

How Self-Awareness Shapes Decision-Making in Leadership

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Abstract: *Self-awareness may influence how leaders interpret information, evaluate alternatives, and approach decisions under uncertainty. This study explored the association between reflective practice, used as an indicator of self-awareness, and rational and intuitive decision-making styles among managers and senior-level leaders. A quantitative, cross-sectional exploratory design was used with questionnaire responses from 73 respondents. Reflective practice was assessed with a 10-item Reflective Practice Questionnaire, and decision-making styles were assessed with a 10-item Rational and Intuitive Decision Styles Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and exploratory Pearson correlations were examined. The mean reflective practice score was 3.96 (SD = 0.30) on a six-point scale. The mean rational decision-making score was 4.49 (SD = 0.41), and the mean intuitive decision-making score was 3.65 (SD = 0.18), both on five-point scales. The preliminary analysis indicated a positive association between reflective practice and rational decision-making ($r = 0.885$) and a negative association between reflective practice and intuitive decision-making ($r = -0.359$). These estimates are provisional: data-related anomalies were identified, and the reliability estimate for the intuitive items was unsatisfactory. The cross-sectional, self-report design does not establish causation, and the results should not be generalised beyond the sample. The study offers an initial basis for further investigation, but the records, scoring procedures, and measurement properties should be verified before the correlations are treated as stable findings. Future research should use validated instruments, larger and more diverse samples, and complementary qualitative or longitudinal methods.*

Keywords: self-awareness; reflective practice; leadership; rational decision-making; intuitive decision-making

1. Introduction

Leadership requires decisions in conditions that often include incomplete information, competing priorities, time pressure, and uncertainty. Decision-making is not solely a technical process: it is also affected by how people interpret events, understand their own reactions, and evaluate information. Leaders may be influenced by prior experience, assumptions, emotional responses, organisational expectations, and preferred ways of thinking. Understanding these influences is relevant to leadership development because decision style can shape how a problem is framed, which information is considered, and how alternatives are assessed.

Self-awareness is a broad construct that includes recognising one's thoughts, emotions, motives, assumptions, strengths, limitations, and behavioural tendencies. It is not a single, uniformly defined capacity; its meaning varies according to whether the focus is on internal experience, how a person is perceived by others, or the processes through which self-knowledge is developed [1]. In leadership contexts, self-awareness may help individuals notice habitual reactions and question whether their judgements are being shaped by unexamined assumptions. However, the presence of self-reflection does not automatically guarantee accurate self-knowledge or better decisions.

Reflective practice provides one way to examine this relationship. Schön described how professionals reflect during action and review their experiences afterwards to improve future practice [2]. Experiential learning theory similarly positions reflective observation as part of a cycle linking experience, conceptual understanding, and subsequent action [3]. The Reflective Practice Questionnaire has been developed and further refined as a measure of

reflective practice, including a 10-item version relevant to concise survey research [4]. In the present study, reflective practice is treated as an indicator related to self-awareness, rather than as a complete measure of every dimension of self-awareness.

Decision-making research commonly distinguishes rational and intuitive styles. Rational decision-making typically involves systematic information gathering, comparison of alternatives, and evaluation of likely consequences. Yet rationality is constrained by limited time, information, and cognitive capacity [5]. Intuitive decision-making involves rapid impressions or pattern recognition and may be useful when based on relevant experience and feedback; it should not automatically be equated with irrationality [6,7]. These approaches may complement one another, depending on the task and context. The Rational and Intuitive Decision Styles Scale was developed to assess these styles as distinct dimensions [8].

Although self-awareness and reflection are frequently discussed in leadership development, the empirical relationship between reflective practice and reported decision-making styles merits further examination. The present study therefore explored whether reflective practice was associated with rational and intuitive decision-making among managers and senior-level leaders. The analysis was exploratory and was not designed to establish causal effects or to evaluate the quality of actual leadership decisions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design and Participants

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, questionnaire-based design. The dataset comprised 73 online responses

from managers and senior-level leaders working in different organisations and industry sectors in Bengaluru, India. The analysis examined the respondents as a single exploratory sample. Because the design was cross-sectional, the variables were measured at one point in time and no temporal or causal relationship could be established.

2.2 Measures

Reflective practice was assessed using a 10-item Reflective Practice Questionnaire (RPQ), with scores recorded on a six-point response scale. Decision-making styles were assessed using a 10-item Rational and Intuitive Decision Styles Questionnaire, with rational and intuitive items scored as separate dimensions on five-point response scales. The two decision-making dimensions were not combined into a single total score. The questionnaire measures capture self-reported tendencies and do not directly measure decision accuracy, leadership effectiveness, emotional regulation, or organisational performance.

