

Information Pack

Unit 503

Developing Critical Thinking



INTRODUCTION

This unit aims to develop the ability to think and reflect critically as required by a potential or practising middle manager.

The management team and the leaders employed within an organisation are pivotal to the success of the organisation. Specifically, the critical thinking that goes into strategic and operational decision-making will play a significant part in defining the level of success or otherwise of the organisation.

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of their thinking by skilfully analysing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication, problem-solving abilities, and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism.

This information pack aims to guide you through the central tenets of critical thinking and will invite you to apply critical thinking against fundamental management theories - a process that will enable you to challenge your existing approach to leadership and management and refine and improve your leadership and management accordingly.

SAMPLE

GUIDANCE

This document is prepared to break the unit material into bite-sized chunks. You will see sub-headings that will coincide with the learning outcomes specific to this unit. Therein you will encounter the following structures;

Purpose

Explains *why* you need to study the current section of material. Often, learners are put off by material that does not initially seem relevant to a topic or profession. Once you understand the importance of new learning or theory, you will embrace the concepts more readily.

Theory

Conveys new material to you in a straightforward fashion. To support the treatments in this section, you are strongly advised to follow the given hyperlinks, which may be useful documents or applications on the web.

Example

The examples/worked examples are presented in a knowledge-building order. Make sure you follow them all through. If you are feeling confident, then you might like to treat an example as a question, in which case, cover it up and have a go yourself. Many of the examples given resemble assignment questions that will come your way, so follow them diligently.

Question

Questions should not be avoided if you are determined to learn. Please take the time to tackle each of the given questions in the order in which they are presented. The order is important, as further knowledge and confidence is built upon previous knowledge and confidence. As an Online Learner, it is important that the answers to questions are immediately available to you. Contact your unit Tutor if you need help.

Challenge

You can really cement your new knowledge by undertaking the challenges. A challenge could be to download software and perform an exercise. An alternative challenge might involve a practical activity or other form of research.

Video

Videos on the web can be very useful supplements to your distance learning efforts. Wherever an online video(s) will help you, then it will be hyperlinked at the appropriate point.

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What Is Critical Thinking?

'Critical Thinking' is the objective, evidence-based analysis of an idea or theory. It requires you to question assumptions and seek opinions that challenge the prevailing wisdom.

Critical thinking is the mental process that individuals go through to reach an answer or a conclusion. The critical thinking process can be a valuable tool in problem-solving and decision-making.

Critical thinking is essentially the process of taking information gathered through day-to-day activities such as observation, reflection, and reasoning, and using personal experience and beliefs, analysing, and applying that information to a given situation. Critical thinking is used in conjunction with creative thinking, where the ideas and processes are generated. Critical thinking can then be used to interpret, assess, and evaluate these ideas and processes in order to make well-considered and comprehensively thought-through judgements that are logical and supported by evidence.

Some definitions:

'Disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence'

'The mental process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion.' (Dictionary.com)

Those adept in critical thinking are able to quickly assimilate information and decide on its relevance, significance, and importance. In the face of convincing evidence, it involves being prepared to change your own beliefs about the matter under scrutiny. Critical thinking examines beliefs as much as facts—many people present as fact what really is belief. Scientific management based on critical thinking exposes beliefs and reveals facts. Yet critical thinking is not cold and impersonal because it recognises the importance of good relationships between people. Critical thinking is essential for logical thinking.

The Key Characteristics of Critical Thinkers

Scepticism

Critical thinkers accept nothing at face value. When presented with an argument, they ask:

- Who is saying this?
- Are they credible?
- What is their motive?
- Are they biased?
- What evidence do they have?

Self-Awareness

As well as recognising bias in others, critical thinkers are conscious of their own beliefs and assumptions. They guard against:

- Confirmation bias: prioritising data that supports their beliefs.
- Stereotyping: unconscious preconceptions that affect reasoning.

- Self-serving bias: drawing conclusions that are beneficial to them.
- Herd instinct: favouring prevailing majority beliefs.
- Pattern-seeking: mistaking correlation (two things happening together) for causation (one thing causing the other).

Curiosity

Critical thinkers base decisions on a dispassionate analysis of data from various sources. They seek truth by:

- being open to new information
- seeking opposing views
- looking for evidence to disprove their theories
- reassessing their beliefs in light of new evidence.

Believe it or not, becoming an outstanding critical thinker has as much to do with your state-of-mind, as it does with a specific set of tools, techniques, or strategies you have learned. Having the proper attitude about thinking critically is essential. Critical thinkers have many different qualities that distinguish them from average thinkers. To be a critical thinker, you must make changes in your usual way of approaching situations and be more thoughtful and perceptive. D'Angelo (in the image below) felt that the following were the central attitudes necessary for developing critical thinking.

SAMPLE

Attitudinal Dispositions for Critical Thinking	Critical Thinker	Average Thinker
Shows intellectual curiosity	Asks excellent questions and needs to know.	Does not go out of the way to seek additional information.
Maintains objectivity	Uses objective factors when making decisions.	Is influenced by emotional factors when making decisions.
Remains open-minded	Shows a willingness to consider a variety of beliefs and points of view.	Examines the views of only a few and often demonstrates a biased judgment.
Exhibits flexibility	Demonstrates a desire to change mindsets and methods of inquiry, compromise, and try new approaches to problems.	Operates from a dogmatic or rigid stance, is not open to compromise, and refuses to try different approaches.
Has healthy skepticism	Requires proof and adequate evidence before accepting a conclusion.	Accepts obvious explanations and answers without challenging views when evidence is weak.
Respects viewpoint of others	Respects arguments and ideas of others, understands that viewpoints vary, and stays willing to admit when wrong and when others are right.	Believes that their thoughts and perspectives are the only correct options and are not interested in hearing the opinions and attitudes of others.
Takes action decisively	Comes to a conclusion and decision rapidly when the evidence warrants it and follows through on decisions to act.	Is hesitant in making decisions, fails to seek confirmation to support decisions, and fails to follow through on decisions.

(Attitudinal Dispositions for Critical Thinking)