

Critical Thinking

Objectives:

- ✓ Dissect what it means to think “critically”
- ✓ Explore ways to investigate your environment
- ✓ Translate Bloom’s Taxonomy into work-related & personal development tasks
- ✓ Relate the decision making model to everyday decisions

Advance Preparation:

- ✓ Review the facilitator notes given below and the attached handout on the Draw Bridge Activity, Bloom’s Taxonomy and case study scenarios

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Computer with projector for Powerpoint slides
- ✓ Copies of attached handouts per participant (Attachments 1-3)
- ✓ Package of index cards
- ✓ Dry erase markers – one per group of 3 – 4 people
- ✓ One pad of Post-It sheets for groups to write scenario solutions
- ✓ The enclosed PowerPoint Presentation

Time Needed: 80 minutes

- ✓ Make copies of case scenarios for each group to have a copy of one scenario to work on in groups
- ✓ Be prepared to listen without judgment to responses given by participants

BACKGROUND

Brookfield (1987) has done a wealth of research into integrating critical thinking and adult learning. His approach is focused in two areas: 1. How people think and 2.

Guidelines for directing thinking. His Brookfield’s approach consists of five steps:

1. Process of critical thinking is person specific given personality traits and cultural background of each person
2. Emotions are central to the process
3. Intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for critical thinking are both important
4. Critical insight often occurs unexpectedly
5. Peer support is crucial for the process to become a habitual behavior

He also lists these guidelines for directing this behavior for facilitators: There’s no standard model of facilitation, diversity in methods and materials is necessary, perfection is impossible for this to work, learner satisfaction is not the sole aim, and risk taking is imperative.

Knowing this background information allows us to look closer at the role of a facilitator. This is an important concept when we are trying to get a group to “think critically.” The role of a facilitator is to offer and encourage enthusiasm about critical thinking. This is done by ensuring that the group conversation is moving and participants are comfortable volunteering their thoughts. This is also done by encouraging participants to challenge any and all assumptions. Other roles include:

1. Help people learn by choosing activities that stimulate critical examinations and that ask participants to practice analytical thinking

2. Be prepared to listen when discussion takes place
3. Don't be afraid to learn from your participants
4. Emphasize the benefits of participating and using critical thinking skills – both positive and negatives
5. Have open discussions on perceptions and fears of critical thinking

INTEREST APPROACH (15 minutes)

Give each participant a note card when they enter the session. Have each participant reflect on the rules their parents set for them that shaped their childhood experiences. After they have done this, ask them to write down one of the rules they broke most frequently.

Once everyone has written down their rule, collect the cards and select a few to share. As the rule is read, have the individuals explore the following questions:

- Context the rule was given in (why was the rule made?)
- Ask the sharing participant to share their initial perception of the rule and their current perception
- Discuss the relevance, usefulness and importance of the rule with the large group

To close out the activity, point out that:

- Perceptions change with experience, context and perspective
- Reflection is needed to gain perspective and to think critically
- Emphasize that participating in this discussion is part of the critical thinking process

An optional activity (The Drawbridge Activity – Attachment 1) is also enclosed.

LESSON (35 minutes)

1. Distribute copies of the attached presentation on critical thinking for participants to take notes on while discussing the main points of the presentation
2. Move to the presentation with slide 2 asking the question, "what is critical thinking?"
3. Ask the participants for definitions of what critical thinking is, are there steps involved, what should the end result be
4. Refer back to the presentation, moving to slide 3-4 being the definition provided by Brookfield & Knox (1987) and www.criticalthinking.org Brookfield & Knox (1987) define it as ". . . calling into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways of thinking and acting and then being ready to think and act differently on the basis of this critical questioning." According to experts at criticalthinking.org critical thinking is, ". . . mode of thinking – about any subject, content, or problem – in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structure inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them." Discuss with the group that this provides a framework for what critical thinking is, but ask how it functions within a group
5. Discuss what critical thinking is not with groups of individuals by defining "group think" on slide 5
 - Here emphasize the importance of individuality and perspective when it comes to challenging values, attitudes and more importantly behavior