2.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the mean and standard deviation for each measure. Exploratory Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to examine the direction and strength of linear associations between reflective practice and each decision-making style. The correlations are reported as preliminary estimates. Data-related anomalies were identified during review of the records, and the reliability estimate for the intuitive decision-making items was unsatisfactory. These concerns limit confidence in the stability and interpretation of the estimates. The results should therefore be verified against the original response records and scoring rules before being treated as final.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive results

The mean reflective practice score was 3.96 (SD = 0.30) on a six-point scale. The mean rational decision-making score was 4.49 (SD = 0.41), and the mean intuitive decision-making score was 3.65 (SD = 0.18) on five-point scales. These descriptive values summarise the reported responses in this sample. Because the measures use different scale ranges and represent different constructs, the mean scores should not be compared as though they were on a common metric or interpreted as direct evidence of decision quality.

3.2 Associations between reflective practice and decision-making styles

The exploratory correlation analysis indicated a positive association between reflective practice and rational decision-making ($r = 0.885$). Within this dataset, respondents reporting higher reflective-practice scores also tended to report a stronger rational decision-making orientation. One possible interpretation is that reflective practice may co-occur with a preference for examining assumptions, considering alternatives, and evaluating information before reaching a judgement. The design does not, however, show

that reflection produces rationality, nor does it establish that a rational style leads to more effective outcomes.

A negative association was observed between reflective practice and intuitive decision-making ($r = -0.359$). This estimate suggests that higher reflective-practice scores tended to accompany lower reported intuitive-style scores in the sample. The relationship should not be read as evidence that intuition is undesirable. Intuition can support rapid judgement in familiar environments where experience provides reliable patterns, while analytic evaluation may be valuable when decisions are novel, consequential, or open to systematic comparison [6,7]. The present data cannot determine whether respondents used these approaches in combination or whether either approach was more successful.

3.3 Measurement and interpretation cautions

The strength of the positive correlation warrants particular caution in view of the data-related anomalies identified during review. The intuitive-item reliability estimate was also unsatisfactory, which weakens confidence in interpreting the intuitive score and its correlation with reflective practice. Before drawing firm conclusions, the original response records should be checked for completeness, duplicate or repeated response profiles, correct item alignment, reverse scoring where applicable, and accurate calculation of composite scores. The instrument versions and scoring procedures should be documented clearly. If the estimates change after verification, the results and abstract should be updated accordingly.

These qualifications are central to the study rather than incidental. Pearson correlations describe linear associations in the observed data; they do not establish causality and may be affected by influential observations, restricted variability, measurement error, and data quality. The relatively small sample and use of self-report measures also limit generalisability. In addition, the study did not directly assess the effectiveness of leadership decisions. Consequently, the findings should be regarded as provisional and should not be used to assess individual leaders or to claim that one decision-making style is universally superior.

3.4 Implications and future research

Despite these limitations, the study identifies a question worth investigating: whether people who report more frequent reflective practice also report different preferences for rational and intuitive decision-making. Future research should begin with verified data and validated scoring procedures, followed by replication with larger and more diverse samples across organisational settings and leadership levels. Researchers should report reliability estimates for each dimension, inspect distributions and scatterplots, assess influential observations, and provide confidence intervals and significance tests where appropriate. Qualitative interviews could clarify how leaders describe reflection and intuition in actual decisions, while longitudinal or intervention designs could investigate whether changes in reflective practice are associated with changes in decision-making over time.

An extended version of the Reflective Practice Questionnaire may be useful if it matches the research question and its validity and scoring procedures are established. In practice, structured post-decision reviews, examination of assumptions, and consideration of alternative explanations may be worthwhile leadership-development activities, but their effectiveness was not tested in this study. Any practical recommendation should therefore be framed as a possibility for further evaluation, not as an outcome demonstrated by the current data.

4. Conclusion

This preliminary study examined the relationship between reflective practice and rational and intuitive decision-making styles among 73 managers and senior-level leaders. The descriptive results showed mean scores of 3.96 for reflective practice, 4.49 for rational decision-making, and 3.65 for intuitive decision-making. Exploratory correlations indicated a positive association between reflective practice and rational decision-making ($r = 0.885$) and a negative association with intuitive decision-making ($r = -0.359$). These patterns offer an initial basis for further research but are not conclusive. Data-related anomalies and an unsatisfactory reliability estimate for the intuitive items mean that the records, scoring, and estimates require verification and replication. The cross-sectional self-report design cannot establish causation or demonstrate that either decision-making style improves leadership outcomes. The study is best viewed as first-level exploratory research. Future studies should use verified records, validated instruments, larger samples, and complementary methods to clarify whether and how reflective practice is related to decision-making styles in leadership.

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Tables

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the study variables

Variable	Scale range	Mean	Standard deviation
Reflective practice (RPQ)	1–6	3.96	0.30
Rational decision-making	1–5	4.49	0.41
Intuitive decision-making	1–5	3.65	0.18

Table 2: Preliminary Pearson correlations

Variable pair	Pearson r	Interpretive status
Reflective practice and rational decision-making	0.885	Positive; provisional
Reflective practice and intuitive decision-making	-0.359	Negative; provisional