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DEVELOPING WORKPLACE CRITICAL THINKING

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Introduction

In this assignment the author will be analysing his own beliefs, values and attitudes, their influence on author's behaviour at specific workplace. It was chosen by the author as his most recent place of work – Abbey Cars UK Group or Abbey Cars for short.

Brief introduction of Abbey Cars: was founded in 1968 as a family business. Nowadays it is one of the biggest private hire operators in UK. It employs around 5,000 drivers on different terms of contract, plus shift controllers and day/night managers. The services of Abbey Cars are all about transportation: minicab private hire, airport transfers, food delivery, van, coach and bus hire. The author worked for this company nearly 5 years as private hire driver, later he started doing shift controlling duties.

Analysing the difference between beliefs, values and attitudes within the context of Abbey Cars

There are many opinions what exactly values, beliefs and attitudes are. According to Yeoh (2014) there is a difference between values and **beliefs**. Beliefs are the core material which is shaping **values**. Beliefs and values together are forming **attitudes**. The diagram below is showing the relations between beliefs, values and attitudes:

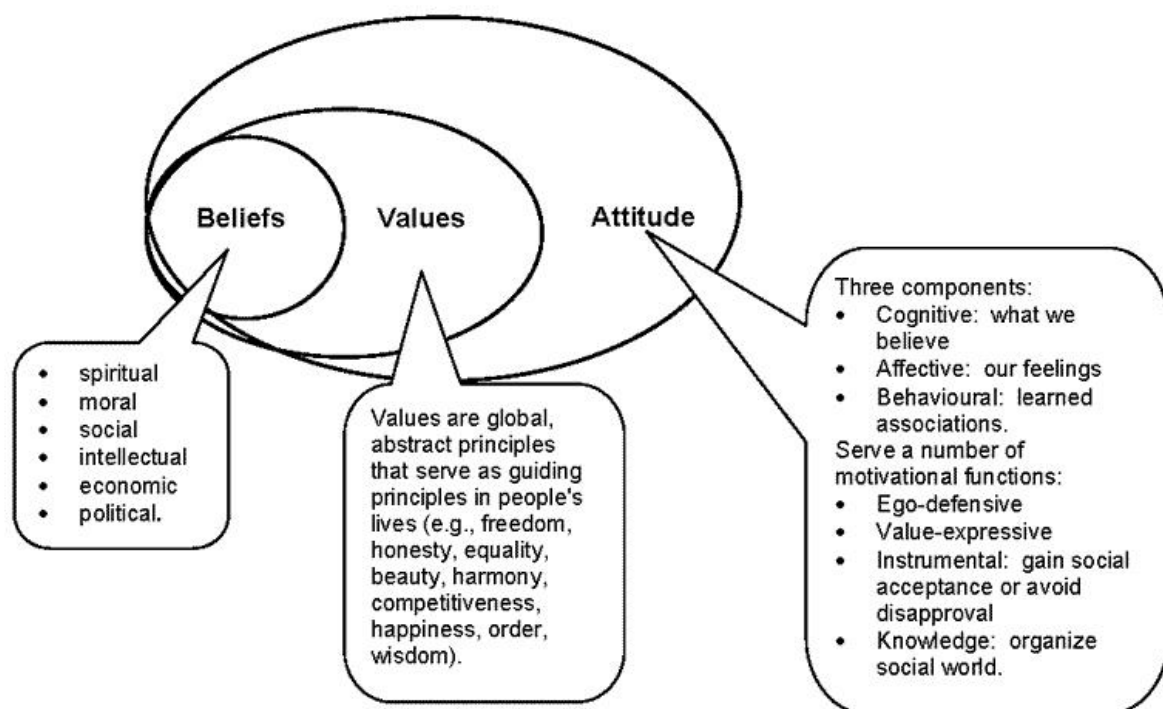


Diagram based on source: (Yeoh, 2014)

Taneja (2016) argues that **attitude** is our reaction when we see something, like a place, a person or maybe an object. The attitude which follows that can be different, rational or irrational. Sharp (2018) states that rational attitude is based on acceptance

of certain values, which were established through practical experience. Most of those are values are long – term existing, therefore they are deemed to be “correct” and “reasonable”. Irrational attitude on the other side will be referring to facts and values which do not have reasonable grounds. To find the difference between **values** and **attitudes** the author has created the comparison table below in which the main dissimilarities can be explained.

Values	Attitudes
Values are helping to guide our behaviour.	Attitudes are the response because of our values.
Values are helping us to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad.	Attitudes are our like or dislike reactions towards objects or people.
Values are well established.	Attitudes can be changed according to our favours in different life experiences.
Values represent single belief which guides our actions and judgements.	Attitudes are the combination of a few beliefs focused on certain situation.
Values have cultural and social roots.	Based on personal experience.

