

BA (Hons) Leadership and Management Skills for the Workplace

Emergent Leadership Skills in the Workplace

Emergent Leadership

At

British Airways

And

Individual Reflective Essay

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Emergent Leadership Skills in the Workplace is learning module design to equip professionals with the ability to identify and harness leadership potential within their teams. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that rely on designated roles, emergent leadership focuses on leadership that arises naturally within a group, regardless of formal titles or positions. This module emphasises the importance of adaptive, collaborative, and situational leadership skills that can help individuals influence others, drive innovation, and contribute to the organisational success in a dynamic work environment.

1. Introduction to British Airways

British Airways (BA), the flagship carrier of the United Kingdom, is one of the world's most recognised and established airlines. With a rich history dating back to 1919, BA has evolved into a global player in the aviation industry, known for its comprehensive network, premium service, and significant contributions to the UK economy. The airline is part of the International Airlines Group (IAG), one of the largest airline groups in the world, and operates out of its main hub at London Heathrow airport. Over the years, BA has been at the forefront of innovation, customer service excellence, and operational efficiency. However, like many other airlines, it has faced substantial challenges due to global economic volatility, health pandemics, and geopolitical shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, highlighted the vulnerabilities in the aviation sector, with BA experiencing unprecedented financial and operational challenges, necessitating a reassessment of its leadership and strategic direction. (IAG, 2023)

2. Key leadership theories, models, and approaches

To effectively explore the leadership challenges and opportunities at British Airways, it is essential to anchor this analysis in established leadership theories and models. The following key leadership theories provide a foundation for understanding leadership in times of crisis and uncertainty:

- **Transformational Leadership:** this theory, introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher levels of performance by transforming their attitudes and beliefs. Transformational leaders are visionary, proactive and capable of leading organisational change (Burns, 1978)
- **Situational leadership:** developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, situational leadership posits that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to leadership. Instead, effective leaders adapt their style to specific situations and the maturity level of their members. This model emphasises flexibility and the need for leaders to assess the context and adjust their approach accordingly (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977).
- **Adaptive leadership:** Introduced by Ronald Heifetz, adaptive leadership focuses on the ability of leaders to navigate complex and changing environments. Adaptive leaders are characterised by their capacity to respond to unpredictable challenges by fostering innovation, encouraging learning, and mobilising people to tackle adaptive issues (Heifetz, 1994)
- **Servant leadership:** coined by Robert Greenleaf, servant leadership is a philosophy where the leader's primary goal is to serve others. This approach emphasises empathy, listening, stewardship and the commitment to the growth and well-being of employees and the community (Greenleaf, 1977)
- **Crisis leadership:** this approach focuses specifically on leading during times of crisis. It involves recognising the onset of the crisis, responding effectively under pressure, and guiding the organisation through uncertainty. Crisis leadership requires strong communication skills,

decisiveness, resilience and the ability to manage stakeholder expectations (Wooten & James, 2008).

3. Application of leadership theories to British Airways

The question at hand explores which emergent leadership skills would be effective for British Airways leaders in analysing and assessing strategies amid ongoing economic uncertainty. Applying the above leadership theories to the context of BA provides insights into the leadership qualities and approaches that could be beneficial.

3.1 Transformational leadership at British Airways

Transformational Leadership is highly relevant to British Airways, especially in times of crisis. Leaders at BA can adopt transformational leadership by:

- **Inspiring vision:** articulating a clear and compelling vision for the future that aligns with the values and aspirations of the organisation. For example, being committed to sustainability and innovation could be emphasised to inspire employees and stakeholders (Northouse, 2021).
- **Motivating employees:** transformational leaders at BA can foster a sense of purpose and belonging by recognising employee contributions and encouraging them to innovate and think creatively, even during challenging times (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).
- **Driving change:** transformational leaders are change agents. At BA, leaders can use their influence to implement new technologies, streamline operations, and enhance customer experience, all of which are crucial for long term success (Kotter, 1996).

