



Thinking about Critical Thinking

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Critical thinking is expanding the mind to more fully understand a situation. It involves analyzing, organizing, interpreting, making decisions about and communicating information. In a business context, critical thinking is applied to pressing issues to achieve better results. We believe it is a prerequisite for problem solving and decision making.

Great Circle Learning's Critical Thinking training programs are designed to propel business professionals from what some have referred to as "cocksure ignorance" to what we call "wise uncertainty".

Successful people are highly knowledgeable about their industry and the challenges they face. They are also usually very self-confident, which can lead to making decisions based upon assumptions and limited examination of situations; sometimes resulting in costly mistakes.

Why does this happen? Because they don't know what they don't know.

Great Circle Learning's Critical Thinking training identifies this knowledge gap and provides the skills and tools necessary to adapt, improvise and overcome. By increasing knowledge and understanding of issues through critical thinking, we can build *wise uncertainty* -- the ability to combine experience and knowledge and apply them judiciously. Decisions made and actions taken within the context of wise uncertainty are inevitably different than they would have been if critical thinking had not been applied.

Our critical thinking model is comprised of five distinct modes of thinking:

- Active thinking, which uses a structured approach for immediate results.
- Strategic thinking, which takes a longer-term view that considers outside influences.
- Systems thinking, which searches for interrelationships among issues.
- Emotional thinking, which taps into our intuitive, more visceral ways of knowing.
- Quantum thinking, which propels us to consider a range of unknown possibilities.

More on Active Thinking...

Active Thinking is about solving immediate problems and producing results. It asks the question, what needs to be done now? It is logical and analytical, and it looks for facts and data. Active thinking is what we are most encouraged to do at work, and what we are most rewarded for.



Active thinking means getting involved mentally in solving problems, analyzing issues and situations, and determining short-term actions and directions. It is a highly personal thinking process, influenced by our past behaviors, experiences, education, and learning. It is primarily characterized by analytical, logical, and sequential thinking because it is oriented toward producing immediate results. When managing a team of people you must consider the motives behind each individual's active thinking decisions.

More on Strategic Thinking...

Strategic thinking is hypothetical thinking about possible future scenarios. It takes a longer view and is more broad-based; it uses external scenarios – future events and occurrences that would have major impacts on strategic decisions. It asks the questions, what might happen, and what else might happen? It requires that you think about the impact of decisions, as well as the consequences and outcomes of those decisions. Judgment regarding likelihood is suspended during this process. Once done, active thinking comes into play to ask questions like: how likely is each of these scenarios, and what's our plan for dealing with the most likely of these? This process of thinking about possible future scenarios followed by planning for the more likely possibilities comprises true strategic planning. Making a plan for the future without considering possible future scenarios first is not *strategic*.

More on Systems Thinking...

Systems thinking involves looking at as many of the influencing factors as you can. It is about knowing how past, present, and future conditions influence our thinking and decisions. In other words, it is looking beyond the immediate context of your situation to consider the larger picture. The term is derived from Bertalanffy's Theory of General Systems and has been made popular by Peter Senge and other contemporary business writers and consultants.

More on Quantum Thinking...

Quantum thinking derives from quantum physics; which, in physics, is a way to describe the dynamic properties of subatomic particles. Quantum thinking is about taking leaps in our thinking to explore the potential of being and doing something new and different. It involves finding a different reality – the parallel, multiple universe reality for our issue or situation.

Looking to physics to help explain what we mean: Light, for instance, was discovered to be both a particle and a frequency, by two different scientists, at different points in time. So today scientists know that, depending on they look at/examine light, it will display different characteristics that will lead to different conclusions about what light is, how to manage it, etc.



In the same way, there may well be “another reality” for our issue that we are oblivious to because we are locked in to our own ways of perceiving. One way to break out of your patterns of perceiving is to ask yourself: What wouldn’t you do? And, WHY NOT?

More on Emotional Thinking...

Emotional thinking considers the many facets of human emotion that contribute to the ways in which we communicate, make decisions, solve problems, and generally “do” in life. It draws upon groundbreaking brain and human behavior research, which establishes a vital link between emotional aptitude and one’s propensity for personal and professional success.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, points out that emotional thinking comprises “a set of traits – some might call it character – that matters immensely for our personal destiny. Emotional life is a domain that, as surely as math or reading, can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and requires its unique set of competencies.” Emotional aptitude is a meta-ability, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we possess.

Emotional thinking is that reaction we feel but have no words for. Active thinking wants us to cast that reaction aside, because there doesn’t appear to be any logical basis for it, or because there’s no apparent data to support it. Yet, in fact, physiologically, *we feel before we think*. Our brains are wired such that our emotions come first – the fight or flight response, before the cognitive thinking part of the brain kicks in.

So what does this all mean?

Each distinct mode of critical thinking brings unique and valuable perspective to any one situation or challenge. Using all five modes of critical thinking enriches our knowledge and understanding, which in turn improves our ability to judiciously take the most appropriate next step. Using only one or two modes of thinking can leave us with a lopsided, incomplete perspective and increases the likelihood that we will make mistakes, misjudge risks, and just plain not see opportunities.

There’s always more to think about!