
Critical Thinking

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Having critical thinking skills are not only important in your personal life but also at the workplace. It is ***“the ability to look at a situation or problem in a way which is impersonal and unbiased”***. Another way to say it is, ***“to look at a situation without any personal opinions or emotions.”*** It lets you look at all options neutrally. This way you are able to look at all the information you have, to form a logical response.

Critical thinking prevents you from doing the “same ol’ same ol’” time and time again. You are free from the traditional way of doing things. You are now able to analyze different points of view, come up with the best possible solutions to complex issues, and become a better learner.

KEY SKILLS IN CRITICAL THINKING

There are several key skills to critical thinking, but these skills can be mastered with practice. Once mastered, critical thinking will naturally begin. These skills are:

Identifying predispositions. Knowing your predispositions will allow you to look at different points of view more objectively.

Inference. Having the ability to draw conclusions based on the information that is presented. Based on that information, a reasonable conclusion can be made.

Research. Based on this skill, critical thinkers can determine if the information is “fact or fiction”. This helps give conclusions more acceptance.

Identification. This ability helps identify the issue, as well as, looking at what is causing it. Knowing what is being looked at, will help determine if the issue needs to be looked at more thoroughly.

Curiosity. Part of critical thinking skills is to question! Critical thinkers are not afraid to question what is being given. Each issue should be looked at with a mindset of a “beginner” (child) to keep an open-mind.

Judging relevance. Not everything is relevant. Critical thinkers are able to judge what is needed and what is not.

Communication. Communication skills are critical when using critical thinking. They include active listening, written/verbal communication, to include communicating concisely, collaboration, and teamwork.

Disposition. Critical thinkers have traits that allow them to think the way that they do. The biggest traits are:

- **Open-mindedness.** The ability to view evidence and reasoning without any predispositions, as well as being able to consider different points of view.
- **Provide some skepticism.** Critical thinkers are curious. They want to see the issue from different points of view.

Argument. The ability to make a solid case based on reasoning and research. Critical thinkers have researched and looked at different conclusions to give their claims sound reasoning.

Metacognition. Critical thinkers have the ability to know how they process information. Critical thinkers who are able to do this, have the ability to judge whether or not they have thought all information through to the best possible solution.

CRITICAL THINKERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Employees that are able to think critically are an asset to any organization as they tend to be able to be more independent and self-aware, leading to an operation running smoothly. When organizations foster critical thinking skills in their employees they see the benefits of:

Happier Employees

Employees tend to be happier when they are given the freedom and encouraged to make their own decisions and form conclusions based on their own research. It makes an employee feel more appreciated, valued, and happy.

Time Saving

By allowing employees to make their own decisions, rather than questioning them or having meetings, decisions can be made quickly and decisively. This means less time is spent on an issue.

Effective Communication Between Individual(s)

Employees who use critical thinking skills are able to look at all the information that they have before making a conclusion. Relevant information can then be given to the individual(s) who needs the information, in a concise and meaningful discussion.

Encourages a Variety of Approaches

When neutrally looking at an issue in a variety of ways; a variety of possibilities can be found. These possibilities give the final decision a more thought out conclusion rather than a snap decision.

Workplace Conflict Resolution

Conflict happens. When using critical thinking skills during a conflict, resolution tends to be quicker as personal feelings are taken out and the situation is looked at neutrally.

HOW TO IMPROVE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

In an article by Jamie Birt, *6 Main Types of Critical Thinking Skills*, she states an **“organization is a sum of the decisions taken by its management and employees. Applying critical thinking in work situations will improve your performance and the [organization’s] chances of succeeding.”** It is important to any organization to:

- [Have a teamwork approach to problem-solving.](#) Problem solving with a team approach creates effective collaboration between team members.
- [Team members evaluate their contributions to the organization's goals.](#) Employees can look at their contributions and see how it fits the bigger picture. How they can contribute to the overall progress of meeting those organizational goals.
- [Employees can practice self-reflection.](#) When you analyze your own thought and decision-making processes critically, you will find that you become more open to other options.
- [Employees can make informed decisions.](#) When using critical thinking skills you are able to look at all information presented. Instead of making snap-judgement decisions, you are able to slow down and make informed rational decisions based on facts.
- [Uses time wisely.](#) Looking at how you spend your time will help you prioritize your workload. This will help you begin to see what is a high-priority and one that is not.

In another article, ***How to Develop Critical Thinking***, it is said that you should begin by:

- [Not believing everything you're told.](#) There is more than one point of view and it is important to look beyond what is read, told, or heard. Look for other solutions or options.
- [Not believing everything you think.](#) This is easier said than done, as we all have formed our own opinions and bias based on our life experiences.
- [Ask questions.](#) Just ask! Asking for clarification to a problem or even a solution will help you with your critical thinking skills.
- [Research deeper.](#) Do not stop on the first or second solution. Keep digging deeper into the issue to see what is causing it. What are the roadblocks, solutions, etc.
- [Seek out diversity.](#) Get out of your own personal bubble! Look for others to give you different options, opinions, or solutions.
- [Know what you want.](#) Know what your goal is to give you a starting point.
- [Consider the consequences of your options.](#) When looking at options/solutions to an issue, weigh the pros/cons of those consequences to help make the best possible solution.
- [Accept the fact that you are not always right.](#) It's okay to make mistakes, we all make mistakes. Just learn from those mistakes rather than continually repeat them.
- [Break down the issue.](#) In order to make the "big picture" obtainable, break it down into smaller logical pieces. Working with pieces is always easier.
- [Don't overcomplicate things.](#) When using critical thinking skills, there is a fine line between thinking things through and over thinking them. Sometimes simplicity is the best way to get the job done. Use the "KISS" acronym.

K = Keep

I = It

S = Stupid

S = Simple

CONCLUSION

Critical thinking skills are not something that comes easily, and can be challenging at times. It requires you to be open to new ideas and solutions. It also requires you to let go of your beliefs and bias, and be open to looking and listening to new ideas or solutions.

Remember though, we have been developing some type of critical thinking skills in our lives since we were able to start reasoning. Critical thinking skills in organizations, seem to get lost as there is always the need to “hurry up and act” rather than take time to really use those skills that may result in a better outcome. It is important that you take some time, starting small, and use some of the critical thinking skills in this article. It will bring more satisfaction to your job, make you feel more appreciated, and bring more value to your work.

***This article is for educational purposes only. If you would like more information on how to develop critical thinking skills, please contact your FDL EAP at (218) 878-7514 (work) or (218) 390-4993 (cell).**

Resources:

<https://hbr.org/2019/05/3-simple-habits-to-improve-your-critical-thinking>
<https://www.betterup.com/blog/critical-thinking-skills>
<https://www.unilodge.com.au/blog/how-to-develop-critical-thinking>
<https://www.findcourses.co.uk/inspiration/articles/how-to-improve-critical-thinking-9900>
<https://www.wikijob.co.uk/jobs-and-careers/employment/critical-thinking-in-the-workplace>