

Critical Thinking...

So, what is critical thinking and why is it so important? Well in simple terms it can be defined as thinking that involves applying judgement and the putting aside of subjectivity and pre-conceptions in favour of a more logical, real life approach.

Critical thinking helps us separate issues and prioritise them by balancing them against the problem at hand. Modern business teams now have many tools and techniques at their disposal, critical thinking being just one of them. The buzz surrounding these new paths to insight and innovation can cause confusion about which tool to use for what purpose. Inappropriate use of the wrong tool/technique only generates poor results and then lack of confidence in these new, unconventional approaches.

Over the years a lack of real understanding of brainstorming techniques and when to use them is a good example of this very issue. The term brainstorming is now used as a general expression when teams want or need to gather round a table and discuss problems or create solutions. In some ways it is to business what the word Hoover is to vacuum cleaner.

In reality, brainstorming should be used as a creativity tool, to generate ideas, not to gather information or try to build a better picture of a problem or brief. Using brainstorming to solve problems merely produces opinions, statements, and general conclusions but not specific points or a deeper understanding of a problem. For listing problems you want factual observations based on reality and for that you need specific tools to help you such as the 5 Whys problem-solving technique.

Problem solving or answering briefs although generically branded as a creative process actually requires a rational and systematic approach, some elements of which require creative, irrational and random thought. The process should start with insight which requires critical thinking and judgement. This then provides the creative stage with a solid brief/foundation from which to develop. However judgement comes back into play when you need to evaluate creative ideas in order to move towards developing and implementing one of them.



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Adopting a systematic approach to the way you think and how you think about problem solving and idea generation and adding critical thinking into the mix helps determine a deeper understanding of a problem, thus helping avoid straying from the intended purpose which commonly results in merely solving symptoms not causes.

The general perception is that when poor or no decisions/ideas are made by a team then they lack creativity. However poor decisions or ideas are usually down to poor thinking habits, more often than not due to pre-conceptions and assumptions gathered over time.

People generally play down the insight stage of any problem solving process on the basis that their assumptions are enough in order to progress with. This just means their understanding of the real problem and hence the starting point will be way off. If the end result (destination) to any process is determined by the starting point (origin) the solution will be commensurate.

What I'm trying to say is that being creative is only part of the story. The road to innovation involves several stages and several different tools, critical thinking being just one of them.

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