

Critical Thinking

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During the next 90 minutes we'll:

- Explore what good critical thinking is & the difference it can have in our decision-making and problem-solving
- Identify decision-making traps & how to avoid them
- Hear Harvard's experience
- Practice on a decision that you have to make
- Look at characteristics required
- Provide a few resources you can follow-up with post-SLA

www.dysartjones.com for slides & worksheets

Decisions, decisions

“in making decisions, you may be at the mercy of your mind’s strange workings....”

Hammond, Keeney & Raiffa, *The Hidden Traps in Decision Making*, Harvard Business Review, January 2006



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

A statement by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, Summer 1987}. <http://www.criticalthinking.org/page.cfm?PageID=766&CategoryID=51> Last accessed May 31, 2009

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 openmindedness
 - On recognizing & assessing assumptions, implications, & consequences
- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems





Mary Lee's message:

- **For our customers:**
 - Instructional, reference & research services
- **For our organizations**
 - Planning, negotiating, managing
- **For ourselves, and our professional credibility**
 - Awareness of our own mental processes
 - Confidence in our knowledge and reasoning ability
 - Conscious awareness of our selective perception based on conditioning, beliefs and desires, focus, emotional state
 - Awareness of the potential for selective and reconstructive memory affected by time, what we want to remember, and after-acquired information and suggestion.

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
- How we ask questions very often determines the type answers we get



Avoidance tactics:

- Don't accept the first frame – or question
- “re-frame” or look at the issue from different perspectives, particularly from customer or stakeholder perspectives

Status-quo

- 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

Avoidance tactics:

- Focus on 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

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



Avoidance tactics:

- 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

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.”

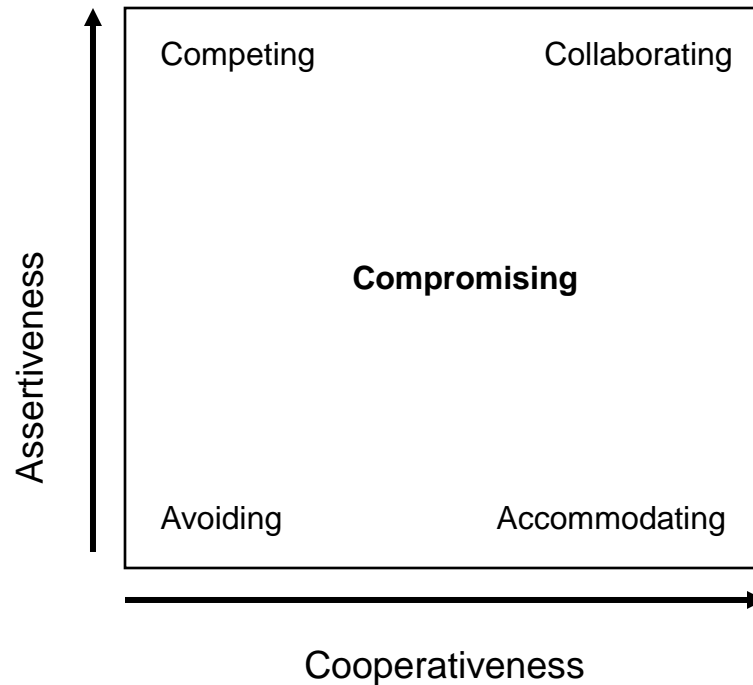
Warren Buffet

Avoidance tactics:

- Consciously set aside past investments & remember that 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



Harvard's experience



Let's try it out

- Choose a partner
- First 10 minutes on your own
 - Prepare your decision approach for either Case 1 or Case 2
- Next 10 minutes with your colleague
 - Talk through your plan or approach with each other
 - Advise each other on critical thinking delivery (good practice/decision traps)
- Next 10 minutes discussing our experiences
 - Challenges, affirmations, ah ha's!

Group Exercises

Case one:

- Your budget will be 10% less for the next financial year.
- 80% of your current budget is staff, 15% is content, the other 5% is for various administrative costs (travel, training, phones, supplies).
- Put together an approach for making the decision of how to work within this budget.

Case two:

- You have an idea for a new service you want to offer to your customers. You know there isn't any more funding available but you think it is really important to make a case for it.
- Put together a plan for making the case to proceed with the service

In your group discussions,

- What surprised you when you had to think about critical thinking practices and avoiding decision-making traps?
- What challenges do you recognize you'll have using this approach?
- What will you do differently in making decisions?
- What more do you want to know so that you can do this better?
- How will you apply this starting now?

Realities

- 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>

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- Bazerman, Max, and D. Moore. *Judgment in Managerial Decision Making*. 7th ed. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008.
- Milkman, Katherine L., Max H. Bazerman, and Dolly Chugh. "[How Can Decision Making Be Improved?](#)" *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (in press).
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- Raiffa, Howard, John S. Hammond, and Ralph L. Keeney. "The Hidden Traps in Decision Making." HBR Classic. *Harvard Business Review* 84, no. 1 (January 2006).
- Hammond, John S., III, Ralph L. Keeney, and Howard Raiffa. *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998. (Paperback: Broadway Books, 2002;

Thank you

www.dysartjones.com

www.kmpro.org