

MSc Applied Psychology
Mentoring, Supporting and Leadership skills (ECAS7012)
Critical Reflection and PDP

I acknowledge the use of Google Gemini and ChatGPT between the 28th of April and 1st of May with prompts: check the following for grammatical and syntactical mistakes, including suggestions to rephrase work. I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after the use of AI tools, which I may be asked to provide in evidence

This reflective piece explores my development in leadership and mentoring within the context of applied psychology and will follow Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988, as cited in McLeod, 2025). It examines my experiences and challenges and considers how my values and identity have shaped my leadership style, mentoring abilities, and professional development. Relevant theories and models are integrated throughout, alongside reflection on my impact on others, the lessons learned, and how these insights will inform my continued development.

I began this module with enthusiasm as my personal philosophy aligns closely with Positive Psychology. I have been particularly influenced by Carl Rogers and his person-centred approach, which emphasises congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding as core conditions for facilitating personal growth (Rogers, 1979). This aligns strongly with my values and my aspiration to support others in the future.

I am also drawn to the concept of flourishing as a holistic measure of wellbeing, rather than defining mental health solely as the absence of distress. Seligman's PERMA model conceptualises flourishing through five elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011, as cited in Khaw & Kern, 2014). This has enhanced my understanding of the factors that contribute to my own wellbeing, and how I may support others in theirs.

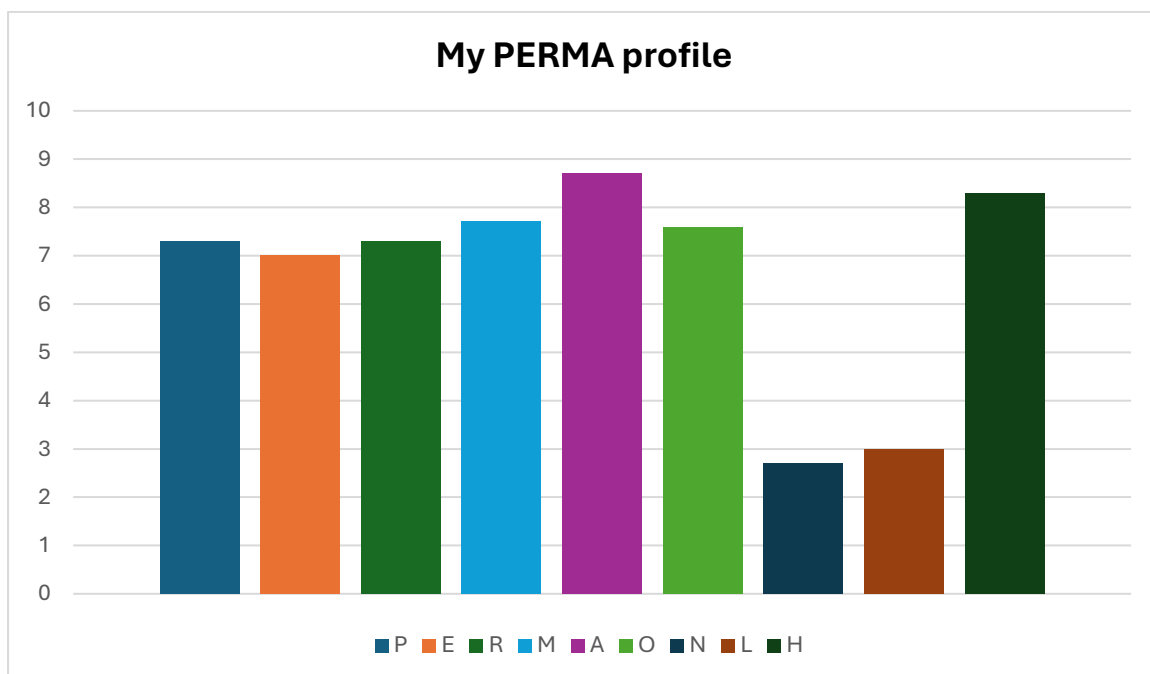
However, I now recognise limitations within the Positive Psychology approach. It has been criticised for lacking strong theoretical foundations and for inconsistencies in how wellbeing is defined. Additionally, it may place excessive emphasis on individual responsibility for happiness, potentially creating unrealistic

expectations and overlooking structural and cultural influences. This may disadvantage individuals who face systematic barriers (Van Zyl et al., 2024).