Table based on source: (iEduNote, 2017)

The author now will analyse what are the main beliefs, values and attitudes were established within Abbey Cars and its employees. The use of critical thinking in this case would be necessary.

The importance of Critical Thinking skills

According to Mendes (2017) critical thinking it is not just a process happening in people’s minds. Most of the people think “uncritically”, because this is in their nature. The decisions made afterwards are not rationally based, they based on emotions, self – interests or personal prejudices. The use of fact consideration and logical conclusion that what makes uncritical thinking becoming critical. Therefore, the ability of using critical thinking can be qualified as a skill. Developing and improving critical thinking skills is vital for the workplace environment like Abbey Cars where customer interaction is the way of committing everyday business. Mendes (2017) recommends five most effective ways how to improve critical thinking skills:

1. It is important not to be under influence of personal prejudices.
2. Constant gathering information and asking questions.
3. Collaboration and interaction with other individuals, better if they are from different backgrounds.
4. Ability to produce conceivable solutions.

5. Being aware of the consequences after execution of produced solutions.

In case of Abbey Cars drivers, the ability of critical thinking will enable them to satisfy customers' needs more fully and effectively. For example, if customer is running late for the flight, quick and critically thinking driver will choose the less consuming time route by using not just traditional devices, but other apps available to avoid possible traffic on the way. Doyle (2018) states there are five main critical thinking skills very important to use at any workplace.

1. **Analytical** – the ability of thorough examination of text, problem or a set of data. It includes: asking questions, analysing of the data, judging, interpreting and being sceptical.
2. **Communication** – the ability to communicate with others to share vital ideas in the most effective way. It includes: questioning, assessing, teamwork, explaining opinions and communications (verbal and written).
3. **Creativity** – the ability to deliver solution never discovered before. It includes: intellectual flexibility, conceptualisation, inquisitiveness and being imaginative.
4. **Open minded** – the ability of being free from any pre – established assumptions and judgments when it comes to analysing of information. It includes: being aware of multicultural perspectives, modesty, independence and equality.
5. **Problem solving** – the ability of analysing the problem, creating solution and finally delivering the plan. It includes: paying attention to details, applying standards, evaluation, decision making and being innovative.

In author's opinion the most appropriate skill of critical thinking to use in assessing beliefs, values and attitudes within Abbey Cars would be the analytical skill, because loads of data will be available after research. Asking questions also will be involved as a part of surveys.

The drivers contingent of Abbey Cars is formed of the people from very diverse cultures and religions. There are representatives from Asia (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri – Lanka), Far and Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Turkey), Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Poland), plus Italy, Spain and Portugal. African continent presented by Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa. South America also has representatives working within the company. The diagram below shows the percentage of the drivers from different countries in different branches of Abbey Cars within Greater London area:

