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Critical Thinking – Resource guide

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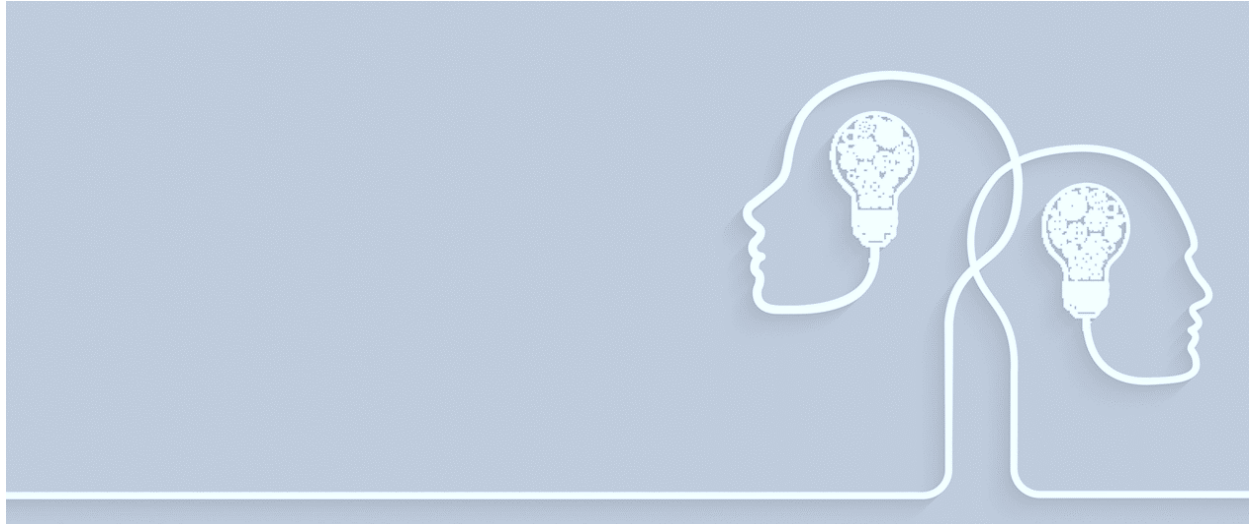
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Overview

Description

This **Critical Thinking** guide will serve as a resource to empower learners to use analysis and evaluation to make decisions. This guide is ideal for individuals looking to learn the basic concepts of critical thinking, including what critical thinking is and the benefits and barriers to using it.



Introduction

Effective critical thinking is important because it allows you to:

- Improve decision making skills.
- Enhance problem solving ability.
- Refine your researching skills.
- Stimulate creativity and curiosity.

Critical thinking can be challenging if you have trouble paying attention to what is going on around you or if you have developed a close-minded mindset. It can be more difficult to utilize critical thinking if you have personal biases that prohibit you from being fair and inquisitive. This is where critical thinking tools and processes can help you to cultivate creativity by introducing your mind to new concepts and ways of thinking.

This resource guide includes exercises and resources for the following:

- Using critical thinking to improve teamwork and leadership
- Eliminating common barriers to critical thinking
- Understanding the process of critical thinking
- Determining the root cause of a problem
- Improving your critical thinking skills

What is critical thinking?

Overview



Critical thinking is the process of carefully reviewing information to reach an answer or conclusion in a clear, rational, open-minded way, supported by evidence.

Critical thinking enables you to:

- See beyond, and not judge, cultural norms to learn how to understand other factors that can influence decision-making.
- Seek deeper understanding, a consideration of alternative views and engagement in thought, discourse, or research that informs your independent judgment.
- Be constructive by considering the strengths and weaknesses of a claim and differing sides to an argument.
- Clarify points, encourage deeper thought and determine whether information that you come across is accurate and reliable.

Journal activity

Note: Throughout this resource guide, there will be several journaling activities. Keep a document with all of your answers so that you can refer back to it as you continue on your career journey.

If you would like to record your answers directly into this guide, use the **comment** feature if you are viewing the document in **Adobe® Reader®** or the **type text** feature if you are viewing in a web browser.

