



Applied Leadership and Management in the Workplace
Module Assignment Submission

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Introduction

As described by Smith, (2003) critical thinking is a valuable managerial competency, particularly within environments characterised by complexity, uncertainty, and competing organisational demands. It is described as a disciplined process involving analysis of information, evaluation of evidence, questioning of assumptions, and making reasoned, defensible judgments. Effective managerial practice requires not only the application of critical thinking but also an understanding of how an individual's beliefs, values, and attitudes influence perception. Ajzen, (1991) Schwartz, (2012)

This report critically examines the role of critical thinking in management, with a particular focus on its application within workplace decision-making. Exploring key models of critical thinking and considering the cognitive and organisational barriers that may limit effectiveness, highlighting the importance of reflective practice in supporting continuous professional development. In addition, the report analyses the relationship between beliefs, values and attitudes, evaluating their impact on managerial behaviour and the potential for bias in decision-making. Finlay, (2008)

Furthermore, the report critically evaluates key schools of management, including scientific, classical, behavioral, and modern approaches, with reference to theories such as Frederick Winslow (1911), Elton Mayo (1933), Douglas McGregor (1960), and Tom Peters (1982). The discussion considers how these theories influence managerial practice, employee experience, and leadership styles within contemporary organisational settings.

The report adopts a reflective managerial perspective, drawing on personal workplace experiences within a support-based environment. It will critically argue that, although critical thinking and management theories offer valuable frameworks for guiding practice, their effectiveness is contingent upon the ability of management to recognise bias, adapt to contextual demands, and integrate reflective learning into their decision-making processes.

This report further argues that effective management is not determined by theoretical knowledge alone, but by the ability to critically evaluate and adapt that knowledge in response to workplace complexity and individual differences.

Critical Thinking

As highlighted by Song et al (2024), critical thinking is increasingly viewed as a core workplace capability due to its role in improving decision quality and adaptability in professional contexts.

The significance of critical thinking within management is largely reflected in its role supporting effective decision-making, risk assessment, and ethical judgement. Managers are often required to operate within time-sensitive environments where information may be incomplete, uncertain, or open to interpretation. In the absence of critical thinking, decision-making can become overly reliant on intuition, personal bias, or business pressures, potentially compromising outcomes. Research by Hodgkinson et al, (2023) highlights that managerial judgement is frequently influenced by cognitive heuristics, which may result in systematic errors if not subject to scrutiny. Smith, (2003) implies that by applying critical thinking, managers are better equipped to explore alternative options, assess potential risks, and base decisions on evidence rather than assumptions. Bartlett, (2003) states that this is essential for maintaining business integrity and ensuring that managerial decisions are both strategically appropriate and ethically justified.

Models of Critical Thinking in Practice

Facione, (2013) suggests that several models have been developed to support the application of critical thinking in professional practice. One widely used framework is the RED Model, which provides a structured approach to analysing information and informing decision-making processes. This model is beneficial for managers, as it promotes the identification of underlying assumptions and encourages the use of evidence to support well-reasoned conclusions.

Similarly, the Paul Elder model of Critical Thinking highlights intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, and logical reasoning, alongside key elements that underpin reflective judgement. This framework is valuable within management, as it supports a more systematic and disciplined evaluation of information while encouraging the consideration of multiple perspectives prior to decision-making. Paul and Elder (2019)

However, while the Paul and Elder model offer a more comprehensive and theoretically detailed framework, the RED Model is often considered more practical within time-pressured managerial environments, as it provides a concise and easily applicable structure for decision-making. This distinction highlights the importance of selecting models that align with the demands of managerial practice. Song et al (2024)

From a managerial perspective within a support setting, the RED Model can be considered the most applicable to the author's role. This is due to its structured and practical approach, which aligns with the need for timely yet informed decision-making in environments involving risk assessment and safeguarding. By recognising assumptions, evaluating available evidence, and drawing justified conclusions, managers in a support role are better equipped to respond effectively to complex situations involving service

users and staff, while maintaining professional accountability and adherence to business standards.