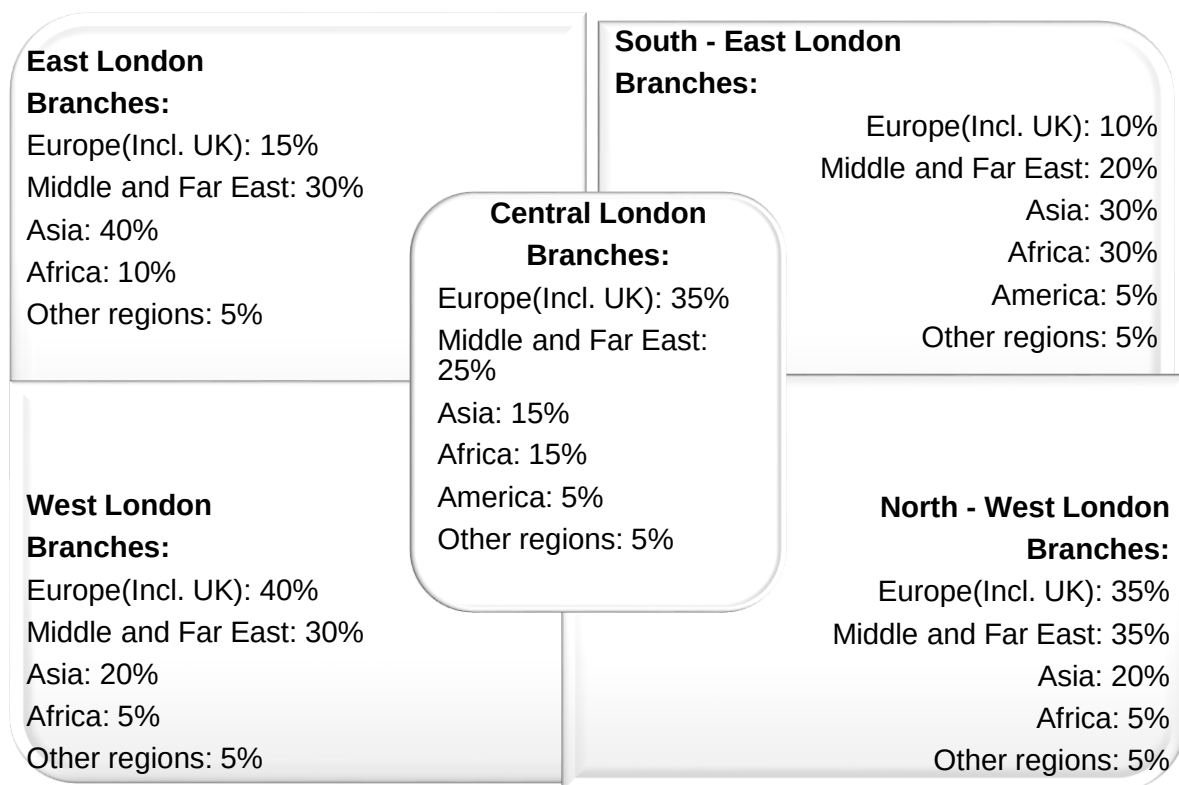


Diagram based on source: (Author's research)

From this diagram it is clear to see how the percentage of the drivers from various countries changes in every area of Greater London. More European representatives in Central, West and North – West branches, Asian countries distributed almost evenly with slight advantage in East London. Africa prevails in the South – East with minimum figures in the West and North – West. In author's opinion such distribution of the certain nationals in the areas mentioned above was formed historically and based on already established communities in different parts of Greater London. All that causes a big impact on the workplace culture within branches of Abbey Cars, making every branch a unique working environment.

Of course, all these drivers do have different spiritual and religious beliefs. Then the difference in intellectual and moral beliefs. All that reflects on their different values and later different attitudes towards customers and company. Not always the beliefs of the drivers are going in the same direction with the company beliefs established by the management rules and guidelines and promoted through formal communications. The author conducted face to face survey between drivers of the branch of Abbey Cars where he worked and another branch to make the whole picture more authentic. 40 drivers in total, 20 from each branch (80% of the workforce) were asked the same five questions regarding company's culture. Their answers presented in the table shown below:

Question	Yes, agree	No, disagree	Not sure
1. I am aware of the company's culture, it was explained to me by my superiors.	35(87.5%)	4(10%)	1(2.5%)
2. I do respect company's values and beliefs.	30(75%)	8(20%)	2(5%)
3. I am trying to promote company's values and beliefs to my customers.	35(87.5%)	1(2.5%)	4(10%)
4. I have been treated by my company as important and valuable member of the workforce.	25(62.5%)	14(35%)	1(2.5%)
5. I feel happy and satisfied at my workplace.	25(62.5%)	14(35%)	1(2.5%)

Table based on source: (Author's research)

According to this research most of the workforce is aware of company's culture, that means formal communications within the organisation are established and working quite well. 75% of the drivers do have respect for the company's values and beliefs, good sign of the well thought company code of conduct and management attempts to explain it. Most of the drivers (87.5%) are willing and trying to promote company's culture to the customers – obviously some relevant training was conducted successfully.

Unfortunately, a few drivers did not feel valued by the company and being happy at work. There are few reasons for that. First, some of the drivers been brought into this country by relatives already working for the company and they just did not have enough time to assimilate themselves with UK's customs and traditions. Lots of them did not speak a good deal of English. That resulted in poor understanding of the company's policies and guidelines. Lack of communication between management and workforce is obvious. The only communication they are getting involved in is in the informal groups established within all the branches. The other reason is low wages paid to the drivers to make fares cheaper and more affordable to the customers. Due to corruption within the branches jobs are distributed by the family and nationality connections, therefore some drivers feeling like outcasts doing small amount of low paid jobs on daily basis.

