Reflective Learning Report

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Introduction

The pursuit of an MBA is not solely an academic milestone. It is a transformation of identity, perspective, and purpose. For me, the Strategic Leadership Development (SLD) journey has been pivotal in reshaping how I view leadership, not as a position of authority but as a dynamic process rooted in self-awareness, adaptability, and ethical influence. This reflective report draws upon three contrasting leadership experiences that marked key turning points in my development.

This report is guided by Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), which enables a critical examination of how my leadership competencies evolved through action, reflection, theory, and experimentation. Each situation captures a different facet of leadership in context. The first centres on collaborative navigation of pressure and conflict during the SLD group challenge. The second explores the complexity of real consulting work through a project with Walker Precision. The third offers retrospective insight, reframing a past professional experience through the ethical lens gained in the Leading a Sustainable Organisation module.

In mapping these experiences against core leadership domains like self-leadership, collaboration, ethics, emotional intelligence, and influence, this report evidences the continued evolution of my identity from a reactive participant to a reflective, strategic leader.

Situation 1: Strategic Leadership Development Group Challenge

Concrete Experience (Doing)

One of the most formative leadership moments during my MBA journey occurred in the Strategic Leadership Development (SLD) module. As part of a seven-member group, I participated in a live boardroom challenge where we were tasked with analysing a real-world organisational leadership issue and presenting strategic recommendations to a panel. Although there was no formal leader appointed, I gradually assumed a cross-functional role, initiating discussion, planning our storyline, keeping time in check, and often acting as a devil's advocate to challenge assumptions and test the robustness of our strategy.

As we progressed, our team began to encounter obstacles. Time pressure and vague direction sometimes led discussions astray. One member, in particular, frequently introduced tangents and was reluctant to contribute to core deliverables. Another exhibited dominant behaviour, pushing their ideas forcefully, which disrupted cohesion. I found myself stepping in to refocus the team, mediate tensions, and create space for balanced contributions. Although I had not formally led a team before, I realised I was guiding this one, not through authority but through influence.

Reflective Observation (Reviewing)

The situation tested several of my core leadership assumptions. I had always seen myself as a calm, analytical contributor, not someone who naturally commands a group. Yet here, I recognised a pattern that I often held back until disorder emerged and only then began structuring, organising, and guiding. While this reactive leadership helped stabilise the group, I now see that earlier intervention could have saved time and prevented disengagement.

I also noticed a tension within myself. I wanted everyone to feel heard and respected, yet I became frustrated with passive resistance and the lack of accountability from some members. I had to consciously regulate my emotional responses to maintain group harmony and avoid confrontation. Emotional regulation became central. I focused on asking clarifying questions, redirecting energy toward constructive tasks, and staying composed even when the group dynamic became strained.

Feedback after the presentation was both surprising and affirming. One teammate privately acknowledged my ability to lead the team without imposing. He recognised how I had stepped up structurally and supported others, despite my earlier self-doubt about leadership experience. His appreciation of the clarity I brought to our direction helped me reframe how I view my own leadership identity, not as underdeveloped, but emerging in a quiet and intentional form.

Abstract Conceptualisation (Theorising)

Reflecting through Kolb's lens, I now recognise that this experience exposed both emerging strengths and hidden blind spots in my leadership practice. My ability to maintain emotional regulation and redirect group tension aligns closely with Goleman's (1995) framework of emotional intelligence, particularly in the domains of self-regulation and social skill. These were essential in sustaining group cohesion under stress.

However, I now see that I over-relied on harmony and avoided early assertiveness by delaying conflict resolution that could have improved team focus. Northouse (2021) argues that effective leaders balance relationship-oriented behaviours with task orientation. I leaned too heavily on relational maintenance and underplayed task clarity until disorder forced my intervention. This imbalance limited our efficiency and revealed my hesitation to proactively lead without formal authority.

This tension also reflects a deeper ethical dilemma. Levine (2014) contends that leadership carries not just interpersonal, but moral responsibilities. By delaying confrontation with the dominating and disengaged members, I inadvertently enabled patterns of exclusion and underperformance. My desire to protect team harmony came at the cost of inclusivity and psychological safety, a lesson that has since shifted how I define ethical action in group settings.

I also found resonance with the adaptive leadership framework proposed by Heifetz et al. (2009). Adaptive leaders frame challenges, surface conflict, and facilitate learning rather than offering technical fixes. In retrospect, I exhibited adaptive tendencies, creating clarity amid uncertainty, but lacked the confidence to do so early enough. What felt like "*stepping up*" was actually late-stage problem management rather than proactive leadership. Finally, my emergent self-leadership became evident through behavioural reflection and preparation. Goldsby et al. (2021) view self-

leadership as a precursor to external influence. My use of post-meeting journaling and pre-meeting task planning helped me organise my internal processes, revealing a capacity for influence rooted not in visibility, but in intentional structure.