Barriers to Critical Thinking in Management

Smith, (2003) implies that despite its recognised importance, the application of critical thinking in managerial practice is often constrained by a range of cognitive and organisational barriers. These barriers influence how managers interpret information, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions, often limiting the effectiveness of rational and evidence-based judgement. Table one outlines key barriers to critical thinking from a managerial perspective.

Table 1: Barriers to Critical Thinking in Management

Barrier	Managerial Perspective	Impact on Decision-Making	Source
Confirmation Bias	Preference for information that supports existing beliefs while ignoring conflicting evidence.	Leads to reduced objectivity and flawed judgement.	Klayman, (1995)
Overconfidence Bias	Overestimation of personal knowledge or decision-making ability.	Limits critical evaluation and increased risk of error.	Dunning et al, (2004)
Business Culture	Environments that discourage questioning or challenge,	Restricts diverse perspectives and critical discussion.	Schein, (2010)
Time Pressure	The need to make rapid decisions in demanding environments.	Encourages intuitive rather than analytical thinking.	Song et al, (2024)
Emotional Influence	Decisions influenced by stress or personal feelings.	Can result in subjective or inconsistent outcomes.	Klayman, (1995)
Resistant to Change	Preference for familiar practices over new approaches.	Limits innovation and adaptive thinking.	Kotter, (1995)
Communication	Lack of clarity or misinterpretation of information.	Weakens understanding and decision quality.	Tourish and Robson, (2006)

As illustrated in table one, both cognitive and organisational factors significantly influence the consistency with which critical thinking is applied in managerial contexts.

The barriers identified in Table 1 demonstrates that critical thinking is not solely based on an individual's competency, but it is significantly influenced by organisational context and environmental pressures. While cognitive biases such as confirmation bias and overconfidence originate at an individual level, their impact is often reinforced by organisational structures and cultural norms. For example, in hierarchical environments where questioning is discouraged, managers may be less likely to challenge assumptions or consider alternative perspectives, limiting the depth of critical thinking. Schein, (2010)

However, Milkman et al, (2009) suggests that not all barriers are inherently negative. In certain contexts, time-pressure and intuitive decision-making may support efficiency, particularly when managers possess significant experience. This aligns with dual-process theory, which suggests that intuitive thinking can be effective in familiar situations. Nevertheless, over-resilience on intuition without critical evaluation increases the risk of error, particularly in high-pressure environments.

From a managerial perspective, the presence of these barriers highlights the importance of developing strategies to support consistent application of critical thinking.

Reflective Practice and Application to Managerial Practice

Within a support-based environment, these barriers have direct implications for managerial decision-making. Particularly in time-sensitive situations, such as safeguarding and risk management. Under these conditions, decisions may be influenced by prior assumptions or incomplete information rather than a full evaluation of evidence.

Structured reflective frameworks, such as those proposed by Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988), provide models that support the systematic analysis of workplace experiences. However, to maintain clarity and conciseness with the main body of this report, these models are applied to specific work-based scenarios and are presented in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Through reflective evaluation of these experiences, the author highlights the importance of challenging initial assumptions and seeking additional perspectives from colleagues. This demonstrated that awareness of cognitive barriers must be supported by reflective practice and structured decision-making approaches to ensure that managerial decisions remain balanced, objective, and aligned with organisational and ethical standards.

Reflective practice is significant as it moves managerial learning beyond hindsight and into future improvement. It enables managers to evaluate not only what decisions were made, but how and why they were made, supporting the identification of alternative approaches.

This strengthens critical thinking by linking experience with continuous professional development and improved decision-making.

Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

Overview of Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

Ajzen, (1991) explains that beliefs, values and attitudes are key psychological constructs that influence how individuals interpret situations and behave within business settings. These elements shape leadership behaviour, decision-making, and interactions. Beliefs represent assumptions considered to be true, values reflect enduring principles that guide behaviour, and attitudes describe learned tendencies to respond in certain ways toward situations or individuals.

