

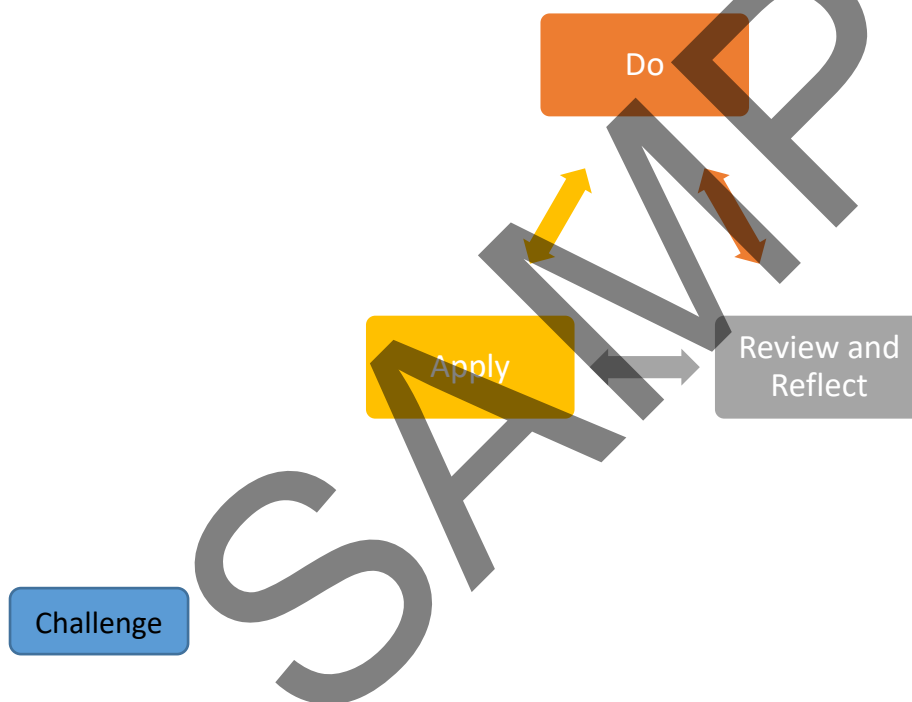
## The Value and Purpose of Reflection

A lot of critical thinking relates to learning. That is, learning more about situations, possibilities, and options, along with learning new ways to resolve problems. Reflective practice provides a systematic way of making sense of experience, developing, and embedding learning and refining thinking, particularly in complex situations requiring a significant evaluation or examination of multiple options.

### Structuring Reflective Practice and Sense-Making

Through systematically reflecting, you can make significant improvements. Taking time to reflect will reap dividends in terms of improving your overall performance. The reflective cycle represents a simple structure for the ongoing process of reflection and review, enabling thorough consideration of your application of critical thinking and the judgements made and implemented. In other words, consider how you might have approached an issue differently, followed by a reapplication of the learning in a similar context.

The diagram below shows the reflective process/cycle:



Using structured reflection to make sense of experience

- Think of a relatively complex situation you have recently been involved in at work. Define your involvement and the actions taken (i.e. the 'Do' element of the Reflective Cycle)
- Capture your review and reflect on how you approached the situation and the outcomes. Consider, for example:
  - What went well?
  - What could have been more thorough?

- What was not done so well?
- What options were missed?
- How effectively were resources deployed?
- How effectively was the critical thinking undertaken?
- Were the judgements made underpinned by evidence? If not, what evidence could have been gathered?

c) Outline what you would do differently in future as a result of your reflection.

## The Value of Discussion in Resolving Problems

In the last activity, you will have experienced the value of reflection in making sense of experience for improving performance and decision-making through the future application of the learning associated with contemplative reflection. But what about resolving problems in the here and now? That is where the discussion becomes invaluable.

Question

How is discussion able to provide practical problem-solving?

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As the saying goes, 'a problem shared is a problem halved'. This holds true. Two or more brains applying thinking power to a problem significantly increases the possibilities of finding an optimum solution to a problem. People contribute different experiences, different levels of knowledge and different ways of thinking to the discussion, all illuminating possibilities and options for problem resolution. The diversity that others bring promotes consideration of alternative perspectives and enables a broader range of possibilities to be explored.