3.2 situational leadership in the context of British Airways

given the dynamic nature of the airline industry, situational leadership is a practical approach for BA leaders. They need to:

- **Adapt leadership style:** depending on the situation, BA leaders should be able to switch between directive and supportive styles. For instance, during a crisis, a more directive approach might be needed to ensure quick decision making, whereas in stable times, a participative approach could foster innovation and engagement (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977).
- **Assess team readiness:** leaders must evaluate the competence and commitment of their teams. In high stress situations, such as economic downturns, providing clear instructions and support becomes essential to maintain morale and productivity (Blanchard et al., 1993).

3.3 Adaptive leadership as a response of uncertainty

Adaptive leadership is crucial for BA, given the unpredictable nature of the global environment. This involves:

- **Encouraging experimentation:** the leaders can promote a culture of experimentation where employees are encouraged to test new ideas and approaches without fear of failure. This can lead to innovative solutions that enhance operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).
- **Navigating complexity:** adaptive leaders at BA should focus on navigating the complexities of the airline industry. By being open to learning, continuously gathering information, and being prepared to pivot strategies when needed (Heifetz, 1994).

3.4 The role of servant leadership at British Airways

Servant leadership is particularly effective in building trust in fostering a positive organisational culture. At BA, this could mean:

- **Prioritizing employee well-being:** leaders could prioritise the health and well-being of employees, especially during crisis. By providing support, resources and open communication, BA can maintain employee morale and loyalty (Greenleaf, 1977).
- **Building community:** servant leaders can focus on building a sense of community within BA, ensuring that employees feel valued and heard. This approach can lead to higher employee engagement and better service to the customers (Spears, 1995)

3.5 Crisis leadership skills for British Airways

In times of crisis, specific leadership skills become paramount:

- **Decisiveness:** BA leaders need to make quick, informed decisions to navigate the complexities of economic uncertainty. This requires a deep understanding of the industry and the ability to analyse data rapidly (Wooten & James, 2008).
- **Communication:** effective crisis leaders at BA should maintain clear and transparent communication with employees, customers, and stakeholders. Providing timely updates and addressing concerns can help mitigate panic and maintain trust (Coombs, 2019)
- **Resilience:** leaders must demonstrate resilience, showing confidence and determination even in the face of adversity. This resilience can inspire the entire organisation to stay focused and committed to overcoming challenges (Boin & Hart, 2003)

4. Critical evaluation of leadership approaches and styles

Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept, and different approaches have their advantages and limitations. A critical evaluation of the aforementioned leadership approaches in the context of BA reveals insights into their effectiveness:

4.1 Transformational Leadership

- **Strength:** Transformational leadership can inspire and motivate employees, fostering a culture of innovation and change that aligns well with BA's need to navigate economic uncertainty and drive strategic initiatives that can position the airline for future growth (Bass & Riggio, 2006).
- **Limitations:** while transformational leadership is powerful, it may not always be practical in situations requiring immediate action. The time required to inspire, and transform could be a drawback in fast moving crisis where quick decisions are necessary (Northouse, 2021)

4.2 situational leadership

- **Strength:** the flexibility of situational leadership is a significant advantage allowing leaders to adapt their style to meet the demands of the moment. This approach can help BA leaders respond effectively to varying circumstances, from routine operations to crisis management (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977)
- **Limitations:** the situational leadership model relies heavily on the leader's ability to accurately assess the situation and team readiness. Misjudgements in this areas can lead to inappropriate leadership responses and decreased effectiveness (Yukl, 2013)

4.3 Adaptive leadership

- **Strengths:** Adaptive leadership is well suited to the complex and unpredictable environment of the airline industry. It encourages a culture of learning, experimentation and innovation which can help be a navigate economic uncertainty (Heifetz, 1994)
- **Limitations:** Adaptive leadership requires a high level of skill in managing ambiguity and complexity. Not all leaders may be equipped to thrive in such environments, and the constant need of adaptation can be overwhelming for some (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

4.4 Servant leadership

- **Strengths:** servant leadership fosters a strong organisational culture by prioritising employee well-being and development. At BA this approach can lead to increased employee engagement, loyalty and customer satisfaction (Greenleaf, 1977).
- **Limitations:** well servant leadership is beneficial for building trust and relationships it may not always align with the need for strong decisive action during crisis. Emphasis on serving others might delay critical decision-making process (Northouse, 2021).