Schwartz, (2012) implies that these constructs are interrelated and collectively influence workplace behaviour. The literature suggests that managers who demonstrate awareness of their beliefs, values, and attitudes are better equipped to make informed, ethical, and balanced decisions. However, it is important to recognise that those internal frameworks may also introduce subjectivity, potentially influencing decision-making in ways that are not always rational or effective.

General Differences in Workplace Values

Generational differences contribute to the diversity of beliefs, values and attitudes within the workplace, influencing how individuals approach work, communication, and organisational expectations. These differences are shaped by broader social, economic, and cultural contexts, which affect how employees perceive leadership and workplace practices. Parry and Urwin, (2011)

Table 2: Generational Differences in Workplace Values

Generation	Key Workplace Priorities	Managerial Implications	Source
Baby Boomer 1946 - 1964	Job security, organisational loyalty, strong work ethic	Prefer structured environments and traditional leadership styles	Twenge, (2010)
Generation X 1965 - 1980	Work-life balance, independence, flexibility	Value, autonomy, reduced supervision	Parry and Urwin, (2011)

Millennials (Gen Y) 1981 - 1996	Career development. Meaningful work, collaboration	Require engagement and regular feedback	Twenge, (2010)
Generation Z 1997 - 2012	Flexibility, technology integration, well-being	Expect adaptable and supportive leadership	Parry and Urwin, (2011)

While the table above highlights key generational trends, Parry and Urwin, (2011) highlights the importance of critically recognising that these categories may oversimplify workforce diversity. Not all individuals conform to generational characteristics, as behaviour is also shaped by personal experience, organisational culture, and individual differences. This suggests that over-reliance on generational stereotypes may limit effective management of decision-making.

From a managerial perspective, understanding general differences can support more effective leadership approaches. Critically, effective management is not dependent on categorising employees, but on recognising individual needs and responding appropriately within organisational contexts. Twenge, (2010)

Furthermore, organisational context may reinforce these biases through workplace culture and expectations, limiting objective judgement. This highlights that bias can be influenced by both individual and organisational factors, requiring a balanced and reflective approach to decision-making. Trevino et al, (2006)

This highlights the importance of adopting an inclusive and flexible management approach that considers both generational and individual differences.

Critical Reflection on Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

This reflection highlights how the author's beliefs, values, and attitudes influence managerial practice within a support-based environment. Values such as empathy, fairness, and responsibility have shaped decision-making and interactions with staff and service users. However, it is critically recognised that these values may introduce bias if not actively evaluated, potentially affecting the objectivity of managerial decisions.

For example, a strong emphasis on maintaining relationships has at times resulted in hesitation when addressing staff performance concerns. While this supported team cohesion, it also limited effective problem resolution and delayed intervention. This

highlights a tension between personal values and professional responsibilities, demonstrating the need for a balance in decision-making.

The application of Meredith Belbin (2010) Team Role Theory further supports this reflection. A “Team worker” preference reflects a tendency towards collaboration and support, which benefits team dynamic but may limit assertiveness in situations requiring decision action. This highlights the importance of recognising both strengths and limitations in managerial practice.

Overall, this reflection demonstrates that effective management requires ongoing evaluation of personal beliefs, values, and attitudes. While these provide an ethical foundation, they must be balanced with critical thinking to ensure decisions remain objective and consistent.

Management Theories

Overview of Management Theories

Management theories provide a foundation for understanding how organisations are structured, how leaders make decisions, and how employees are managed within the workplace. These theories have evolved, reflecting changing perspectives of efficiency, human behaviour, and organisational effectiveness, offering valuable frameworks for guiding leadership practice. Sayeed et al., (2026)

However, the application of management theory is inherently subjective. Their interpretation by managerial beliefs, values and assumptions, mean outcomes are shaped by both individual and organisational factors. As a result, their effectiveness depends on how they are applied in practice, highlighting the importance of critical thinking in evaluating and adapting theoretical approaches. Trevino et al., (2006)

