

CRITICAL THINKING FOR DEVELOPMENT

By Yashodhara Pant (Nepal)

INTRODUCTION

The world gets more complex every day. There is only one way to cope – through command of our mind. Thinking more effectively gives us greater control over our life, helps one deal better with adversity. Effective thinking is no mystery. It consists of practical skills which one can acquire through critical thinking.

Everyday work and life are an endless sequence of decisions. Some of the decisions are small and insignificant, and some are hefty and life-determining. When the patterns of decision-making are rational, we live a rational life and vice versa. Rational decisions enhance the quality of life through happiness, successful living, and fulfillment. Critical thinking facilitates decision-making abilities by raising pattern of decision-making to the level of conscious and deliberate choice.

Critical thinking, enable one to take control of the thinking, to solve problems more effectively, make better decisions, as well as distinguish manipulative thinking.

What Critical Thinking Means Generally

Critical thinking (CT) can mean quite different things to different people in different contexts and cultures.

Defining critical thinking (CT) as a concept, however, has been contentions from its beginnings. In 1991, Ennis posited a definition which has become widely accepted, that critical thinking is “reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do.” (Baron & Sternberg, 1987) Paul broadened this definition to include associated dispositions of critical thinkers themselves as well as certain standards of intellectual thought which those thinkers should apply. (Paul, 1987)

Critical Thinking is “the art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better: clearer, more accurate, and more defensible.”

Paul, Binker, Adamson, and Martin (1989)

A separate approach to defining critical thinking exists within the field of cognitive psychology, which addresses critical thinking in relation to higher order thinking skills such as within Bloom’s taxonomy. In this view, critical thinking occupies the higher order planes of evaluation and synthesis, rather than the lower order skills of comprehension or knowledge recall. (Hofreiter, 2005)

Generally speaking, to think critically about an issue is to consider that issue from various perspectives, to look at and challenge any possible assumptions that may underlie the issue and to explore its possible alternatives.

Still, scholars debate whether critical thinking can indeed be considered as a set of general skills and dispositions, or if it is too nebulous and broad for simple categorization. It seems that researchers cannot agree on whether it is the process and structure of thought, or the quality of the thinking. (Abrami, et al., 2008)

The definition below serves as the most comprehensive and cited definition to date.

We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based.

Why We Need Critical Thinking

New global realities are rapidly working their way into the genuine structures of our lives: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental realities — realities with profound implications for thinking and learning, business and politics, human rights and human conflicts. These realities are becoming increasingly complex; many represent significant danger and threats. And they all turn on the powerful dynamic of accelerating change.

To deal with persistent and accelerating change and complexity higher order thinking is essential. Our thinking has been designed for usual, for habit, for automation and fixed procedure traditionally. We learned how to do our job once, and then we used what we learned over and over. But the problems, presently we face, and will face, require a radically different form of thinking, thinking that is more complex, more adaptable, more sensitive to divergent points of view.

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its ideal form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue, assumptions, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions, implications and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints, and frame of reference. Critical thinking – in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes – is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking.

Critical thinking has two components:

- A set of skills to process and generate information and beliefs, and
- The habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior.

Critical thinking varies according to the motivation underlying it. When grounded in selfish motives, it is often manifested in the skillful manipulation of ideas in service to one's own, or one's groups', vested interest. As such, it is typically intellectually flawed, however pragmatically successful it might be. When grounded in fair-mindedness and intellectual integrity, it is typically of a higher order intellectually, though subject to the charge of "idealism" by those habituated to its selfish use.

How Critical Thinking Facilitate For Development

One of the most important goals of CT is developing mind, as everything we do in our life is affected by our mind and how it operates. The quality of personal relationships is affected by the quality of thinking about those relationships. Similarly, the quality of work is also affected by the quality of thinking about work. To take command of the thinking that controls life, one must cultivate intellect.

Thus, for anyone (CEO, manager, administrator, worker) to function well in their work, they need to be able to do second order thinking. They need to become proficient in thinking about thinking as thinking. They need to assess their thinking (and the thinking of others) using basic intellectual standards (standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevant, precision, logic, and significance). In other words, they need to become skilled at to do the following:

- Identify goals and purposes
- Gather relevant information

- Formulate questions clearly and precisely
- Determine (and evaluate) the assumptions they are making
- Think through the implications of the decisions they make
- Make logical and accurate inferences and interpretations
- Clearly articulate the concepts or ideas that are guiding their thinking
- Consider alternate ways of looking at situations and so on.

CT assists the professionals to understand thoughts, feelings, and desires as interrelated functions of the mind operating in a dynamic relationship to one another. When they understand these relationships, they understand that desires and emotions emerge from thoughts, just as thoughts are influenced by our desires and emotions. In addition, CT helps out identifying and modifying the thinking that is governing negative emotions and thought. As it enables to solve emotional as well as cognitive problems through higher order thinking.

Critical thinking ensures that you use the best thinking you are capable of in any set of circumstances. The general goal of thinking is to “figure something out.” In every situation and context, we all have multiple things to figure out. Thinking enables us to do this. The problem is that our thinking often goes awry. Often it presents the world falsely to us. Often it causes us to make serious mistakes. Often it causes us to lose money, to waste resources, to make bad investments, to make foolish decisions, to hurt ourselves or others.

Conclusion

The world is incredibly challenging. To countenance the challenging world we need to be very critical and ready to relearn regularly, change our decisions, and we have to frequently reconsider our working and living styles. In short, there is a new world facing us, one in which the power of the mind to command itself, to regularly engage in self-analysis, will increasingly determine the quality of our work, the quality of our lives, and perhaps even, our very survival.

Yet we are unprepared to deal with the complexities in the world we now face. The question of how to survive in the world is a question continually transforming itself. Accelerating change, increasing complexity, and intensifying danger sound the death knell for traditional methods of thinking. How can we adapt to reality when reality won't give us time to master it before it changes itself, again and again, in ways we can but partially anticipate? Unfortunately, the crucial need for ever-new modes of thought to adapt to new problems and situations in new and humane ways is ignored by most cultures and today. Short-term thinking leading to quick-fix solutions still rule the day.

The following are the dispositions as defined in the Delphi report by (Facione, 1990)

Approaches to life and living in general through CT

- Trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry,
- Self-confidence in one's own ability to reason,
- Open-mindedness regarding divergent world views,
- Flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions,
- Understanding of the opinions of other people,
- Fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning,
- Honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, egocentric or socio-centric tendencies,
- Prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments,

- Willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted.

Approaches to specific issues, questions or problems

- Clarity in stating the question or concern,
- Orderliness in working with complexity,
- Diligence in seeking relevant information,
- Reasonableness in selecting and applying criteria,
- Care in focusing attention on the concern at hand,
- Persistence though difficulties are encountered,
- Precision to the degree permitted by the subject and the circumstance.

The research suggests that CT involves mainly higher-order cognitive skills. No evidence could be found to support the generalizability of CT skills. Further research is needed in this area. Changes in our environment necessitate basic changes in our approach too.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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