Critical assessment of author's beliefs, values, attitudes and their conflict with Abbey Cars workplace culture and behaviour

To make critical assessment of author's beliefs, values and attitudes we need to look at the background where the author came from. The author was born in the USSR or Soviet Union, the country which stopped its existence in early 90's of the last century. This country was trying to build communism but failed to do so and started to break apart at the stage of so – called "developed socialism". Castellano (2006) states that collapse of the Soviet Union started with economy stagnation in 1970's. In author's opinion as an eyewitness and participant of the Soviet society it is all started going down with the involvement in Afghan war. That is when the food started to disappear, the rationing was introduced, and long queues started to form by the shops since the night time. However early 70's was the most enjoyable time to live in the Soviet Union. Everybody was employed, accommodation was provided by the state, free of charge medicine and education made living in the USSR very comfortable. Police and other emergency services were doing great job in making society safe and secure. The rules of the Soviet society were built on honesty, integrity, equal treatment of all the nationalities. In author's memory people those days were friendly, open minded, trustworthy and responsible. Since the start of the school the teachers were promoting the advantage of living in the socialism society. Of course, propaganda was doing its work very well to discover only negative sides in western world, but most people were not involved in politics and did not really care why they should not listen to Pink Floyd or wear Levi's jeans. When author arrived in the UK his beliefs and values were already formed in the Soviet society and of course that caused lots of questions being asked by author while trying to adapt to the life in Great Britain.

When author started to work for Abbey Cars, he was already living in UK for long time and his previous work experience was airport, security company and car hire place. Airport and security company had very strict rules and guidelines regarding workplace behaviour and attitude. Strong formal communications were in place. Management was in control of all situations and resolving the problems or conflicts was very effective and on time. No informal groups were spotted by the author inside those organisations. Most of the staff was coming with British background or long-time residence in UK, so the beliefs, values and attitudes of the workers were similar, the selection was made through long and detailed job interviews. Vetting process was in force and it could take up to six months to be completed. Car hire place was an absolute opposite kind of working environment. The staff rotation in and out of the company was unbelievable. That was the place where rules and regulations were just written in staff book, but no one really have read them. The job interviews were based on the author's ability to speak certain languages on order to fit within the company and English language was not one of them. Three managers from different countries were hiring people from their own homeland or like in author's case, multilinguals. People with British background were in minority. The level of corruption was very high. Informal groups based on nationality principle were basically ruling the company. If some drivers or valeters were

not happy with working conditions or any other issue, the whole shift could just not turn up for work. Sometimes managers had to call everyone available for work from different shifts. Shift supervisors were cleaning and delivering cars themselves. All that reminded author his work experience in the later years of Soviet Union when similar things were happening. Clear majority of people employed in this car hire place were coming from post – Soviet republics or countries with ex – communism regimes and that explains everything.

When author arrived to work for Abbey Cars first feeling he had that it was very multicultural place to work in. Within a couple of weeks, the author started to see some resemblance with his previous place of work (car hire place): same high level of corruption, informal groups inside every branch, plus family connections between some managers, controllers and drivers. Every branch was different to another in the sense of dominating informal group usually connected to the branch manager. Communication and cooperation between branches were almost not existing. Formal communications between branches and head office were also not very visible. In five years of working for Abbey Cars author saw someone from higher management level only three or four times. Sometimes the author and few other drivers were sent to help the branches in different areas, but no drivers from informal groups could do so. It was clearly to see who the manager's favourite was and who was getting all the good, well - paid jobs. Author's beliefs and values were confronted with completely different beliefs and values, which were not even going in line with company's official culture and behaviour stated in the code of conduct. The author himself was an outcast at his branch, so the feeling of working for nothing is familiar to him. That situation has made him to file formal complaints to the management, but due to previously mentioned corruption it did not produce any results. In author's opinion Abbey Cars needed change of management from head to toe, constant rotation of the branch managers to combat corruption and strong control from the head office using formal and informal communications. Using of communication and problem-solving skills as parts of critical thinking would be necessary. In the next part of the assignment the author will analyse an appropriate management theory which can be applied to change the Abbey Cars workplace culture and behaviour.

Assessment and analysis of appropriate management theory and its implementation within workplace of Abbey Cars

According to McNamara (2017) out of many more there are six well established and widely used theories of management:

1. **Scientific Management Theory** (1890 – 1940), developed by Frederic Taylor: equal distribution of working tasks, all organisational tasks are carefully specified and measured, financial stimulation.

2. **Bureaucratic Management Theory** (1930 – 1950), developed by Max Weber: strong hierarchical structure with strict authority and control.
3. **Human Relations Movement or Human Relations Theory** (1930 – present time), developed by Elton Mayo: encouraging and developing interaction within organisation by using formal and informal communications. Increasing importance of the individuals within the company.
4. **Progressive Management Development Programs**: the use of various training programs to cultivate and grow solid supervisory skills. Offers wide range of topics, including career development, motivating, delegating and coaching.
5. **Systems Management Theory**: departments of the company are working as parts of one mechanism, removing of one part will cause the collapse of the whole system.
6. **Contingency Theory**: use of various types of the leadership according to current situation, from autocratic to participative.