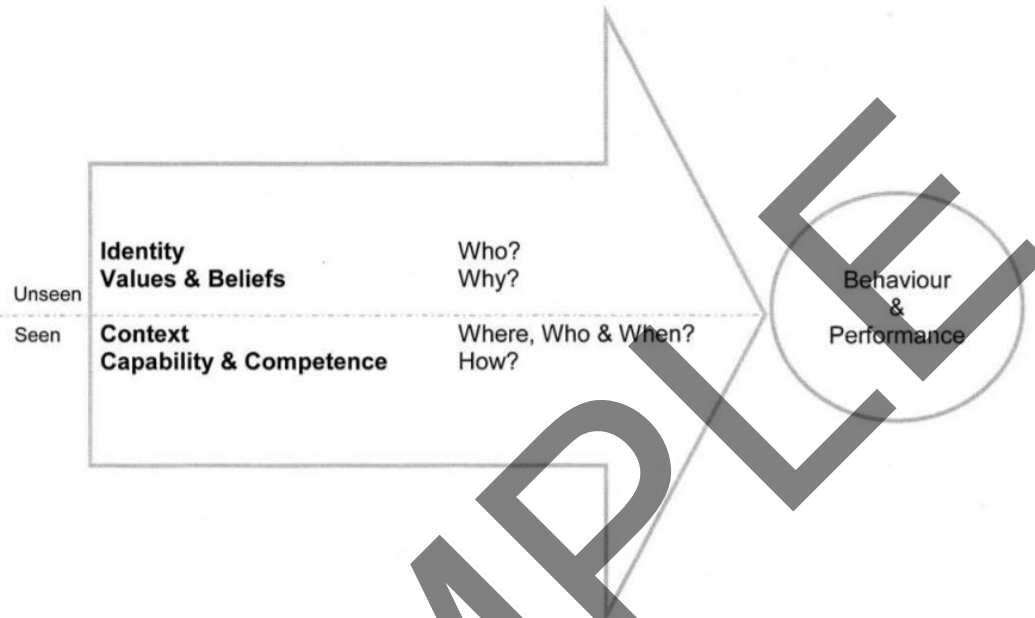
## How Emotions, Attitudes, Values & Beliefs Affect Rational Discourse

Values and beliefs sit right at the root of what drives someone to operate and interact the way they do. Virtually everything people do, including their contribution to discussion and rational discourse, is governed, and regulated by their belief systems, associated values and how they see themselves - their identity. Identity sits right at the core of what makes a person who they are. It incorporates their values, beliefs, accompanying characteristics, experience, and perceptions. To help differentiate between values and beliefs, ask:

**'Is this something I aspire to or aim to be like?' This reveals a value.**

**'Is this something I consider to be true and act accordingly?' This reveals a belief.**

Beliefs are formed based on experience and help us make sense of the world. People pay attention to what they believe is important and disregard what they consider unimportant. In this respect, beliefs act as filters. People's belief systems in the workplace are important to driving the business's success, as it is beliefs that drive our behaviour. Henry Ford famously emphasised this by saying, 'whether you believe you can or you believe you can't, you're probably right'. The link between behaviour and performance is illustrated in the following diagram:



Layers of Human Behaviour & Performance

Beliefs drive behaviour but 'limiting beliefs', and the way reality is interpreted shape our performance in the workplace - i.e. perceptions - are often what prevent most people from achieving their true potential. If you hear, for example, someone says, 'I can't speak in public' it is likely to be a self-limiting belief (and a self-fulfilling prophecy). In stating that they cannot speak in public, the person is creating an environment in which it is acceptable for them not to try. In other words, because we accept that we cannot do something, we choose not to put ourselves in that position. Limiting beliefs may prevent people from exploring options for problem resolution because the limiting belief has made them assume that a particular solution is not viable.

Values are essentially standards and conditions that relate to what you consider important and necessary for you to be content and satisfied. It is essential and highly productive to have goals that are congruent with individuals' values - i.e. consistent with what is important to them- which will lead to conviction and leaps in levels of achievement. Goals not consistent with personal values cause frustration, internal conflict, and anxiety. Indeed, if people's accomplishments are not in line with their values, they will have little significance, will not attract high levels of satisfaction, and will be energy sapping. People are likely to avoid involvement in an activity that does not align with their values, which may impact their contribution to the problem-solving discourse.