Active Experimentation (Applying)

This experience led to a shift in how I see myself as a leader. From waiting to be invited to lead, I now see the value in stepping forward earlier when chaos or ambiguity is likely. One action I have already taken is revising a SMART goal in my Leadership Development Plan: to initiate task framing and team structuring within the first 20 percent of any collaborative project. In our SLD challenge, my delayed intervention cost us valuable alignment time.

I also aim to develop a more collaborative conflict style, as proposed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974), where parties work together to understand underlying needs rather than just compromise. This involves strengthening my feedback-giving skills. I plan to engage in peer feedback workshops and simulations offered by the Strathclyde MBA to improve this.

Another insight I carried forward was about the power of influence without authority. In the following modules, especially the Consulting Impact Challenge, I actively leveraged facilitative leadership by bringing clarity to meetings, re-framing tensions, and coordinating tasks without dominating. This style feels authentic to me and supports the kind of culture I wish to foster in the future pharmaceutical venture I plan to lead.

Finally, this challenge affirmed the importance of team diversity and psychological safety. Drawing on Boies et al. (2015), high-performing teams thrive when members can express ideas without fear of ridicule. As a future leader, I want to build environments where dissent is not just tolerated but invited.

Conclusion of Situation 1

Through the SLD challenge, I experienced leadership as an act of navigating ambiguity, maintaining composure, and bridging diverse personalities. While I still see areas for improvement by particularly in early engagement and assertive feedback, I now understand that leadership is not about control, but about conscious contribution and adaptive alignment. This situation marked the emergence of a more confident, emotionally intelligent, and reflective leadership identity.

Situation 2: Consulting Impact Challenge – Group work

Concrete Experience (Doing)

During the Consulting Impact Challenge, which was a group work, I worked with a small, high-precision engineering firm Walker Precision Engineering (WPE) to assess how it could enhance its profitability and operational alignment. Our client operated in a niche B2B segment and was undergoing a strategic inflection point due to increased global competition and legacy system inefficiencies. This was a real-world consulting project involving team collaboration, client presentation, internal stakeholder management, and the synthesis of strategic recommendations under tight deadlines.

In this project, I assumed an informal leadership role, guiding group structure, mediating disagreements, and ensuring cohesion across deliverables. A key challenge arose midway through when the team began to fracture over disagreement on the interpretation of the client brief. While some members proposed ambitious transformation plans, others urged a conservative approach due to limited data. Tensions increased, especially when one member's aggressive tone began to demoralise others. This conflict could have derailed our progress, but I stepped in to bridge perspectives, reframe the conflict, and help the team refocus on our shared objectives.

Reflective Observation (Reviewing)

The complexity of the project exposed my limitations and growth simultaneously. I recognised that I had grown more confident in my leadership voice since the SLD module, but the context here was more intricate. It was not simply about team collaboration, but it also involved stakeholder influence, ethical decision-making, and translating ambiguity into action.

One of the most difficult moments came when our client unexpectedly challenged one of our recommendations during a live discussion. Their tone was defensive, and it created unease within our team. I realised that my own discomfort with confrontation had caused me to underprepare for this level of scrutiny. However, I also noticed how I adapted mid-conversation, summarising the client's concern calmly and steering the dialogue back to shared priorities. Later, a teammate commended me for "keeping the room together," which reinforced the importance of emotional regulation in high-stakes settings.

Equally challenging was managing team expectations. There were visible divides in working styles, while some preferred perfectionism and detail, others aimed for pragmatic delivery. I found myself repeatedly mediating between these positions. Although it was draining, I stayed committed to finding middle ground that aligned with both our academic objectives and the client's real needs.

Abstract Conceptualisation (Theorising)

Reflecting on this experience through Kolb's lens brought several theoretical insights to light. While emotional intelligence clearly played a central role, as articulated by Goleman (1995), the situation also revealed gaps that EQ alone could not address. In hindsight, I had placed too much faith in emotional awareness to bridge strategic disagreement. Yet, as Northouse (2021) contends, effective leadership requires not just interpersonal sensitivity but also clear vision and decisive communication, traits I struggled to fully embody in moments of strategic divergence.

The tension around the client brief also exposed the limits of collaborative neutrality. At first, I avoided taking a firm stance to maintain harmony. However, this backfired, leaving some team members confused and disengaged. In contrast to my instinct to harmonise, Levine (2014) argues that ethical leadership often involves moral courage: choosing clarity over comfort. My eventual decision to reframe the debate and call for evidence-based compromise reflected this principle, though delayed.