Reflecting on this, I recognise how my positionality as an optimistic, healthy, white individual may shape my perspective. It is, therefore, unsurprising that my PERMA profile results (see figure 1) were largely positive. I acknowledge that this framework and related measures may not be appropriate in all contexts, particularly where cultural or socioeconomic understandings of wellbeing differ (Khaw & Kern, 2014; Lambert D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2016). Despite these criticisms, I remain interested in how Positive Psychology principles can be applied to areas such as Motivational Interviewing (MI), conflict resolution and leadership.

Figure 1

Mean scores from my PERMA profile analysis (Butler & Kern, 2016).



Note. The initials represent factors in the PERMA-Profilier: P = positive emotion, E = engagement, R = relationships, M = meaning, A = accomplishment, O = overall wellbeing, N = negative emotion, L = loneliness, H = health.

The Initial application of theory to practice involved developing active listening and embedded counselling skills, which I had not previously recognised as distinct competencies. The SOLER model, part of Egan's Skilled Helper Model (Egan, 1975, as cited in Stickley, 2011), provides a structured approach to non-verbal communication. Alongside techniques such as reflecting, paraphrasing and open-ended questioning, this helped me appreciate the importance of pausing and listening attentively. However, SOLER has been criticised for encouraging overly mechanical application, with suggestions that non-verbal communication should embody a more human and intuitive approach rather than a set of prescribed techniques (Stickley, 2011). Nevertheless, applying theory in practice, reinforced my learning and increased my confidence, aligning with research suggesting that practicing theory-based skills, enhances retention and supports real-world application (Riggall, 2011, 2016).

Building on these foundational skills, roleplay was used to develop MI. Roleplay is recognised as an effective method for developing MI skills such as empathy, and deepening theoretical understanding (Mounsey et al., 2006). MI is a person-centred counselling approach designed to strengthen motivation and commitment, particularly in individuals experiencing ambivalence (Rollnick & Miller, 1995). It incorporates structured techniques such as OARS (open questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries) and DARNCATS (desire, ability, reasons, need, commitment, action, taking steps) to facilitate engagement and behaviour change.

Reflecting on my professional aspirations, I was motivated to engage fully and develop my competence. I participated in two practical workshops, where hearing experienced practitioners discuss how to support individuals in an accessible way

enhanced my understanding of applying these approaches. However, I was not given the opportunity to practice in one breakout session due to more dominant group members, and in another instance, due to time constraints. This limited my opportunity for development and reduced my ability to fully engage with the skills being taught.

Nevertheless, it was particularly useful to reflect on the similarities between MI and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983, as cited in Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), with which I was already familiar. In a previous experience, I applied this model to support a client in increasing physical activity. Through a semi-structured interview, I identified their stage of change (e.g. pre-contemplation, contemplation, or preparation) and developed recommendations based on the transcript.

On reflection, I recognise that I had unintentionally incorporated elements of MI. For example, during the engagement phase, I used open-ended questions to explore the individual's perspective, helping to establish rapport and trust. I also demonstrated aspects of focusing and evoking by identifying a relevant topic and attempting to elicit 'change talk', indicating emerging motivation. However, the planning stage was largely driven by my own recommendations rather than client-led goal setting. This suggests that, although I was using some MI-consistent strategies, I lacked the theoretical understanding at the time. Applying MI more intentionally may have enhanced both the client's autonomy and the overall effectiveness of the interaction.

The spirit of MI encompasses partnership, acceptance, compassion and evocation, and closely aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasises

autonomy, competence and relatedness for effective functioning and wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Reflecting on these theoretical underpinnings has enhanced my understanding and positioned me to apply coaching more mindfully. This has also highlighted a need for further development, as I recognise a natural tendency towards a solution-focused style, which can lead me to intervene prematurely. By not allowing individuals sufficient space to explore their own thoughts and motivations, I may limit their autonomy and reduce the collaborative spirit of MI. Resisting the 'righting reflex' aligns with evidence suggesting that active listening enhances collaboration and wellbeing outcomes (Lee et al., 2024).

When practising MI through roleplay, I found the process challenging due to its artificial nature. Focusing on stages and acronyms such as OARS and DARNCATS led to a 'tick box' approach, which felt inauthentic and not reflective of real interactions. Additionally maintaining authenticity while consciously applying these techniques was difficult. Evidence also suggests that long-term retention of MI skills following training may be limited (Maslowski et al., 2022), raising questions about the effectiveness of role-based learning.

Despite these challenges, my aspiration to become an effective health coach motivates continued development. As a result of applying these theories and receiving constructive feedback from observers, I recognise the importance of becoming comfortable with pauses and silence, allowing space for reflection and self-directed problem solving. Moving forward, I intend to adopt a more deliberate pace, to support a more authentic, client-centered approach.