4.5 Crisis leadership

- **Strengths:** crisis leadership is specifically tailored for times of uncertainty, enabling leaders to make quick decisions, communicate effectively, and manage stakeholder expectations. This approach is crucial for BA to maintain stability and navigate through crisis (Wooten & James, 2008)
- **Limitations:** crisis leadership can be reactionary and may not always consider long term implications the focus on immediate response could overlook opportunities for strategic growth and development (Boin & Hart, 2003)

5. Critical analysis of current leadership strategies at British Airways

British Airways, as one of the world's leading airlines, has been significantly impacted by the challenges posed by global economic uncertainty fluctuate in market demands an unprecedented crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic. This section provides a detailed analysis of PA current leadership strategies evaluating their effectiveness, strengths and limitations through the lens of established leadership theories and models

5.1 Strength for current leadership strategies

- **Quick adaptation to crisis** One of the key strengths of BA's leadership has been its ability to adapt quickly to crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, BA's leadership implemented rapid changes to its operations, such as shifting to reduced flight schedule, enforcing health and safety protocols, and promoting remote work for office staff. These actions reflect an understanding of situational leadership, where BA's leaders adopted their leadership style to meet the immediate needs of the situation (IAG,2023). This responsiveness helped BA to manage this crisis more effectively and maintain operations, demonstrating resilience - a critical component of crisis leadership.
- **Focus on innovation and sustainability:** BA's leadership Has also demonstrated a strong commitment to innovation, particularly in the areas of sustainability and customer service. For example, BA has invested in sustainable aviation fuel and modern, fuel efficient aircrafts, reflecting a strategic move towards environmental sustainability. This initiative aligns with

transformational leadership, where leaders inspire and motivate stakeholders by advocating for long term vision and change (British Airways. 2023). Additionally, BA's focus on enhancing the customer service through digital innovation, such as contactless check in and in flight services, underscores its commitment to adopting the changing consumer preferences and technological advancements.

- **Customer centric approach:** BA has maintained a strong focus on customer service, Which is evident in its efforts to enhance passenger experience in maintain high service standards. Despite the challenges of economic uncertainty and operational disruptions, BA has prioritised customer needs by offering flexible booking options, improving digital interfaces and maintaining customer communication during disruptions. This approach reflects elements of servant leadership, where the focus is on meeting the needs of customers and ensuring their satisfaction (IAG, 2023). By doing so, BA has managed to sustain customer loyalty and trust, which are critical for businesses continuity in long term success.