- Discuss the definition of group think in the context of thinking like others in the group or echoing their sentiments is not always thinking critically as a group
- 6. Provide an overview of what skills are necessary for critical thinking given on slide 6 – with more explanation of each of those skills in the slides to follow
- 7. Discuss the roles of the following things in slides 7-11:
 - a. Concept of emancipatory learning – the importance of independent thought
 - b. Critical thinking in adult life
 - c. Listening being a key aspect in order to gain insight into an issue and reflect on the problem and possible solutions
 - d. Affirmation from others regarding the challenging of attitudes & behaviors – although difficult at times, is necessary in order to achieve change
 - e. Critical questioning: needed in order to get to the root of the issue and acquire needed information
 - f. Why analyze the information you get – because you will not be able to determine success or failure
 - i. This becomes the basis of the decision made to change the behavior, attitude, value or culture
 - g. Emotion arises when challenging things people hold dear (beliefs, values, etc)
 - i. Need to be aware of what triggers your responses to things
 - ii. Need to understand why people hold this behavior or value in high esteem
- 8. Review how to recognize when “critical thinking” is taking place in slides 12 & 13
 - a. Discuss the myths/truths about critical thinking – consider doing this one column at a time with the animation on PowerPoint
 - b. Ask participants to identify some others from their work or home environments
 - c. Take a closer look at what else is included in critical thinking slide 13
- 9. Describe the four phases of critical thinking outline on slides 14-20
 - a. Each of the slides following slide 13 gives more detail and explanation of what each phase entails
 - b. Slide 16 specifically covers types of questions used to explore a situation – each question can be classified into one of these categories (similar to Bloom’s Taxonomy)
 - c. If time permits, after discussing slide 16, add some discussion on Bloom’s Taxonomy and how it can be used
 - d. Slide 20 goes into more detail into how to adapt solutions given in one context can be used in another situation that might be similar
- 10. Once slide 20 is completed, be prepared to move into a break if necessary or straight into the group activity listed on slide 20 for “Application”
- 11. Ask the groups to use the notes and information presented to answer the following areas:
 - a. Identify the main issue or problem
 - b. Identify the behaviors, attitudes and values that contributed to this issue or problem

- c. Generate a list of 3-4 solutions and proceeding impacts (positive & negative) for each solution
 - d. Select the best solution possible and be prepared to defend it
12. Distribute the attached scenarios at this time to each group and ask them to write their answers on the sheet of post-it pad paper
- a. If more groups are present than scenarios please take time before hand to develop other situations where critical thinking can be used
 - b. If you experience difficulty in developing scenarios, ask the remaining groups to come up with:
 - i. Examples in their workplace or home environments where critical thinking was used
 - ii. What alternative solutions could have been considered
 - iii. Was the best course of action taken
 - iv. Would they change it if they could
13. In order for participants to feel comfortable with the concepts presented they should be able to practice it before using it in what used to be a comfortable environment
14. Encourage each group to keep asking “why” when they feel as though they have reached an end point
15. After each group is finished ask the groups one at a time to discuss their results
- a. Once the group identifies it's “best solution” ask the larger group to see if they agree
 - b. Ask the groups to share how they arrived at these answers using the information presented
16. Once the groups are finished, move onto slide 24 “What Does It All Mean?” to discuss what success means for critical thinkers
17. Take the meaning of success in critical thinking further and discuss what it means for both the individual and the organization
- a. If time allows, ask the group to offer other outcomes that are apparent for them in their respective environments that would be achieved if this type of critical thinking were used
18. Move into the last slide for questions
19. Refer to the list below for references for the participants

REFERENCES

- Brookfield, S. D. (1987) *Developing critical thinkers: challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- B.S. (Ed.) (1956) *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals: Handbook I, cognitive domain*. New York ; Toronto: Longmans, Green.
- Chaffee, J., Kalash, B. D., Brooke, C., and Janzow, F. (2000). *Thinking Critically*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Facione, P. A. (1998). *Critical thinking: what it is and why it counts*. Millbrae, CA: California Academic Press LLC.
- Mager, R. F. (1962). *Preparing instructional objectives*. Belmont, CA: Fearon.

