Knowledge Reflection

As I reflect on the knowledge I’ve gained throughout my graduate experience, two artifacts stand out as particularly transformative they are my Organizational Systems paper and concept map on retail banking, and my Human Resource Management research project on the EEOC v. Walmart case. These two projects display the reason I wanted to be on a leadership journey. Not just for my academic and personal development but to make a difference in professional workplaces. These assignments provided not only opportunities for theoretical exploration but real-life application that molded how I view leadership, systems, and human capital management.

During the development of these artifacts, it became more than completing assignments—it became about changing my viewpoints and beliefs in corporate work environments. When I was creating the concept map, I realized I had spent over a decade in the banking industry but had never taken the time to dissect the intricacy of its systems. The most unforeseen aspect of this artifact had to be uncovering how much every operational process—vault access, cash flow, dual control, and compliance—was interconnected and how even tiny disruptions could lead to bigger inefficiencies. Often frontline employees carry the weight of complex systems, customer satisfaction and financial compliance and leadership may not fully see or appreciate the mental workload that goes into those efforts.

In contrast, examining the Marlo Spaeth case was emotionally stimulating and intellectually motivating. I defiantly did not expect to feel so connected to the articles and reports I read, but as I studied more about the legal, ethical, and emotional repercussions of Walmart’s failure to accommodate an employee with Down syndrome, I developed a passion for disability inclusion and compliance training. A positive aspect from this assignment was learning that I want to be a human resources leader who builds systems that respect, empower, and protect all employees.

The theoretical complexity of both artifacts helped me take in core leadership and organizational behavior concepts and relate them to practical workforce problems. While creating the retail banking concept map, I used Weisbord’s (2011) systems thinking model, this taught me that “to change a system, take into account economics and technology by involving all stakeholders.” I had to sit with this concept for a while because banking operations is often dictated by compliance and efficiency, but the people running the systems—the tellers and support staff—are almost always left out of decision-making. It was then I realized how frequently leadership makes operational changes without engaging the very people those changes affect.

This relates closely to Kurt Lewin’s field theory, where he states that behavior is a function of the person and their environment. In banking, when personnel are not sufficiently informed or integrated into procedural changes, it interrupts not only workflow but morale. Lewin’s change management model—unfreeze, change, refreeze—also became acutely relevant as I imagined how to shift outdated practices toward more modern and all-encompassing systems, specifically through communication and training.

In the HRM research project, I studied the EEOC v. Walmart case, which presented a unusual kind of systems breakdown—a failure in leadership empathy and legal responsibility. Regardless of her excellent work history and positive performance reviews, Marlo Spaeth was let go because the company failed to accommodate a simple schedule modification. This wasn’t just a misstep; it was a failure to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and demonstrated lack of emotional intelligence at the management level.

Reading the case made me consider Theory Y leadership from Douglas McGregor, which theorizes that people will perform well when they are trusted, supported, and involved. Marlo's circumstances directly contradicted this philosophy. Her routine was predictable, her work performance was dependable, and her requests were sensible. Walmart’s managers failed to honor her requests not because they were compelled by policy, but because they didn’t see the significance in modifying the system for an individual. Consequently, the organization faced a public lawsuit, reputational damage, and financial loss. More significantly, they lost a dedicated employee. This case helped me understand the importance of inclusive leadership, legal literacy, and human-centered management. The biggest lesson I learned that compliance does not mean equity. Simply because a policy exists does not mean it is applied fairly—or at all. That accolade changed how I will assess HR policy in my own career.

These artifacts taught me that leadership must go outside process implementation and into procedural design and ethical decision-making. I now view leadership as a blend of technical skill, legal and ethical responsibility, and emotional intelligence. Operational oversight must be matched with empathy, specifically in roles that aid diverse populations with different needs and abilities. Another takeaway from these artifacts is that pre-emptive leadership matters more than reactive compliance. Organizations that are stalled to address inequities until legal action has begun have already lost the chance to demonstrate their values and retain their people. Conversely, when leaders foresee potential obstructions—whether it is technology, operations, or accommodation—they form cultures of trust, performance, and innovation.

At a former company, I noticed that new hires were having a hard time adjusting and feeling supported. Without accepting that high turnover as inevitable, I started a mentorship program that matched experienced team members with incoming employees. The program incorporated guidance for mentors, feedback loops, and association with onboarding strategies. Not only did engagement grow, but morale and cross-departmental confidence improved as well. Senior staff had a renewed purpose, and junior staff felt heard. That ingenuity, though small, was formed on the principles I discovered in both artifacts—inclusivity, structure, emotional intelligence, and stakeholder alignment.

Short-term, I will take these lessons and improve the leadership coaching framework for frontline managers that incorporates modules on compliance, emotional intelligence, and employee support. I also plan to join conferences dedicated to inclusive leadership and HR innovation to continue developing my understanding of best practices.

Long-term, I plan to earn my SHRM-SCP certification and work towards a doctoral degree in Organizational Leadership or Human Resources. My vision is to lead enterprise-wide initiatives that improve outdated processes and uplift ethical leadership in measurable ways. I also desire to mentor others—especially women and underrepresented professionals—so they can see themselves in areas of influence and impact. These artifacts didn’t only teach me how to finish projects; they reformatted my mindset as a leader. The artifacts taught me how systems operate, where they fail, and how leadership can both propagate or disrupt dysfunction. They revealed to me the value of proactive, inclusive, and strategic thinking when designing systems that serve people, not just policies.

As I move onward, I hope lead with a systems mindset and a servant’s heart. I will advocate for transparency, inclusion, and foresight. I plan to take the lessons from these artifacts into every boardroom, training room, and team meeting I attend. Because leadership is not about having all the answers—it’s about producing environments where the right questions are asked, and all voices are valued.

**References**

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