5.2 Limitations of current leadership strategies

- **Communication challenges:** while BA's leadership has shown strength in adaptability and customer focus, there has been notable communication challenges, particularly during crisis. For example, during COVID-19 pandemic, BA faced criticism from customers and employees for inadequate communication regarding flight cancellations, refund policies and health protocols (BBC News, 2022). Effective communication is a cornerstone of crisis leadership, as it helps to manage expectations, reduce uncertainty and maintain trust. The lapses in communication suggest that BA's leadership could benefit from more robust communication strategies, ensuring that information is disseminated clearly and consistently across all channels.
- **Employee morale and relations:** another area of concern for BA's leadership please employee relations and morale. The airline has faced challenges related to labour disputes, layoffs and restructuring which have affected employee morale and engagement. For instance during the pandemic BA's decision to reduce its workforce and implement pay cuts led to tensions with employee unions and negative publicity (Financial Times, 2022). Such actions, well perhaps necessary for financial viability, can undermine trust and loyalty among employees. This is a critical issue, as engaged and motivated employees are essential for delivering high quality customer service and driving the organisation success. The situational leadership model suggests that leaders need to assess and adapt to the needs of their teams, providing support and reassurance, especially during turbulent times (Blanchard et al., 1993).
- **Strategic visions and consistency:** while BA has shown elements of transformational leadership, there have been concerns about the consistency and clarity of its strategic vision. Holders have pointed out that BA's strategic initiatives sometimes appear reactive rather than proactive, lacking a cohesive long term plan that aligns with have broader goals of the organisation. Leaders need to ensure that strategic initiatives are well communicated and aligned across the organisation (The Guardian, 2023). This lack of strategic clarity can lead to confusion among employees and stakeholders, potentially impacting the airline's ability to execute its vision affectively. Transformational leadership emphasises the importance of a clear and inspiring vision that unites and motivates the organisation. BA's leadership could enhance its effectiveness by ensuring that its strategic initiatives are consistently communicated and aligned with a long term vision that resonates with both employees and customers.

- **Over emphasis on short term solutions:** another limitation observed in BA's leadership strategy is the occasional overemphasis on short term, reactive measures at the expense of long-term planning. For instance, cost cutting initiatives, while necessary in the short run to maintain financial stability, might have long term repercussions on service quality and brand reputation. The focus on immediate financial performance can lead to decisions that compromise employee satisfaction and operational excellence which are vital for sustainable success (Yukl, 2023). Balancing short term survival with long term strategic growth is crucial, and leaders must adopt an adaptive leadership approach that allows for flexible responses while maintaining a clear focus on future goals (Heifetz, 1994)
- **Lack of comprehensive crisis preparedness:** this fight BA's ability to respond to COVID-19 pandemic, there is an indication that more comprehensive crisis preparedness planning could be beneficial. Crisis leadership requires not only the ability to react, but also the foresight to anticipate potential disruptions and prepare accordingly. BA's responses, while effective in many respects we're often perceived as ad hoc and reactive rather than the result of well established contingency planning (Boin & Hart, 2003). Developing a comprehensive crisis management framework that includes regular scenario planning, risk assessment and crisis simulations can better equip BA's leadership to handle future crisis with greater confidence and effectiveness.

5.3 Opportunities for improvement

Based on the critical analysis, British Airways can leverage several opportunities to improve its leadership strategies:

- **Enhancing communication strategies:** Implementing more robust communication protocols can help be a manage stakeholder expectations more effectively during crisis. This could include regular updates, transparent communication of policies and active engagement with both employees and customers.
- **Focusing on employee engagement:** to improve morale and foster a positive work environment, BA's leadership should prioritise employee engagement initiatives. This can involve recognising and addressing employee concerns offering professional development opportunities and ensuring that employees feel valued and heard.
- **Strengthening strategic alignment:** BA's leadership can benefit from developing a more cohesive strategic vision that aligns with the organisation long term goals. This vision should be clearly communicated across all levels of the organisation to ensure that employees and stakeholders are aligned with the company direction.
- **Balancing short term and long term objectives:** leaders at BA should strive to balance the need for short term financial stability with long term strategic growth. This can be achieved by integrating adaptive leadership principles, which allow for flexibility and innovation while maintaining a focus on sustainable success.
- **Developing comprehensive crisis management plans:** to enhance resilience, BA should invest in comprehensive crisis management planning. This involves not only responding to crisis affectively but also anticipating potential challenges and preparing accordingly. Regular crisis simulations and scenario planning can help BA's leadership remain prepared and capable of managing future disruptions.

