Critical Thinking

Getting to the right decision

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Let’s explore:

• What good critical thinking is
• Why it’s important for our decision-making & problem-solving
• Identify & avoiding traps, trips & landmines that foil our decision-making…..maybe even disarming them?
• Harvard’s experience
• Characteristics required

www.dysartjones.com for slides & worksheets
“in making decisions, you may be at the mercy of your mind’s strange workings….”

Critical Thinking: formal definition

“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.”

Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987
Critical thinking is really about

- Decision-making & problem-solving
- Openmindedness
- Productive dialogue
Implicit that we can’t make decisions alone or in a vacuum

The decisions & problems we face are increasingly complex

It’s hard, and it’s worth it
Good Critical Thinking

• Raises the **right** questions – clearly & precisely
• Focuses on the **real** problem or decision to be taken
• Gathers & assesses **relevant** information
  ▫ Uses abstract ideas to interpret info effectively
• Develops well-**reasoned** conclusions & solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
• Relies on recognizing & assessing **assumptions, implications, & consequences**
• **Communicates effectively** with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems
Critical, not criticize
Why?

• For our customers
  • Designing meaningful services

• For our organizations
  • Planning, negotiating, managing & relationship building

• For ourselves, and our professional credibility
  • Aware & factor in our:
    • tendencies & assumptions
    • perceptions & selections based on conditioning, beliefs and desires, focus, emotions
    • reconstructive memory affected by time, what we want to remember, and after-acquired information and suggestion.
  • Confident in our:
    • knowledge
    • ability to reason
Wake up call

“Set in our ways” won’t move us forward

“Naming” the process at first makes it legitimate to:

- Challenge usual practices
- Rethink what has been thought
- Expand the emphasis from short-term fixes to long-term fusion
Common Decision Traps

- Framing
- Status quo
- Anchoring
- Sunk cost fallacy
- Information gathering traps
- Overconfidence bias
- Availability
- Confirmation bias
- Generalization
- False cause

Based on the work of Michael B. Metzger, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University
Framing

- Put the frame up first
  - May clarify status-quo, anchor & sunk-costs
- The questions we ask very often determines the type answers we get

To avoid this:
- Don’t accept the first frame – or question
- “re-frame” or look at the issue from different perspectives, particularly from customer or stakeholder perspectives
Like it or not, tendency is to perpetuate what we already know – like it or not

Psychologically risky

“breaking from the status quo means taking action, and when we take action, we take responsibility, thus opening ourselves to criticism and to regret.”

Hammond, Keeney, Raiffa

To avoid this:

Focus on the real goals & ask how status quo helps move towards them

Evaluate vs. all other alternatives IN TERMS OF THE FUTURE

Ask outsiders to review your evaluations

Kennedy & Jones, 2009
Anchoring

- What we hear or see first influences our subsequent thinking
  - Past statistics & trends, an article, a colleague’s comment
  - The order in which we receive info distorts our judgment

To avoid:
- Be aware
- Purposefully use different starting points
- As you gather other people to discuss the issue, try to limit the information you give them
  - Clarity what each of your base assumptions are
  - Keep coming back to the issue on which you are focusing

Kennedy & Jones, 2009
Sunk cost

- People want to justify past decisions, regardless of how present & future change the situation
  - Some cultures reinforce this by punishing decisions that haven’t turned out as planned

“When you find yourself in a hole, the best thing you can do is stop digging.”
  
  Warren Buffet

To avoid:
- Consciously set aside past investments
  - a rational decision is based on current assets & future consequences
- Stop “sinking” costs into “sunk” costs
- Reward turn-arounds & “try’s”
Reaching clarity means wading through confusion

Know your own conflict handling style

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument
Harvard Business School’s experience
We educate leaders who make a difference in the world.

We support Harvard Business School’s mission by enabling the creation and exchange of ideas, expertise and information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Shifts</th>
<th>FY07</th>
<th>FY08</th>
<th>FY09</th>
<th>FY10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrate with Research</strong></td>
<td>3 pilot MBA projects</td>
<td>34 projects</td>
<td>Develop - 3</td>
<td>10% Growth Focus MBA and Exec Ed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Course Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Model developed</td>
<td>Revise - 2</td>
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<td>Enhance - 31</td>
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<td><strong>Organize the School’s priority information</strong></td>
<td>Catalog books</td>
<td>Catalog electronic information: Institutional Memory (IM) Information Lifecycle Management Program</td>
<td>Complete IM and Centennial Assets Start Scholarly Assets Standards for SharePoint (Intranet)</td>
<td>Scholarly Assets Intranet content governance Web content management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Socialize information management</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Develop an enterprise Web service</strong></td>
<td>Ad hoc – mainly work for KLS</td>
<td>iTRAC Governance Group reorganization and new hires 89 projects</td>
<td>74 projects Q1&amp;2 School-wide Establish Intranet Program Office</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Move to electronic products and services</strong></td>
<td>Status Quo 2.5X electronic vs. print expenditure</td>
<td>First Knowledge Center – BBOP HC web properties 2.9X electronic vs. print</td>
<td>Institutional Memory Agribusiness Knowledge Center OPM eBaker 2.9X electronic vs. print*</td>
<td>Deliver products on SharePoint 2.3X electronic vs. print*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support Global Research and Education</strong></td>
<td>No Focus</td>
<td>Alliance with CBS Network with European universities Relationship with HBS Research Centers Global databases added (China, India)</td>
<td>Network with Chinese Universities and Harvard Launch GKEN – 40 Track global component of research support – 269 Q3 -1st sourcing in China</td>
<td>Leverage GKEN Solidify relationships in China and Europe India? China Knowledge Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase reach of faculty knowledge dissemination</strong></td>
<td>Working Knowledge website and newsletter</td>
<td>Working Knowledge for Exec Ed, Publishing, media WK moved to daily content</td>
<td>Economic Crisis site Working Knowledge for Initiatives Alignment with Marketing Plan</td>
<td>Redesign pending stakeholder analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Exercising Good Judgment

- Capability Development
- Modeling Best Practice
- Road Maps
- Performance Management
- Project Management
  - Team Norms
  - Opportunity Management
  - After Action Reviews
All Day; Every Day

- Customer Service Standards
- Service Delivery Agreements
- Customer Relationship Management
- Exceptions Management
- Strategic Alignment
- Employee Engagement
- Balanced Score Cards
- Job Descriptions/Work Designs
Manage carefully – it’s new

- Disagreement must be incited & managed
  - Once conflict becomes too intense people shut down
- Organizational culture must encourage questioning, especially of decision-makers’ assumptions & propositions
Critical characteristics

- Communication skills
  - Listener
- Self-awareness & self-acceptance
- Curious, interested & questioning
- Admits lack of valid information or understanding
- Assesses & evaluates information & propositions for their value on the issue at hand
What’s critical?

- Awareness

- Discipline your decision-making to uncover thinking errors & prevent judgment errors

- Trying it
If you’re interested, try:

The Critical Thinking Community
http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/Open-minded-inquiry.cfm

  Abstract
Thank you

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