Although roleplay practice was sometimes uncomfortable, I also had positive experiences working with peers. For example, I supported a peer who lacked

confidence, helping them to develop self-belief. This experience made me realise that, through supporting others, I have also grown in confidence. This highlights the value of peer support in developing skills and confidence (Crisp et al., 2020). This was further highlighted during conflict resolution practice.

Although I initially perceived conflict resolution as less relevant, I now recognise that it is a key leadership competency underpinning effective teamwork and professional relationships. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, as cited in Haslam et al., 2017) suggests that behaviour is shaped by both individual identity and group membership. This is particularly relevant in workplace contexts, where conflict can arise from 'in-group' and 'out-group' distinctions. From this perspective, leadership that fosters a shared group identity can enhance collaboration and reduce intergroup conflict (Haslam et al., 2017). This was evident in roleplay, where despite initial discomfort, our shared group identity enabled collaborative working towards our common goal, supporting one another and building confidence.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1979, as cited in Thomas, 2008) provides a framework for understanding conflict styles based on levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness: competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating. I identified my dominant style as compromising, characterised by moderate levels of both assertiveness and cooperativeness. While this approach can facilitate mutually acceptable solutions, it may also result in outcomes where neither party is fully satisfied, particularly in contexts involving strong group identities.

This highlights the importance of flexibility in conflict management. While compromising may be my default approach, adapting my style to suit specific

contexts is essential, particularly where alternative strategies may be more effective (Pennington, 2024). Developing greater assertiveness may enable a shift towards a more collaborative style, focused on longer-term, mutually beneficial outcomes.

It is also important to recognise that conflict resolution styles are shaped by upbringing, cultural expectations, and past experiences (Pennington, 2024).

Reflecting on my own experiences, including environments where conflict was poorly managed, including instances of unfairness and bullying, has reinforced my value of fairness and may explain my tendency towards compromise. Engaging with conflict resolution and leadership theory has enhanced my understanding of the importance of teamwork, communication, and group dynamics, and how these are often context dependent (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018; Schmutz et al., 2019).

Reflecting on my own role within teams has prompted me to consider what constitutes effective leadership? Leadership is commonly defined as the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of shared goals (Hassan et al., 2016). Previously, I had not critically examined my effectiveness in this role or the theoretical frameworks underpinning my approach.

To develop this understanding, I assessed my personality (see Table 1) using the Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10, Rammstedt & John, 2007), based on the Big Five model (McCrae & John, 1992). This model measures five traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN). Research suggests that extraversion, conscientiousness and openness are positively associated with leadership emergence and effectiveness (Judge et al., 2002), whereas neuroticism is linked to challenges such as poor stress management and decision-making (Nordin et al., 2025).

Table 1

Assessment of personality using the Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10; Rammstedt & John, 2007)

Personality Trait	Score
Extraversion	6 (moderately high)
Agreeableness	6 (moderately high)
Conscientiousness	10 (high)
Neuroticism	4 (moderately low)
Openness	8 (high)

Based on my profile, characterised by high conscientiousness and openness, and low neuroticism, I identified that I may possess the traits associated with effective leadership. However, this raises the question of whether traits alone are sufficient, as they offer a relatively simplistic interpretation of leadership. While the Big Five model is widely validated, the HEXACO model offers a broader, more culturally sensitive perspective by incorporating an additional dimension; Honesty-Humility (H-H). This introduces an ethical component to leadership, with higher levels associated with fairness, integrity, and trustworthiness (Ashton & Lee, 2008; Javalagi et al., 2024). From my own experience, I recognise the importance of these qualities and aspire to express them in my leadership approach.

However, personality influences leadership not only through traits, but through how these traits are expressed and how they are perceived by others (Härtel et al., 2025). For example, emotional stability may be interpreted as trustworthiness, while

extraversion may manifest as assertiveness (Javalagi et al., 2024). Reflecting on this, I recognise that my openness, emotional stability, and strong values of fairness and honesty, may shape how others perceive me. Colleagues have often approached me with workplace concerns, suggesting that I am seen as trustworthy. However, this raises a question: am I perceived as an effective leader or simply as approachable and supportive?

My high conscientiousness aligns with aspects of transformational leadership, a concept introduced by Burns, which emphasises inspiration, collaboration and motivating others towards shared goals (Burns, 1978, as cited in Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016; Hassan et al., 2016). However, developing an effective leadership identity requires more than aligning personality traits with theoretical models. Although I initially believed I needed to strengthen my assertiveness, based on insights from conflict resolution frameworks and personality assessments, engagement in skills-based activities suggested that I already demonstrate assertiveness and confidence in practice. This led me to recognise that, in previous roles, I have often undertaken leadership responsibilities without consciously identifying them as such.