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Comment



Draw



Journal prompt: Think about decisions you've made today or recently. Did you consider alternate views, seek constructive feedback or research prior to deciding? Why or why not?

Benefits of critical thinking

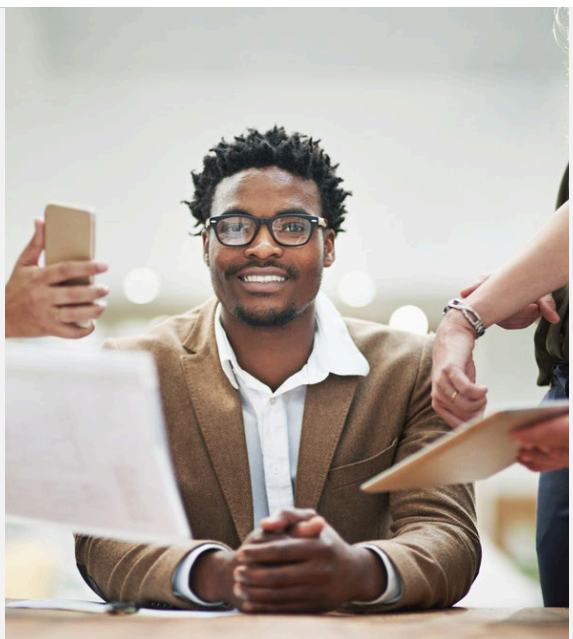
- Safeguards against automatic thinking and classifying issues under something that's happened in the past
- Allows for innovation and the ability to explore new ideas by looking beyond conventional solutions
- Fosters teamwork by working together to find the right solutions and resources so that the right action rises by itself

Barriers of critical thinking



The key to understanding critical thinking is not only knowing and making sure that you understand the process, but also being able to put this into practice by applying your knowledge.

Why don't we always think critically?

<p>System one where our automatic thinking occurs, we just act without thinking</p> <p>Fast</p> <p>Unconscious</p> <p>Automatic</p> <p>Everyday decisions</p> <p>Error prone</p>		<p>System two where logical reasoning, explicit knowledge and critical thinking occur</p> <p>Slow</p> <p>Conscious</p> <p>Effortful</p> <p>Complex decisions</p> <p>Reliable</p>
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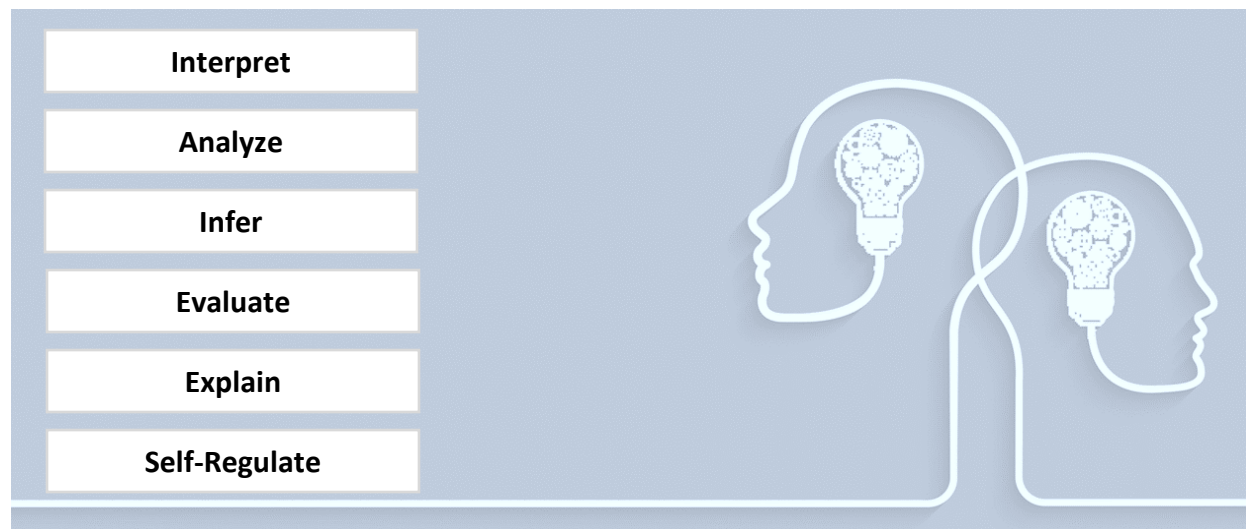
System two (critical thinking) takes more time and energy, so we often just go to our default thinking, which is System one.