Furthermore, this episode illuminated the utility of systems leadership. Rather than viewing the conflict as interpersonal misalignment, I later understood it as a systemic failure of shared framing and information asymmetry. Senge's (1990) perspective helped me grasp how unaligned mental models can create bottlenecks in team performance. Had I applied systems thinking earlier, I might have proactively clarified our assumptions and reframed the ambiguity in the brief as a shared challenge.

Lastly, I revisited stakeholder influence through a strategic lens. Kotter's (1996) idea that leadership is fundamentally about aligning people to a vision, not controlling them, resonated deeply. In the latter half of the project, I practised this by advocating for a shared "good enough" strategy rather than aiming for conceptual perfection. This pivot, while not flawless, enabled consensus and helped preserve trust both within the team and with the client. As Daud et al. (2023) suggest, ethical leadership is not about being right but about building relational credibility through consistent integrity.

Active Experimentation (Applying)

This experience reinforced the idea that leadership does not always require authority, but it does require clarity, composure, and purpose. One action I have since taken is building structured influence into my project management style. For example, in subsequent group work, I set expectations early and introduced optional “reflection checkpoints” mid-project to check for alignment and morale. This approach draws from Boies et al.’s (2015) findings that trust and psychological safety are foundational in high-performing teams.

I also began refining my communication under pressure. Recognising my discomfort with conflict, I joined a coaching circle through the university to rehearse difficult conversations. This practice has increased my confidence in speaking truth diplomatically, even to senior stakeholders.

Furthermore, I now proactively create space for cognitive diversity. I noticed during this challenge that valuable contributions were sometimes lost because more assertive voices dominated. Going forward, I want to design meetings whether in class or work with deliberate inclusion tactics. These include round-robin sharing, silent brainstorms, and rotating facilitators. As Aust et al. (2020) argue in their work on Common Good HRM, true collaboration emerges when leaders reduce barriers to voice and create equity in decision-making forums.

This project reinforced that ethical leadership is not just about avoiding harm, it is about actively building value. By choosing to take the middle path between aggressive and passive responses, and by building bridges in moments of disconnection, I found that influence is a daily practice rather than a single act. That lesson has stayed with me.

Conclusion of Situation 2

The Consulting Impact Challenge developed a more situationally aware, ethically grounded version of my leadership. I began the project unsure of my voice but ended with the confidence to lead through influence, bridge conflicts, and uphold the team’s cohesion during a complex real-world engagement. While I continue to develop my negotiation style and communication in conflict, this experience was a clear pivot from hesitant contributor to resilient, values-driven facilitator.

Situation 3: Leading a Sustainable Organisation – Reframing My TransUnion Experience

Concrete Experience (Doing)

Before commencing my MBA, I worked as a Quality Assurance Engineer at TransUnion, where I was part of a team responsible for transitioning manual testing processes to an automated framework. At the time, management positioned the shift as an inevitable and necessary innovation for improving performance and staying competitive. However, I observed subtle but growing resistance from many colleagues. This resistance was not vocal or explicitly oppositional, but manifested as delays, incomplete adoption of new protocols, and hesitancy in training engagement. I interpreted it then as a lack of commitment or adaptability from my peers.

It wasn't until engaging with the *Leading a Sustainable Organisation* (LSO) module that I began to reflect critically on that experience. The module challenged me to reconsider the systems, assumptions, and behaviours I had previously accepted unquestioningly. It helped me reframe my TransUnion experience, not as an example of operational inefficiency, but as a case study in ethical leadership failure and the neglect of participatory management.

Reflective Observation (Reviewing)

During the LSO module, I encountered frameworks and discussions that prompted deep discomfort. They illuminated how leadership decisions especially those about change, carry implications for inclusion, voice, and psychological safety. As I revisited my TransUnion experience, I realised how easily I had overlooked these elements.

Our department's leadership was focused on efficiency and compliance. Change was implemented with minimal two-way dialogue, and success was measured in deadlines, not engagement. In retrospect, I now see that many of my colleagues' actions, which I had once labelled as passive resistance, were actually pragmatic attempts to preserve agency in a system that had excluded them. I too had been complicit. While I complied and delivered, I never questioned why the rollout felt uncollaborative or how it could have been more participatory.

The reflective lens provided by the LSO module prompted me to consider not just the impact of the change process, but the values embedded within it. I saw clearly that

leadership is not only about getting results, but about how those results are pursued. Ethical compromise in process diminishes the sustainability of outcomes.

Abstract Conceptualisation (Theorising)

This experience aligns strongly with Kolb's learning cycle, particularly in the stage of abstract conceptualisation, where raw experience is reinterpreted through theory and critical insight. Initially, I viewed my colleagues' reluctance to engage with automation as resistance to change. However, through McCabe's (2014) and Clarke's (2010) analyses of pragmatic resistance, I came to understand it as a rational, values-driven response to exclusion and fear. The apparent inefficiency was actually a form of silent protest, a feedback mechanism from those sidelined in the change process. More strikingly, I began to interrogate my own complicity. While I complied with new processes and met performance expectations, I never questioned the absence of dialogue or the top-down manner of implementation. Levine (2014) challenges us to consider ethical leadership not only in active decisions but also in silence and inaction. My failure to challenge the approach, despite sensing discomfort in the team, constituted an ethical omission, what Levine terms "ethical passivity."