The development of management theory is commonly grouped into four main schools, scientific, classical, behavioral, and modern approaches, each reflecting different perspectives on organisational effectiveness in leadership. Early scientific and classical theories focus on structure and efficiency, whereas behavioural and modern approaches emphasise people, flexibility, and organisational context. Thomas, (2009)

Scientific and Classical Schools of Management

The scientific and classical schools of management focus on efficiency, structure, and control within organisations. Frederick Winslow Taylor’s Scientific management approach aimed to improve productivity by analysing tasks and identifying the most efficient

methods of working. Taylor, (1911) This approach introduced standardisation and performance measurement, which remain influential in modern management practices. However, despite its contribution to organisational effectiveness, Awofeso, (2019) argues that scientific management reduces employees to “machine like” roles and neglects the human element of work.

Similarly, classical management theory, associated with Henri Fayol, emphasises organisational structure and key management functions, including planning, organising, and controlling. These principles contributed to the development of formal management systems and provided clarity in organisational roles and responsibilities. However, Fayol’s approach has been criticised for promoting rigid hierarchical structures, which may limit flexibility and innovation in modern organisational environments. Rodrigues, (2001)

However, these approaches have been widely criticised for prioritising efficiency and control at the expense of human factors. By focusing on standardisation, they often overlook individual needs, motivation, and workplace relationships. Research by Parker et al, (2001) suggests that highly structured work designs can reduce employee autonomy and negatively impact engagement. Critically, while these theories provide structure and consistency, their limited consideration of human factors reduces their effectiveness in modern, people-focused environments.

Behavioral School of Management

The behavioural school of management emerged in response to the limitations of earlier theories, shifting focus towards employee motivation, relationships, and workplace dynamics. Smith, (1998) suggests that Elton Mayo’s work is widely associated with the human relations approach, which emphasises that social factors, group relationships, and employee well-being could significantly influence productivity and organisational performance.

Building on the behavioural approach, Douglas McGregor developed Theory X and Theory Y, which represent contrasting assumptions about employee behaviour and motivation. Theory X assumes that employees require direction and control, whereas Theory Y suggests that employees are capable of self-direction, responsibility, and motivation. Sahin, (2012)

While behavioural theories provide a more human-centered approach, they are not without limitations. They often assume that all employees will respond positively to empowerment and participation. However, this overlooks variations in individual motivation and organisational contexts. Research indicates that employees response to leadership and

motivational practices are influenced by situational and psychological factors, suggesting that a single approach may not be universally effective. Gagné & Deci, (2005)

Modern Approach to Management

Modern management theories emphasise flexibility, adaptability, and the importance of organisational contexts. Contingency theory suggests that there is no single best way to manage, and that effective leadership depends on situational factors such as organisational structure, workforce characteristics, and external environment. This perspective challenges the earlier universal approaches by recognising that management practices must be adapted to meet specific demands and different organisational contexts. Donaldson, (2001)

The work associated with Tom Peters further highlights the importance of organisational culture, innovation, and employee engagement in achieving organisational success. This perspective is supported by contemporary research demonstrating that organisational culture plays a significant role in influencing employee performance and organisational effectiveness. These approaches are particularly relevant in modern environments, including support-based settings, where flexibility and responsiveness are essential. Hung et al, (2022)

However, while modern management approaches emphasise flexibility, adaptability, and organisational culture, they are not without limitations. Their focus on situational factors may create difficulty in consistent applications, making them challenging to implement in practice. Additionally, an emphasis on flexibility can reduce structure and accountability, particularly in environments requiring clear procedures. Research indicates that the impact of organisational culture on performance is not uniform and depends on how it is implemented. From a managerial perspective, this suggests that effective practice requires balancing flexibility with clear structures to ensure both adaptability and control. Hung et al, (2022)

