising care? This kind of thinking helps you stay calm under pressure and find the best way forward.

Another example is dealing with challenging behavior. Instead of just reacting, critical thinking helps you understand the root cause. Is the person in pain? Are they frustrated because they're struggling to communicate? Once you figure out what's really going on, you can respond in a way that actually helps rather than just managing the surface level behavior, in care we call that the "Antecedence", which means the act of going before; precedence, (Dictionary.com)

Without critical thinking, mistakes can happen and in care work, mistakes can have serious consequences. If you don't take the time to assess a situation properly, you might make the wrong decision, which could put someone at risk. Poor problem solving and not working as a team, short staffed or not can also lead to stress and burnout. If you don't think through situations logically, everything can feel overwhelming and it will show in the work you provide.

Problem solving in the workplace is a crucial skill that helps teams and organisations navigate challenges effectively. It begins with identifying the issue, gathering relevant information and understanding the problem's root causes. Once the problem is clearly defined, brainstorming possible solutions and evaluating them based on feasibility, cost and potential impact is the next step. Whether you're an artist, a software developer or a CEO of a multinational conglomerate, problem solving skills are a critical asset in any professional setting. (DeakinCo.,2020).

After selecting the best course of action, it's important to implement the solution and monitor its effectiveness. This may involve making adjustments and ensuring that the solution addresses the problem long term. Effective problem solving not only enhances productivity but also fosters a proactive work environment where employees feel empowered to tackle challenges. It boosts morale, encourages innovation and drives continuous improvement within the organisation, helping businesses stay competitive and adaptable in a dynamic work environment.

On the other hand critical thinking, if taken too far, can lead to workplace tension and conflict. According to Sinfield (2010), Individuals who critically evaluate every idea or decision may challenge their colleague's opinions, creating an environment of constant debate. This can foster a sense of conflict, as people may feel their contributions are being undervalued or disregarded. When critical thinking becomes questioning authority or established procedures, it can create separations within teams, making collaboration difficult. This could result in friction that may lower morale and reduce co-operation. While critical thinking is essential, it must be balanced with respect and open mindedness to maintain healthy relationships in the workplace. Everyone's opinion must be heard regardless of who has the loudest and strongest voice, it is vital that each member of the team has their turn to voice their concerns.

Demonstrate how biases and assumptions (values, attitudes & beliefs) can impact or influence the process.

As a female in the care sector, I see firsthand how biases and assumptions influence the way care is provided. In this field, our values, attitudes and beliefs shape our interactions with clients, the decisions we make and even how we respond to challenging situations. While we all strive to be professional and person centered, it's important to recognize that unconscious biases can still affect the care we provide.

One of the biggest areas where bias comes into play is cultural assumptions. For example, I previously worked with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and sometimes I catch myself making assumptions based on my own upbringing and experiences. There have been times when I assumed an elderly client wanted to eat certain foods or celebrate certain holidays because they were from a different background to myself. However, I've learned that even within cultures, people have individual preferences and their own character. It's important to ask rather than assume. This realisation has helped me provide more personalised and respectful care if I was ever to work in the care industry again.

Another way biases can impact care is through attitudes toward age and capability. As a younger care worker, I've noticed that some people assume older clients can't do things for themselves, which can lead to unnecessary dependency. I've worked with colleagues who automatically do everything for an elderly client rather than encouraging independence. While this may seem like kindness, it can actually take away a person's dignity and sense of control. I try to challenge this by promoting independence where possible, helping clients do things for themselves rather than assuming they need me to do it all for them.

Beliefs about gender roles can also affect care. For example, I've seen situations where male clients prefer to have male caregivers for personal care, but staff sometimes dismiss their requests as unimportant or outdated. On the other hand, I've also heard people assume that female clients are more emotional or in need of more comfort, even when they haven't expressed this themselves. These kinds of assumptions can lead to care that isn't truly individualised. I remind myself to listen to what the client actually wants rather than relying on my own ideas about gender and care needs.

Biases around disability can also be a challenge. Many people assume that individuals with disabilities are helpless or that they can't make decisions for themselves. I've worked with clients who have learning disabilities, behavioural issues and I've seen how they sometimes get spoken to like children or ignored in conversations about their own care. It's frustrating because everyone deserves respect and the right to make their own choices. I make it a priority to include clients in discussions and support their individual personalities rather than making assumptions about what's best for them.

I've learned that self awareness is key in overcoming biases. Self-awareness seems to have become the latest management buzzword and for good reason. Research suggests that when we see ourselves clearly, we are more confident and more creative, (Eurich, 2018). I try to reflect on my own values and beliefs regularly and I welcome feedback from colleagues and clients. Training and education also help, as they challenge outdated attitudes and encourage inclusive care. By being open minded and willing to challenge our own assumptions, we can provide better, more respectful support to those we care for.