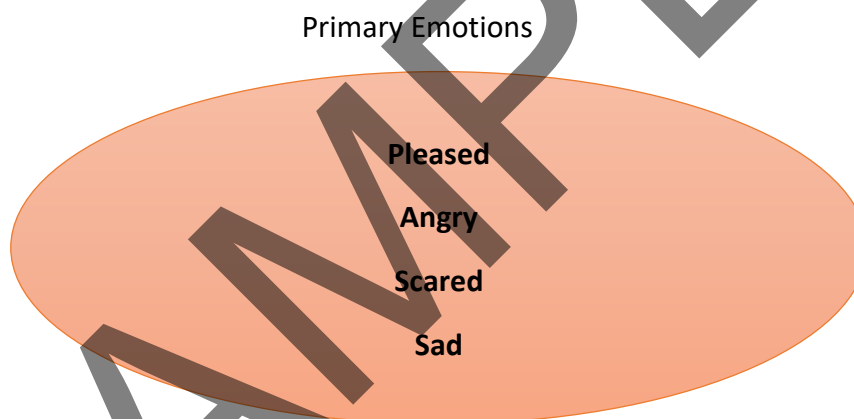
Attitudes are personal views - *an opinion or general feeling about something* (Encarta Dictionary).

Attitudes of individuals at work can be positive or negative, helpful, or unhelpful. Individuals' attitudes will affect their contribution and involvement in dialogue and rational discourse. In extremis, a person with an unhelpful attitude could cause decision-making to be sub-optimal or erroneous through failure to disclose information or being obstructive.

Emotions are strong feelings about somebody or something (Encarta Dictionary). The main difference between feelings and emotions is that an external factor induces feelings, whereas emotions can be entirely internalised. Many decisions and contributions to the dialogue we make are made because of how we feel or expect to feel. Emotions can stunt or disrupt clear thinking. Moreover, emotions have the potential to unite and create bonds between people and negative feelings can be viewed as indicators of unfulfilled emotional needs.

## Understanding Emotional Literacy

To be effective, we need to be able to identify and label emotions as we experience them. We have hundreds of thoughts, but despite having lots of different labels and levels of intensity, our emotions are generally within four broad categories - our primary emotions:



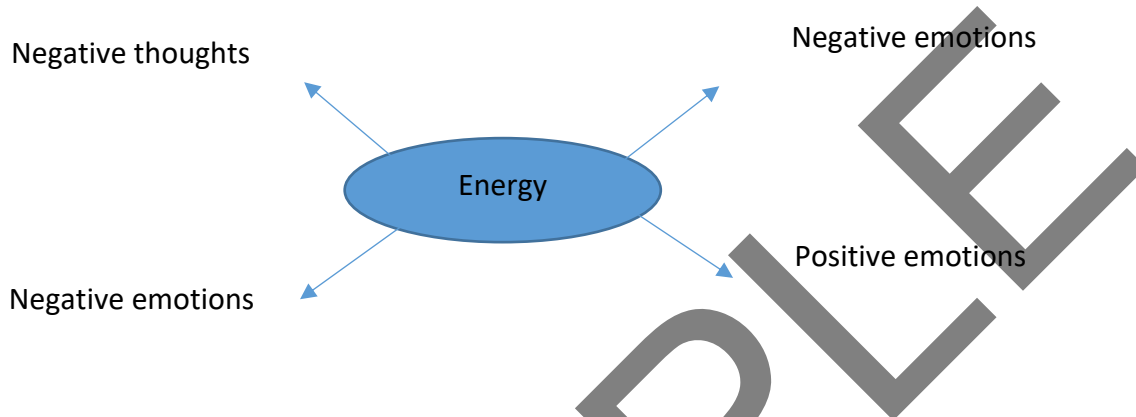
Recognising when we feel these emotions is how we can focus on developing our responses to become more adept at handling emotions. Recognising the emotional states of others is a vital skill for managers. It is perfectly normal to experience emotions at work.

### Example

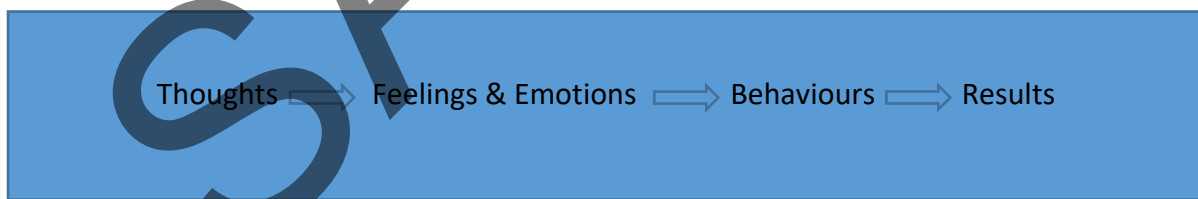
- Feeling happy with a job well done
- Worrying about an uncertainty
- Irritation with others
- Positive thoughts
- Being angry with rude customers.