In author's opinion the most suitable management theory in case of Abbey Cars would be Human Relations Theory. There are few reasons for that. The best method to discover the employee's opinions would be the surveys or interviews like the one conducted by Elton Mayo (1928 – 1931) and called Mass Interviewing Programme. The target of this programme was to investigate the feelings and attitudes of the employees regarding their working place and supervisors. In the interviews employees were asked about their opinions on working place, working conditions and the quality of the supervision. Similar survey was performed by the author within two branches of Abbey Cars. The results of the interviews confirmed the vitality of social factors at the workplace and their influence in formation of the company's culture and attitude. The other outcome of the Elton Mayo's experiment was that the workers started to feel that their working conditions were changed for the better, however no reforms were made. They even felt that they started earning more, although the pay rate remained the same. Similar satiation was observed after the author's survey within Abbey Cars. The only the fact of the interviews being conducted has made the drivers feeling like more valuable members of the organisation. Their general behaviour has also changed to more positive side. To summarise the changes in the driver's attitudes and behaviour before and after the interview, the author conducted another survey one week later and asked the same drivers the same set of questions. The results of the survey are presented in the table showed below:

	Before survey			After survey		
Question	Yes, agree	No, disagree	Not sure	Yes, agree	No, disagree	Not sure
1. I am aware of the company's culture, it was explained to me by my superiors.	35(87.5%)	4(10%)	1(2.5%)	38(95%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)
2. I do respect company's values and beliefs.	30(75%)	8(20%)	2(5%)	38(95%)	0(0%)	2(5%)
3. I am trying to promote company's values and beliefs to my customers.	35(87.5%)	1(2.5%)	4(10%)	38(95%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)
4. I have been treated by my company as important and valuable member of the workforce.	25(62.5%)	14(35%)	1(2.5%)	36(90%)	2(5%)	2(5%)
5. I feel happy and satisfied at my workplace.	25(62.5%)	14(35%)	1(2.5%)	34(85%)	4(10%)	2(5%)

Table based on source: (Author's research)

Now the author will briefly analyse the changes in the percentage of the answers before and after the survey. **Question 1:** the amount of disagreed has lowered by 7.5%, not bad, but still no 100% of awareness: more formal communications between drivers and management will be required in the future. Some short time training courses also will be very useful. **Question 2:** big increase in rise of respect to the company's values and beliefs, 20%, with no one disagreed and only 5% unsure. This is the result of only the one survey when the author briefly explained every question and of course gave the short background of it. With the improved formal and informal communications, the result of 100% can be achieved easily. **Question 3:** awareness of the company's culture and growing respect to it was resulted in the slow rise of people trying to promote company's values and beliefs. **Question 4:** 90% of the respondents' feeling being treated by the company as important and valuable. This is direct result of the survey, matching the original studies by Elton Mayo (1928 – 1931), it also proves the importance of this theory in the modern society. **Question 5:** 10% of the drivers

still not feeling happy, the real change in paying policy within the company needs to be implemented to achieve 100% of happy workforce.

Conclusion

In case of Abbey Cars problems within the company existed long time and never being looked at properly. One of the reasons was the corruption. PHC Magazine (2014) states the bribery within cab companies had a long history going back 1970's. It happened between drivers and controllers, managers and controllers, and finally between some hotels reception staff and the drivers. Introducing new booking software helped to combat some bribery between controllers and drivers but did not completely erase it. The drivers were still trying to bribe the controllers to get better jobs. They were buying cigarettes, drinks (including alcoholic), some of the drivers even were doing shopping for the controllers. In the Abbey Cars branch where author was employed it happened on regular basis. Plus, we must remember family connections which do exist in every branch of Abbey Cars. Using Human Relations Theory of course will improve the communications between management and drivers, it will also change the company's culture and attitude. The driver's attitude and confidence will also change for the better as it was already mentioned before. But to combat the corruption completely it will be not enough. Firstly, family ties and connections must be broken, to do that more staff interviews will need to be arranged. It will help to analyse the situation in every branch. The constant rotation of branch managers and controllers is necessary. Job interviews for new coming drivers must be done by professionally trained staff from head office. The question "do you have family members and relatives working for the company?" must be answered by all the applicants. Avoiding this answer will terminate the recruiting process straight away. Also, strong position of the head office regarding corruption and bribery must be established and sent down by formal and informal communications to all the workers. All this at the end will help to improve the company's image. The author is optimistic about the future of Abbey Cars, it looks good, but lots of hard work needs to be done to get there.

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