There is also another side to biases and different beliefs/values in the workplace. There is the generational difference which also affects the day to day goings on at each workplace.

There are the Baby boomers, they have the most power by virtue of their high numbers in leadership positions. Baby boomers are reputed to be loyal and competitive workaholics (Crampton & Hodge, 2007). As a young female, navigating the workplace, I've noticed that baby boomers bring a great deal of experience, strong work ethic and a more traditional approach to professional life. Many have been with their companies for decades, valuing loyalty and stability. Which can sometimes contrast with younger generations who prioritise flexibility and a work life balance. Communication styles also differ too. I have noticed Baby Boomers tend to prefer face to face interactions, while younger employees often lean on digital communication like emailing or social media groups.

However, despite generational gaps, I feel there is a lot to learn from them. Their problem solving skills, mentorship and deep industry knowledge are irreplaceable. At times, resistance to change or new technologies can be a challenge, but open meetings and mutual respect help bridge that gap. In today's

evolving workforce, the key is finding a balance between experience and innovation, leveraging the strengths of all generations to create a productive and inclusive work environment for all.

Generation X, At work they are computer literate and want a fun environment (Patota, Schwartz & Schwartz, 2007). But they are far more mobile than baby boomers moving from job to job improving their careers (Johnson & Lopes, 2008). In the workplace, I see Generation X as the bridge between baby boomers and millennials. They're independent, adaptable and value efficiency. Many of them grew up during a time of economic uncertainty, which shaped their strong work ethic and self sufficiency as well as their independence. Unlike baby boomers, who often prioritise loyalty to one company, Generation X are more open to job changes if it means better opportunities. They strive for happiness and enjoyment in the workplace.

One thing I admire about Generation X is their balance between professionalism and flexibility. They're comfortable with technology but still appreciate direct communication, like emailing but as well as group discussions . They also value work life balance, having seen their families dedicate everything to work. At times, they can be skeptical of authority and are result driven. In a multigenerational workplace, Generation X plays a crucial role in bridging generational differences, offering both experience and adaptability that help companies evolve in a changing world.

Next there is Generation Y. They were raised with MTV, mobile phones and computer games. Less indulged than the X generation, the Millennials accepted diversity and different types of families (Alch, 2008). As a 24 year old in the workplace, I see Generation Y or millennials, as the pioneers of workplace transformation. They value flexibility, work life balance and driven careers over traditional job loyalty. Unlike previous generations, they prioritise culture, career growth and mental well being, often seeking roles that align with their personal values.

Millennials were raised during a time of rapid technology change, which has made them highly adaptable and proficient with digital tools. They value open communication, regular feedback and teamwork. While some criticise them for often changing jobs, this behavior often reflects their strong desire for continuous learning and personal growth.

One of their biggest contributions is pushing for more inclusive, diverse and innovative work environments. They've normalised remote work and mental health awareness. In a multigenerational workplace, millennials act as a bridge between Generation X's experience and Generation Z's digital mindset, helping to modernise industries worldwide.

The ERA Cycle, introduced by Jasper (2013), is a model designed to guide reflective practice, particularly in professional development and learning. The cycle consists of three stages. Experience, where individuals encounter a situation, Reflection, where they analyse their thoughts, emotions, and reactions to that experience and lastly Action, where they apply their reflections to improve future practice. Jasper's model emphasises the continuous, iterative process of reflection, suggesting that it leads to deeper learning and more effective decision making in a professional settings

Apply critical thinking frameworks to a workplace scenario.

To critically think about the issues at hand in my previous work place, I have used Dewey's Model of Reflection to help shed light on to move forward as a team and provide the right care. Reflection is a deliberate and active process. It is about thinking and learning.

In Dewey's words it is an A person on a walk notices that it has suddenly become cool, thinks that it is probably going to rain, looks up and sees a dark cloud obscuring the sun, and quickens their steps. (Dewey, 1910 pg. 6-10).

Ultimately the biggest challenge not just in my previous work place but over all in the care sector is staff shortages. I have found that not just in my previous job but in my daily life I go to the Terry Borton (1970) model "What? So What? What Now? " to critically evaluate my situation.

What? My care facilities are experiencing severe staff shortages, leading to increased workloads, stress and reduced quality of care for patients. Many employees feel overworked, and patient safety may be compromised.

So What? Staff shortages impact both caregivers and patients, leading to burnout, decreased morale, and potential neglect. It also affects retention rates, making the problem worse.