It is relatively evident that positive emotions make us more productive and effective. However, negative emotions are a reality, and the objective should be to recognise a negative emotion and move through and

away from it quickly. Emotions are an outward expression of what we think and believe. It is tempting to believe that the external cause creates the emotion, but our thoughts and how we respond, cause the emotional reaction. Emotions are an expression of how we think. All emotion is, is energy in motion (e-motion).



Emotions experienced by an average healthy person result from thoughts that they have before they experience the feeling. Some thoughts may be conscious, and some unconscious. You can make a choice about your thoughts and about how you react to an experienced emotion. Choice Theory (Dr William Glasser, 1999) asserts that you feel a particular way because you have chosen to feel that way.



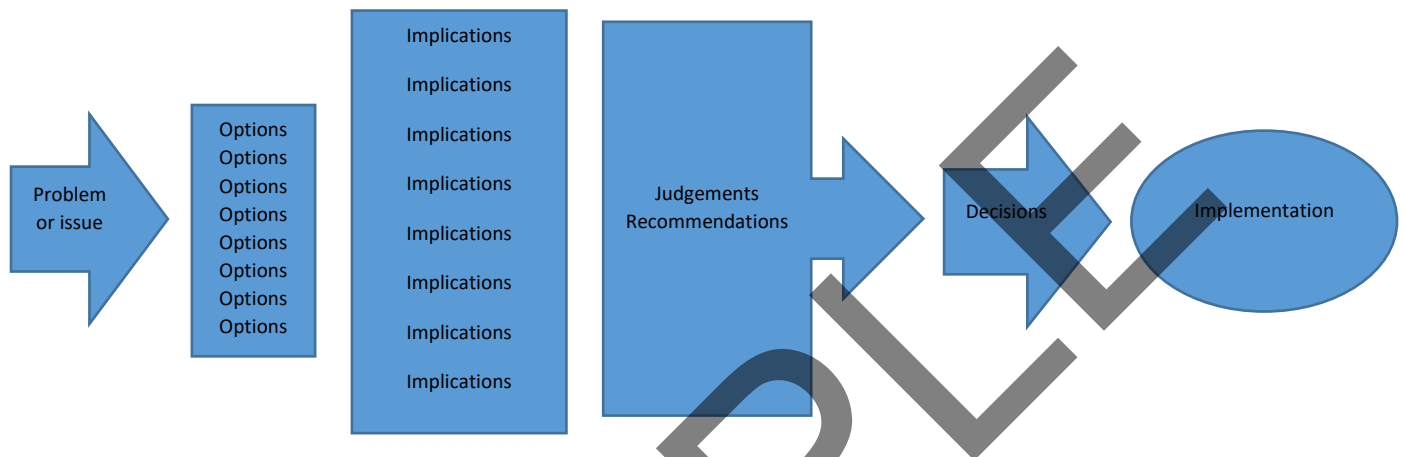
There is something significant in recognising that how we make people feel at work will affect their behaviours, positively or adversely affecting what we are trying to achieve. Feelings and emotions will be the root of what drives the quality of critical thinking developed and applied in the workplace.

### Identifying and Evaluating Alternative Options and Propositions Critically

It is often surprising how difficult it can be to identify and develop a range of options for meeting the identified need and then justify the need. By using the options model (below) as a framework for identifying

and developing options, you can be confident that you will be less likely to miss things. Evaluating the range of strategic options requires the application of sound judgement. There are many different tools and techniques that can be used, including decision-making grids and Force Field Analysis. First, however, let us consider the Pathways to Decisions (sometimes called the Pathways to Change) Model below:

### Pathways to Decisions/Change Model (A critical thinking process model)



#### What? Why? When? Where? How?

This Model highlights that managers need to consider a broad range of options in responding to identified problems. Once all the options have been fully developed, each potential solution needs to be evaluated to determine the most viable. There are several ways of doing this, including, for example, decision-making grids.