Journal activity

Journal prompt: What examples of work or work-related tasks require critical, or System two, thinking?

The process of critical thinking

Overview



Interpretation — To comprehend and express meaning or significance

Skills: Categorize, decode significance, clarify meaning

Examples for applying these skills:

- Recognizing a problem and describing it without bias
- Reading a person's intentions through facial expression
- Distinguishing a main idea from subordinate ideas in a text
- Constructing a tentative categorization or way of organizing something you are studying
- Paraphrasing someone's ideas in your own words

Analysis — To identify intended and actual relationships

Skills: Examine ideas, identify arguments, identify reasons and claims

Examples for applying these skills:

- Identifying the similarities and differences between two approaches to the solution of a given problem
- Picking out the main claim made in a newspaper editorial and tracing back the various reasons the editor offers in support of that claim
- Identifying unstated assumptions; constructing a way to represent a main conclusion and the various reasons given to support or criticize it; sketching the relationship of sentences or paragraphs to each other and to the main purpose of the passage

Inference — To draw reasonable conclusions; conjecture; form hypotheses

Skills: Question evidence, propose alternatives, draw logically valid conclusions

Questions to leverage when applying these skills:

- Given what we know so far, what conclusions can we draw?
- What does the evidence imply?
- What additional information do we need?
- What are the consequences of doing things as proposed?

Evaluation — To assess the credibility and logic of statements, representations, arguments and opinions

Skills: Assess credibility of claims, assess the quality of arguments that were made using inductive or deductive reasoning

Questions to leverage when applying these skills:

- How credible is that claim?
- How strong are those arguments?
- Do we have our facts right?
- How confident can we be in our conclusion given what we know?

Explanation — To state and to justify the reasoning upon which your results are based; to present your reasoning in the form of a strong convincing argument

Skills: Justify procedures, present arguments, help people understand our thought process

Questions to leverage when applying these skills:

- How did you come to that conclusion?
- How would you explain...?
- Take us through your reasoning.

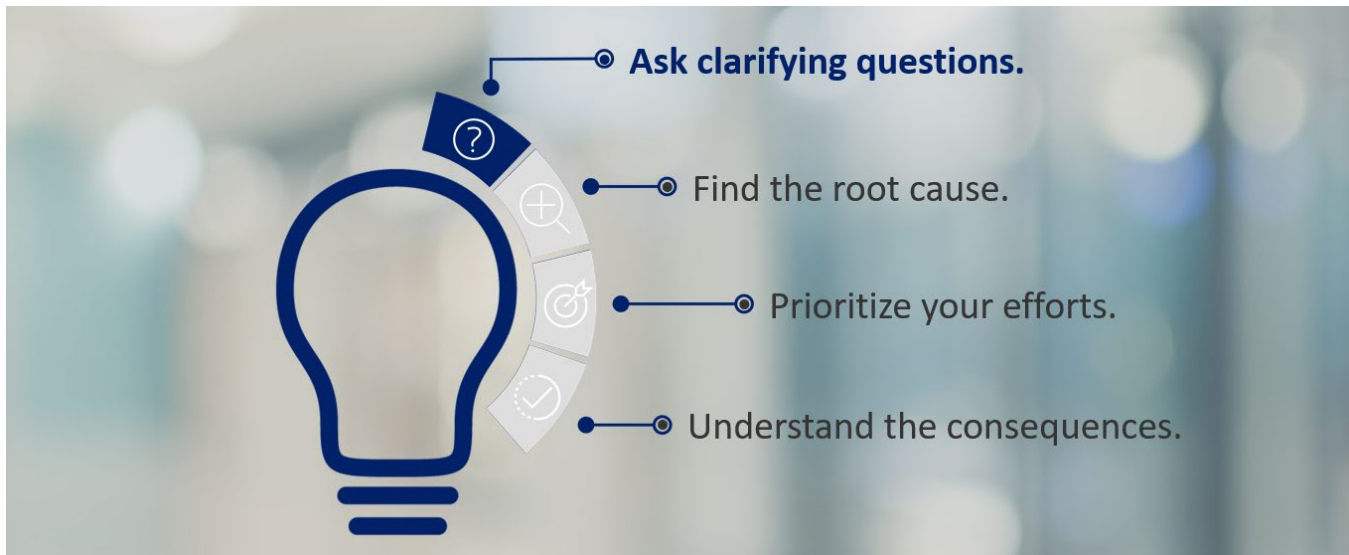
Self-regulation — To self-consciously monitor your own process of applying the previous skills with a goal of confirming, validating or correcting your results (The act of self-regulating is what keeps us in check, making sure we are on point.)