6. Recommendations for British Airways leadership amid economic uncertainty

Based on the analysis of leadership theories and BA's current strategies, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance leadership effectiveness amid ongoing economic uncertainty:

6.1 Foster a culture of adaptability and innovation

- **Implement Adaptive leadership training:** BA should invest in training programmes that develop adaptive leadership skills among its leaders. This training can help leaders become more comfortable with ambiguity and better equipped to navigate complex challenges (Heifetz, 1994)
- **Encourage experimentation:** Leaders should create an environment where employees feel safe to experiment and propose new ideas. Encouraging innovation can lead to the development of new services, operational efficiencies and enhanced customer experiences (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002)

6.2 Enhanced crisis leadership capabilities

- **Develop a crisis response framework:** BA should establish a clear crisis response framework that outlines roles, responsibilities and communication protocols. This framework can help ensure a coordinated and effective response during crisis (Wooten & James, 2008)
- **Focus on resilience building:** Leaders should focus on building organisational resilience by preparing for potential disruptions and developing contingency plans. Regular crisis simulations and scenario planning can help prepare leaders and employees for unexpected events (Bon & Hart, 2003)

6.3 Strengthen communication and transparency

- **Improve communication channels:** BA needs to enhance its communication channels to ensure timely and transparent communication with employees, customers and stakeholders. Implementing robust feedback mechanisms can also help leaders understand and address concerns (Coombs, 2019).
- **Leverage technology for communication:** using digital platforms and tools can facilitate better communication and collaboration. BA should invest in technology that enables real time updates and interactions, especially during crisis (Northouse, 2021)

6.4 Prioritise employee well-being and engagement

- **Adopt servant leadership principles:** Leaders should adopt servant leadership principles by prioritising employee well-being, providing support and actively listening to employee feedback. This approach can improve morale and foster a positive organisational culture (Greenleaf, 1977)
- **Implement employee development programmes:** investing in employee development and training programmes can enhance skills and career growth opportunities. This investment can lead to a more engaged and committed workforce, contributing to BA's success (Spears, 1995)

6.5 Align leadership and strategic vision

- **Clarify and communicate strategic vision:** BA's leadership should ensure that strategic vision is clear, consistent and well communicated across the organisation. This alignment can help employees understand the organisation goals and their role in achieving them (Kotter, 1996)
- **Regularly review and update strategies:** leaders should regularly review and update strategies to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with the changing environment. This ongoing assessment can help BA stay competitive and responsive to market dynamics (Yukl, 2013)

7. Conclusion

The leadership landscape at British Airways is complex, shaped by the need to navigate economic uncertainty, innovate and maintain operational excellence and has demonstrated significant strengths in its leadership strategies, particularly in adaptability, innovation, and customer focus. By applying leadership theories such as transformational, situational, adaptive, and servant leadership, BA can strengthen its leadership approach and enhance its ability to respond effectively to crisis. The critical evaluation of current leadership strategies reveals areas where BA excels and areas for improvement, particularly in communication, employee relations and strategic consistency. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report can help leaders develop the emergent skills needed to analyse and assess strategies effectively, ensuring the airline remains resilient and successful amid ongoing economic challenges.

8. References

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Individual Reflective Essay

Introduction

This reflective essay explores my personal learning and the skills I have acquired through the module focused on leadership and decision making in complex business environments. The course has provided invaluable insights into the importance of understanding both internal and external business environment especially in roles that demand personal responsibility as a leader. This essay will employ reflective learning modules such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, to analyse my learning journey. Additionally I will critically assess my ability to fulfil key leadership responsibilities by examining my strengths and limitations in light of established leadership theories and approaches.

Reflective Learning models

reflective learning models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, offer structured frameworks for introspection and learning from experience

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) consists in six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and an action plan. It encourages a thorough examination of experiences by prompting individuals to reflect on what happened, their emotions and what could be improved

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) is a four stage cycle involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Kolb's model emphasises learning through a continuous cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting.

Application of reflective models to my learning

Using Gibbs reflective cycle, I can break down my learning into a structured reflection process.