Benefits and Limitations of Management Theories

Management theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding organisational behaviour and guiding leadership practice. They support managers in improving efficiency, enhancing employee engagement, and structuring decision-making processes by offering systematic and evidence-based approaches to management. Research highlights that the application of theoretical frameworks can improve organisational effectiveness. Dinh et al, (2014)

However, each theory is based on specific assumptions about organisations and employees, which may not be universally applicable. Scientific approaches may limit autonomy, behavioral theories may oversimplify motivation, and modern approaches may lack clarity in practical implementation. Research suggests that organisational effectiveness is influenced by a range of contextual factors, meaning that no single theoretical approach is sufficient in isolation. Critically, this highlights that over-reliance on one theory can lead to ineffective management. Instead, managers must integrate multiple theoretical perspectives to adapt them to suit organisational needs and situational demands. This reinforces the importance of critical thinking in enabling managers to evaluate and apply theoretical approaches effectively in practice. Donalson, (2001)

Impact on Employees, Leadership and Application Practice

Management theories directly influence leadership styles and employee experiences within organisations. Scientific and classical approaches are often associated with directive leadership styles that prioritise efficiency and control. However, research suggests that such approaches may reduce employee autonomy and negatively affect motivation and job satisfaction. Parker et al, (2001) In contrast, behavioural approaches promote participative leadership, which has been shown to enhance employee engagement and motivation, and performance by encouraging supportive management practices. Gagne and Deci, (2005)

However, both approaches present limitations. Directive leadership, while effective in structured or high-risk environments, may negatively impact morale and reduce employee commitment. Conversely, overly participative approaches may reduce structure, slow decision-making, and pose challenges in maintaining accountability. From a managerial perspective, this highlights that leadership effectiveness is dependent on context and requires balancing and control. Donalson, (2001)

Critically, the application of management theories in practice demonstrates that no single approach is universally effective. For example, while Theory Y supports empowerment and autonomy, it may be less suitable in time-sensitive or high-risk situations where clear direction is required. Research supports the view that leadership effectiveness varies according to situational factors, including task complexity and organisational environment. This highlights that effective management requires adaptability and the critical evaluation of theoretical approaches, rather than reliance on a single model. Yukl and Mahsaoud, (2010)

Personal Reflection on Management Theories

The author's experience within a support-based environment highlights the need to apply multiple management theories in practice. In one safeguarding scenario, immediate action was required to ensure the safety of a service user. In this context, a directive leadership approach aligned with Theory X was adopted to ensure compliance and effective risk management. However, it is critically recognised that while this approach provided immediate control, it limited staff involvement in the decision-making process, potentially reducing opportunities for shared learning and development.

In contrast, within routine team management a more collaborative approach aligned with Theory Y has been more effective in supporting staff engagement and communication. This has contributed to improved team performance and a more positive work environment. However, it is acknowledged that this approach may be less effective in situations requiring rapid decision-making or clear authority, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on participative leadership.

Critically, this reflection demonstrates that effective managerial practice requires the ability to adapt leadership styles based on situational demands. While structured approaches provide control and consistency, behavioural approaches support relationships and motivation. This suggests that effective leadership is not defined by a single theoretical perspective, but by the ability to critically evaluate and integrate different approaches. From a managerial perspective, this reinforces the importance of balancing control and flexibility to achieve both organisational effectiveness and employee well-being. This highlights the importance of reflective practice in enabling managers to continuously evaluate and adapt their leadership approach within complex organisational environments.

Conclusion

This report critically examined the role of critical thinking within managerial practice, highlighting its importance in supporting effective decision-making, risk assessment, and ethical judgement in complex working environments. While critical thinking provides a structured approach to analysing information and evaluating evidence, its application is not consistently realised in practice. Cognitive biases, organisational constraints, and time pressures demonstrate that managerial decision-making is often influenced by factors that limit purely rational analysis, reinforcing the need for reflective practice and adaptive approaches.

The analysis of beliefs, values, and attitudes has demonstrated that these constructs play a significant role in shaping managerial behaviour and workplace interactions. While they provide a foundation for ethical and consistent decision-making, they may also introduce subjectivity and bias if not critically evaluated. This highlights the importance of self-awareness and continuous reflection in ensuring that managerial decisions remain balanced, fair, and aligned with organisational objectives.

