

CRITICAL THINKING

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The dictionary meaning of 'critical thinking' is – the objective analysis and evaluation of a issue in order to form a judgement. Critical thinking is that mode of thinking about any subject, content, problem – in which the thinker improves the quality of him/her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them. As a human being it is natural to think of anything. However, at many times, our thinking is biased, distorted, partial, un-uniformed, down- right prejudiced. There is need of critical thinking at every step of our day to day life.

In 1987, Michael Seriven and Richard Paul presented a statement at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform. According to them critical thinking is a intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information gathered from or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, communication as a guide to belief and action. Critical thinking is based on clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth and fairness of the subject. It is related to the elements of thought those are implicit in all reasoning- purpose, problem, question, assumptions, concepts, grounds, consequences, objections from counter view points and frame of references.

Critical thinking has 2 components –

- A set of information and belief generating and processing skills.
- The habit based on intellectual commitments of using those skills to guide behaviour.

BENEFITS OF CRITICAL THINKING

With the help/study of critical thinking one becomes able to-

- Understand the link between ideas. He/she becomes more rational in decision making.
- Determine the importance and relevance of arguments and ideas. He/she can avoid the unnecessary part of reasoning.
- Build, recognise and appraise arguments. He/she can exercise by him/her own.

- Identify inconsistencies and errors in the reasoning. He/she can develop self learning.
- Approach problems in a consistent and systematic way. He/she becomes more logical.
- Justify own assumptions, beliefs and values. He/she can reflect on and examine own decisions.
- Open minded. He/she always ready to think and re- think own ideas and others.

SKILLS NEEDED IN CRITICAL THINKING

The basic skills needed in critical thinking may be summarised as –foresightedness, observation, analysis, interpretation, reflection, evaluation, explanation, problem solving, decision making.

The various steps taken in critical thinking are-

- ✓ Find out a problem or topic or issue in an objective and critical way. It means that we first have to state the problem and then make an attempt to elaborate it with examples. Thus, we have to illustrate it.
- ✓ Identify the different arguments that are related to a particular issue or problem.
- ✓ Evaluate a point of view to determine how strong or valid it is.
- ✓ Recognise any weakness or negative points that are in the evidence or argument.
- ✓ Notice what implications there might be behind a statement or argument.
- ✓ Provide structured reasoning and support for an argument that we wish to make.

We can simply state that the sequence of critical thinking are-

Identify the problem > Generate potential solutions > Choose one solutions > Implementation of solution > Evaluate results

BARRIERS OF CRITICAL THINKING

There are various barriers of critical thinking. It can be summarised as follows –

- Social brainwashing and our view of the world
Generally, our understandings of the world are influenced by parents, teachers, neighbours, friends, idol persons, media etc. They sometimes control our critical thought process.
- Tendencies to think in binaries

Most of our thought processes are related to binaries like good-bad, just-unjust, liberal-conservative, black-white etc. But the world and its objects cannot be judged only in terms of binaries.

- Fears regarding free thinking

Very often, though we feel that something is wrong, we support them due to the scare of being the first to voice a new opinion. It happens because of social discouraging of free thinking.

- Group thinking

At many times we accept what is admitted by common people. Instead of questioning we follow the mass. To overcome it individual has to stand apart from the group and question opinions, thoughts and popular ideas.

- Social conditioning

There are discriminations in society. Economic conditions, racism, poverty, social conflict, differences in ideology – have influenced our critical thinking processes.

- Egocentrism

Generally, we consider that we are the centre of the universe individually. None but 'I am' right. As a critical thinker we have to go beyond our own experiences, perspectives and be able to appreciate the other ways of looking at things.

- Personal interests and personal experiences

Everybody has his/her own field of interest. We have certain commitments that determine the direction of our journey. Our allegiances, social and emotional commitments are determined by past experiences. Sometimes it seems difficult to have influence of reason upon past experiences and commitments. We sometimes, do not want to question our so called beliefs.

- Drone mentality

It means not paying any attention to what is going on around somebody. To avoid it one has to change daily routines.

- Biased experiences

Sometimes, personal biases prevent the thinker from being fair, rational and open minded.

- Arrogance and intolerance

To think critically person should have control over his/her emotions, have patience and open minded. He/she must be able to observe the situation or the problem from different standpoints.

- Schedule pressure

Time management is necessary condition in critical thinking. Information gathering in time, proper environment, use of technology in data analysis etc. required in critical thinking.

We may mention besides them some other barriers of critical thinking as –

- Misunderstandings
- Unwillingness to be objective
- Insufficient knowledge
- Unnecessary assumptions
- Personal emotions

The above barriers of critical thinking may be broadly divided into – physical, sociological and psychological barriers. To overcome these barriers we should take the following measures –

- ❖ For overcoming social barriers - involve the community, create working environment, keep your focus, accept cultural differences, staying open minded.
- ❖ For overcoming psychological barriers – physical, mental and emotional control, acceptance one's imperfectness, practice of relaxation techniques, boosting mental health.
- ❖ For overcoming physical barriers – provide healthy environment, personal communication, develop the use of modern tools and techniques.