1. **Description:** Throughout this module, I engaged in various activities and case studies but focused on leadership decision making. We explore different leadership theories, including transformational, situational adaptive and servant leadership, and apply them to a real world scenarios. One of the most impactful activities was analysing a crisis management case where leaders had to make rapid decisions to navigate through economic uncertainties.
2. **Feelings:** initially, I felt overwhelmed by the complexity of leadership decisions, specially in crisis. The multitude of factors to consider, such as stakeholder interests, employee morale and organisational goals, seemed daunting. However, as the module progressed, again confidence. The theoretical frameworks provided clarity and a sense of direction. I started to see how I could apply these frameworks to make informed decisions.
3. **Evaluation.** This module has been immensely beneficial. I gain practical insights into the challenges faced by leaders and the importance of adaptability and communication. Engaging with leadership theories help me understand the need for different leadership styles in different situations. For instance, the transformational leadership style's emphasis on inspiring and motivating others resonated with me. I realised but the power of a compelling vision and how it could align and energise a team.

4. **Analysis.** Through the case studies and discussions I recognise the importance of self-awareness and continuous learning as a leader. Adaptive leadership, in particular, stood out to me. It inquires leaders to be flexible, responsive to the changes but open to new ideas - qualities I aim to embody. The situational leadership model also made me realise that leadership is not about rigidly adhering to one style but about understanding the needs of the moment and adjusting accordingly.
5. **Conclusion.** My learning journey has underscored the importance of being a versatile leader who can adapt varying circumstances. I have learned that effective leadership is not just about making decision but also about understanding the broader context, communicating effectively and inspiring others. This reflection has helped me identify areas what I need to improve, such as handling uncertainty and building resilience.
6. **Action plan.** Moving forward, I plan to continue developing my leadership skills by seeking feedback, engaging in continuous learning, and taking on roles that challenge me to make decisions under pressure. I will practise adaptive leadership by staying open to new ideas and experimenting with different approaches to problem solving.

Critical assessment of my leadership abilities

The module has provided me with a solid foundation of leadership knowledge and highlighted my strengths and areas of improvement.

Strengths

- **Adaptability:** I have realised that adaptability is one of my strengths. Understanding and applying adaptive leadership theory has shown me the importance of staying flexible and being prepared to pivot strategy as circumstances change. I'm comfortable with change and see it as an opportunity for growth, which is crucial for a leader in today's fast-paced business environment.
- **Communication skills:** throughout the module I have honed my communication skills, understanding the critical role in leadership. Effective communication ensures that team members are aligned with the vision and goals of the organisation. I have learned the importance of clear, transparent and consistent communication especially during times of uncertainty.
- **Empathy and emotional intelligence.** Servant leadership's emphasis on empathy and putting others' needs first resonates with me. I believe that understanding and addressing team members' concerns and aspirations is crucial for building trust and fostering a positive organisational culture. My ability to connect with others on an emotional level helps me build strong relationships and motivate my team.

Limitations

- **Handling ambiguity:** one of the key challenges I identified through this module is my discomfort with ambiguity. Situational leadership theory suggests that leaders must adapt their style based on the situation and a team's readiness, which often involves making decisions with limited information. I tend to prefer structured environments where outcomes are predictable. To grow as a leader I need to improve my ability to navigate ambiguity and make confident decisions even when not all variables are known.
- **Decisiveness.** Another area for improvement is decisiveness. Crisis leadership theory highlights the importance of quick decision-making during crises. I tend to deliberate

extensively, considering all possible options before making a decision. While this thoroughness can be valuable it may also lead to a reluctance to delegate. Transformational leadership requires leaders to empower their teams and delegate responsibilities effectively. I recognise the need to trust my team members more, delegate tasks, and provide them with opportunities to grow and take on leadership roles themselves.

Conclusion

this module has been instrumental in developing my understanding of leadership and decision making. By reflecting on my learning using models like Gibbs' Reflecting Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, I have gained valuable insights into my strengths and areas for improvement. Understanding and applying various leadership theories have equipped me with the skills to navigate complex businesses environments and exercise personal responsibility as a leader. Moving forward I am committed to enhancing my leadership capabilities embracing adaptability improving my ability to handle ambiguity and becoming a more decisive and empowering leader.

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