Overall, this process has highlighted the importance of reflective practice in aligning self-perception with actual behaviour. It has strengthened my recognition of my potential as a transformational leader, a supportive and trustworthy peer, and, with further development, an effective coach and mentor. This reflection has increased my self-awareness and confidence in both my interpersonal interactions, as well as my academic and professional contexts

Through engaging with theory-driven models, I have identified previously unrecognised strengths alongside areas for development that are central to my future goals as a health coach or freelance nutritionist. This awareness reinforces the need to build on existing strengths while remaining adaptable and responsive to context and group dynamics. Moving forward, I intend to continue engaging in reflective practice to support ongoing development, using tools such as skills gap analysis to enhance my effectiveness as a supportive peer, coach and leader (see Tables 2 and 3 for my skills gap analysis and my professional development plan).

Table 2

Skills gap analysis

Skill Gap	Current state	Desired state
MI skills	Good theoretical understanding with limited practical application	Confident, competent application of MI skills in professional practice
Application of nutritionist role	Experience limited to informal or academic settings	Confident application in professional nutrition or coaching contexts
Academic and research competency	Nearing completion of MSc with developing research skills	Progression to PhD-level study or a research-focused role
Entrepreneurial and professional application	Developing understanding of business and social media	Established freelance practice with consistent professional presence

Table 3*Professional Development Plan (PDP)*

Learning and Development Need (competency, skill, qualification)	Specific goal	When do I want to achieve this?	Which obstacles may get in my way?	How can I improve my chances of meeting my goal?	Where can I go for further info/support?
<i>Develop competence in Motivational Interviewing skills</i>	<i>Attend an online or in-person skills workshop and apply the learning through practice and reflection</i>	<i>By the end of 2026</i>	<i>Time constraints, funding requirements, and selecting an appropriate course</i>	<i>Research and compare available online and local workshops, allocate time and budget, and commit to an appropriate accredited course</i>	<i>Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers Association for Psychological Therapies</i>
<i>Successful completion of MSc with high academic achievement</i>	<i>Achieve a distinction in the MSc and publish research findings</i>	<i>By the end of 2026</i>	<i>Life demands and potential lack of focus</i>	<i>Maintain effective time management, engage in early literature synthesis, maintain rigorous record keeping, and prioritise personal wellbeing</i>	<i>Supervisor support Personal support network (e.g. partner)</i>
<i>Maintain ANutr registration with the Association for Nutrition (AFN)</i>	<i>Complete, record, and reflect on a minimum of 30 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) from October 2025</i>	<i>By October 2026 (fully recorded by December in preparation for January audit)</i>	<i>Ensuring all five competency areas are adequately covered</i>	<i>Engage in a broad range of applied, work-based, and professional development activities to ensure balanced competency coverage</i>	<i>Association for Nutrition (AFN) Opportunities for volunteering or gaining experience with nutrition professionals or relevant organisations</i>

Learning and Development Need (competency, skill, qualification)	Specific goal	When do I want to achieve this?	Which obstacles may get in my way?	How can I improve my chances of meeting my goal?	Where can I go for further info/support?
<i>Entrepreneurial progression</i>	<i>Develop a freelance business structure, including registration and indemnity insurance</i>	<i>Set up by the end of 2026 and actively trading by June 2027</i>	<i>Confidence, time management, and an initial lack of clients</i>	<i>Gain experience by offering free or low-cost sessions, build a client base and testimonials, and produce consistent content (e.g., social media, Substack)</i>	<i>University enterprise support Business Wales Professional networking (LinkedIn) Social media platforms Substack</i>
<i>Progression from Associate to Registered Nutritionist</i>	<i>Transition from Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) to Registered Nutritionist (RNutr)</i>	<i>By October 2028</i>	<i>Insufficient CPD across all five competency areas and limited applied experience</i>	<i>Gain relevant employment or research experience, or establish a nutrition-related business to evidence competency development</i>	<i>University enterprise support Business Wales Professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn) Exploration of research assistant roles or funded PhD opportunities Supervisor guidance Jobs.ac.uk, Indeed</i>
<i>Explore options for developing research skills and academic progression</i>	<i>Secure a research assistant position or PhD opportunity</i>	<i>By 2028</i>	<i>Limited relevant experience Geographical constraints (e.g., living in Milford Haven)</i>	<i>Maintain strong academic performance during MSc research, proactively search for opportunities and consider developing an independent research proposal for funding, explore potential remote or hybrid positions to mitigate geographical barriers</i>	

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