This insight made Brown and Treviño's (2006) framework on ethical leadership particularly resonant. They emphasise alignment between stated values and enacted behaviours. In TransUnion's case, management espoused innovation and empowerment while enforcing rigid compliance without feedback structures. This disconnects undermined trust and psychological safety, eroding the social foundations necessary for sustainable change. The situation also illuminated the value of systems thinking. At the time, I attributed team disengagement to individual attitudes, but Senge (1990) argues that patterns of resistance often stem from system-level dysfunctions. Only later did I grasp how siloed communication, lack of cross-functional alignment, and an absence of participatory mechanisms contributed to organisational inertia. This shift from blaming individuals to diagnosing systemic breakdown was transformative.

Finally, the LSO module's emphasis on Common Good HRM (Aust et al., 2020) expanded my ethical vocabulary. It repositioned leadership not as a transactional coordination of tasks but as a moral and relational endeavour. What was once an "efficiency project" I now understand as a missed opportunity for dignity-preserving, participatory change.

Active Experimentation (Applying)

This retrospective learning changed not only how I understand past events, but how I intend to lead in the future. I now believe that sustainable leadership is less about control and more about co-creation. In my future entrepreneurial journey, I plan to build organisations where change is collaborative, and where resistance is invited as a form of feedback rather than suppressed.

To put this into action, I have already begun documenting a set of personal leadership principles informed by the LSO module. These include: "*resistance is insight," "voice before velocity,"* and *"accountability is shared."* I intend to use these principles to guide my decision-making and team interactions, particularly as I begin developing a pharmaceutical venture in India.

Furthermore, I am applying participatory design in my academic group projects. I now open group discussions with shared agreement on roles, norms, and feedback structures. This has led to smoother collaboration and increased ownership from all members. I have also started engaging with content on decent and fair work (ILO, 2021) and exploring how I can embed those values structurally, not just behaviourally. For example, in future roles, I will advocate for employee representation in decision-making forums, transparent upskilling pathways, and inclusive feedback loops.

Finally, I continue to reflect regularly. I've adopted a weekly journaling practice to assess whether my leadership decisions align with ethical and sustainable principles. I now see leadership as a moral practice, not just a strategic one. This commitment to reflection has strengthened my emotional intelligence and self-awareness, two domains I now consider essential to effective leadership.

Conclusion of Situation 3

The LSO module reframed a familiar experience into a deep leadership awakening. It helped me understand the ethical and systemic dimensions of change, moving me from judgement to empathy, from compliance to critical thinking. I now view sustainable leadership not just as a skillset, but as a value system rooted in dignity, equity, and dialogue. What I once saw as a technical process, I now understand as a relational and ethical responsibility. I aim to carry this awareness forward with greater care and accountability.

Conclusion

Engaging with the Strategic Leadership Development journey has catalysed a deep shift in how I perceive, practice, and pursue leadership. Through the three contrasting situations which are team-based ambiguity in the SLD challenge, live stakeholder engagement in a consulting project, and a critical ethical re-evaluation of my past organisational role, I have moved from being a reactive contributor to an intentional, systems-aware, and ethically grounded leader.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle proved to be more than a model, it became a method of inquiry. It enabled me to convert discomfort into awareness, reflection into strategy, and missteps into growth. Each stage such as doing, reviewing, conceptualising, and experimenting have revealed how leadership is not a static trait, but a disciplined, iterative practice.

Equally, the lens of systems thinking (Senge, 1990) has profoundly altered how I approach problems. I now see leadership failures not merely as individual oversights but as emergent outcomes of flawed structures, misaligned incentives, and broken feedback loops. This has shaped my resolve to become a leader who diagnoses context before prescribing action.

Above all, I have come to understand leadership as a moral responsibility. As Levine (2014) reminds us, it is not only what leaders do, but what they allow, enable, or ignore that shapes organisational culture. In my future venture, I aim to lead with a commitment to voice, equity, and values-in-action. My leadership philosophy now centres on co-creation over control, reflection over reaction, and inclusion over expedience.

This report is not a conclusion but a recalibration. I will continue integrating feedback, challenging assumptions, and embedding reflective routines into both entrepreneurial and organisational spaces. Strategic leadership, for me, is no longer just about delivering outcomes but is about shaping cultures where people are respected, feedback is systematised, and ethical clarity drives strategic intent.

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