Furthermore, the evaluation of management theories has shown that different schools of thought offer valuable but limited perspectives and organisational structure and efficiency. Scientific and classical approaches provide structure and efficiency, whereas behavioural and modern theories emphasise employee engagement, flexibility, and organisational culture. However, no single approach is universally applicable, and reliance on one theory may result in ineffective or imbalanced management practices. From a managerial perspective, effective leadership requires the integration of multiple theoretical approaches, adapted to suit the specific demands of the workplace.

From a personal standpoint, this report has highlighted the influence of my own beliefs, values, and attitudes on managerial decision-making within a support-based environment. While values such as empathy, fairness, and responsibility support positive workplace relationships and ethical practice, they may also create challenges in maintaining objectivity and consistency. This reinforces the importance of critically evaluating personal assumptions and applying reflective practice to support more balanced and evidence-based decision-making.

Overall, the findings of this report suggest that effective management is not solely dependent on theoretical knowledge, but on the ability to critically evaluate, adapt, and apply this knowledge within real-world contexts. The integration of critical thinking, self-awareness, and management theory is essential for developing a flexible, reflective, and effective managerial approach capable of responding to the complexities of contemporary workplace environments.

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Appendix A: Kolb's Reflective Cycle (Safeguard Scenario)

Concrete Experience - A safeguarding incident occurred within a support-based setting, where service users displayed significant distress that posed a potential risk to themselves and others. Immediate intervention was required, and appropriate de-escalation strategies were implemented to ensure safety. Safeguarding procedures were followed, including documentation and communication with relevant professionals

Reflective Observation - Following the incident, it was identified that while the situation was managed effectively in terms of safety, there were inconsistencies in team communication. Some staff members appeared uncertain about their roles and responsibilities during the incident, which affected the coordination of the response.

Additionally, decision-making was largely reactive, with limited use of structured critical thinking frameworks at the time.

Abstract Conceptualisation - This experience highlights the importance of clear leadership, structured communication, and critical thinking in high-pressure situations. It demonstrates that while procedural compliance is essential, effective management also requires coordination and clarity among team members.

From a critical perspective, the incident demonstrates that effective safeguarding requires both structured processes and adaptive leadership. It also highlights how managerial values, such as responsibility and duty of care, influence decision-making.

Active Experimentation - As a result of this reflection, improvements can be implemented to enhance future practice. These include:

- clearer role allocation during incidents
- improved communication through team briefings
- greater use of structured decision-making models

These actions aim to ensure that future responses are both efficient and critically informed.

Appendix B – Gibbs Reflective Cycle (Staff Management Scenario)

Description - A situation arose in which a staff member did not follow a service user's care plan correctly, creating a potential risk to the quality of care. The situation required managerial intervention to address the issue while maintaining professional standards and supporting staff development.

Feelings - The situation generated concern regarding the potential impact on the service user, alongside recognition that the staff member may have required additional support or clarification. There was also an awareness of the need to balance accountability with a supportive management approach.

Evaluation - The issue was addressed through corrective guidance, ensuring that immediate risks were mitigated. However, the situation highlighted gaps in communication and staff understanding, suggesting that preventative measures could have been more effective.

Analysis - This scenario reflects the influence of beliefs, values, and attitudes on managerial decision-making. A value-driven approach, particularly one highlighting fairness and support, influenced the decision to adopt a constructive rather than punitive response.

Conclusion - The reflection indicates that while the issue was resolved appropriately, earlier intervention through improved communication and training may have prevented the situation. It also highlights the importance of clear expectations and consistent leadership.

Action Plan - To improve future practice, the following actions can be implemented:

- enhanced staff training and supervision
- clearer communication of care plans
- regular feedback and performance review
- encouraging open discussion to support learning

These actions aim to improve staff competence while maintaining high standards of care.