Judgement needs to be applied in making recommendations and/or decisions. The final stage of the process is the implementation of the decision. 'What, where, when, how and why' relates to asking questions to broaden the range of options and to draw in all the implications, such as:

- What have we missed?
- How do other organisations do this?
- Why are we doing it that way?
- What if we...?
- Where could we do that...?
- How would we do that?
- What would be involved?
- What would or might happen if ...? . Etc.

#### Techniques for Comparing and Evaluating Alternative Propositions Critically

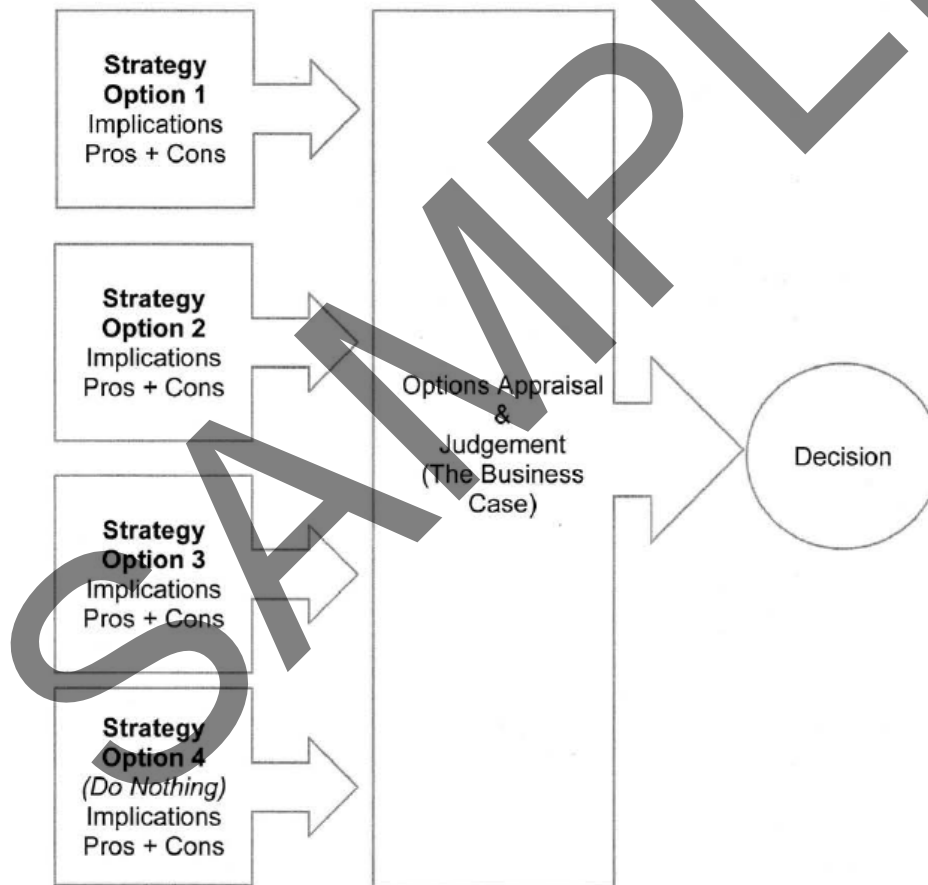
Having generated ideas and considered the various options, the next stage would be to evaluate and justify the preferred solution. This typically involves setting out the available, viable options and making a recommendation for one strategy. One option that should be considered is the 'do nothing' option: maintaining the 'status quo'.

This may seem strange in the context of a need or problem that requires resolution. It is possible that, for example, the cost to change might be disproportionate to the benefit derived from the change. Consequently, a value judgement regarding the benefit must be made.

In larger organisations and companies, many decisions are subject to a formal evaluation process known as an Options Appraisal. This particular approach may be enshrined in a change or project management process. It is also worth reflecting on whether the presented options are consistent with the company or organisation's vision or mission statement.

All options must be carefully considered to fully appreciate the pros and cons (the implications) in an appraisal and decide which strategy to adopt. Usually, a significant change would require a Business Case in which the options would be set out in business terms and a recommendation made to the decision maker(s) based on the business interest. A significant shift in strategy will likely require a change project to be initiated.

The diagram below shows the process:



The Process for Consideration of Options (AH Raymondson, 2014)