Now What? Employers should improve recruitment strategies, offer better pay and working conditions. They should invest in staff well being and team bonding exercises. Policies should focus on keeping staff members , training and support to ensure sustainable care that is going to be provided.

Red Model Thinking (2013)

The RED Model, Recognises assumptions, evaluates arguments and draws conclusions. It is a structured approach to critical thinking that enhances decision making and problem solving (Pearson, 2013).

Firstly, recognising assumptions involves identifying implicit beliefs and biases that may influence reasoning. This step is crucial in workplaces where unchecked assumptions can lead to flawed conclusions. For instance, a manager may assume a decline in staff morale is due to employee inefficiency rather than the burn out of an overworked team

Secondly, evaluating arguments requires analysing evidence and distinguishing fact from opinion. This ensures decisions are based on sound reasoning rather than emotions or fake data.

Finally, drawing conclusions involves gathering information to make well reasoned judgments. This step enables professionals to make informed choices while remaining open to new evidence.

By following the RED Model, everyone develops a systematic approach to critical thinking, improving their ability to make rational and unbiased decisions.

Blooms Taxonomy (2001)

As a care worker, Bloom's Taxonomy can enhance both learning and practice. Starting with remembering, I recall essential care principles and guidelines, like patient dignity.

Through understanding, I explain the importance of person centered care and not one way fits all.

Applying these concepts, I use active listening techniques with patients and reading different forms of communication. Some may think communication is just the form of verbal words. Communication can be voiced in other ways, such as - body language, eye contact, tone of voice and facial expressions. With knowing those types of communications in and out of the workplace you can truly gauge the person's level of interest in a conversation, how they are or if they are taking in anything you are projecting. Verbal and nonverbal communication are seen in terms of interacting streams of spontaneous and symbolic communication, and posed "pseudo-spontaneous" displays, (Buck, R & VanLear, C. 2002)

By analyzing, I assess the effectiveness of different communication methods and their impact on patient well being.

Evaluating allows me to critically review care practices while suggesting improvements.

Finally, creating involves developing new strategies, such as enhancing patient engagement in care planning. (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). I took the initiative to improve our work environment by designing a rota that not only benefited our team but also ensured the highest standard of care for our clients. By creating a fair schedule that considered generational differences in working styles, I aimed to promote a better work life balance for everyone. When I presented this idea to management, they were initially skeptical about its feasibility within existing policies and procedures. However, I proposed a system where each team member would have two weekends off per month and one weekday with a half day shift. My colleagues supported the idea, recognising that it would allow them more time for hobbies and family. Introducing this alternative schedule in an open and honest team discussion encouraged everyone to share their thoughts, ensuring that different perspectives and strategies were considered.

After learning of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), It can be an effective tool for managing challenges like staff shortages in the care sector. The cycle involves four stages, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. In the case of a staff shortage, care workers may first experience the increased workload so that would be my concrete experience. Reflecting on the stress and challenges this brings, they might observe how it affects their work and patient care called reflective observation. Based on these reflections, staff can then develop strategies for managing the workload more effectively, such as prioritising tasks or improving communication within the team and abstract conceptualisation. Finally, these strategies can be tested in practice, with the aim of improving efficiency and maintaining quality care despite limited resources and active experimentation. Kolb's cycle encourages continuous learning and adaptation, making it a valuable approach in overcoming staff shortages in the care sector.

Conclusion

To conclude, critical thinking in the workplace is an essential skill that enables individuals to analyse situations, make informed decisions, and solve problems efficiently. By evaluating information objectively and considering various perspectives, critical thinkers can contribute to better outcomes, improved productivity and stronger collaboration with all generations. In a workplace setting, the ability to question assumptions, assess risks and think strategically can lead to innovation and more effective solutions to challenges. It promotes a culture of continuous improvement, where employees are encouraged to think deeply, communicate clearly and act decisively.

The principles of critical thinking extend beyond professional environments and can significantly impact everyday life. Whether making personal decisions, managing relationships or navigating complex societal issues, critical thinking equips individuals with the tools to assess information critically and make thoughtful choices. In daily life, this means questioning the validity of information we receive, weighing pro's and cons and reflecting on potential outcomes before acting.

Moreover, critical thinking fosters empathy and open mindedness. By considering different viewpoints and experiences, individuals become more understanding and responsive to other's needs. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, these skills help us navigate diverse perspectives, adapt to change, and solve problems effectively, whether at work or in our personal lives. In essence, critical thinking is not only vital for professional success but also for making informed decisions that lead to personal growth, stronger relationships and positive contributions to society. It is a skill that empowers individuals to navigate life thoughtfully, responsibly and with greater confidence.

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