Skills: Self monitor, self-correct

Questions to leverage when applying these skills:

- Are we being precise?
- How good was our methodology?
- What are we missing?

Tools you can use to strengthen your critical thinking skills — Ask clarifying questions.



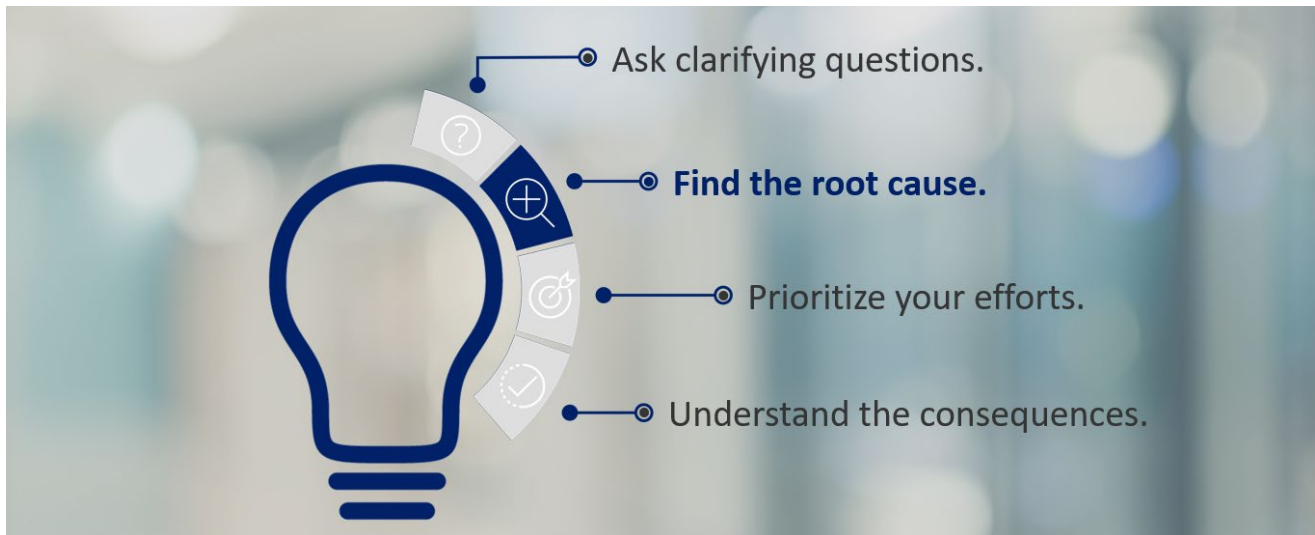
The first step is to make sure you're clear on what the problem is before you jump into solving it. By asking questions and spending time in critical thought, you're going to have a more clearly bounded problem space. Here are three ways to ask clarifying questions when working to uncover the real problem.

- **What does success look like?**
 - Understanding what your partner views as success will help give you insight to why they view something is not working and help give you needed criteria you can use to evaluate if you are successful in your problem solving.
- **What are we trying to solve for?**
 - Getting the main stakeholder in the issue to actually explain in their own words what they need you to solve helps paint a picture of what the problem is and what success looks like.
- **What do you mean by that?**
 - Sometimes the best way to ask for clarity when trying to understand something is to ask them directly: "What do you mean by that?"

It can also be helpful to restate what you just heard.

- For example, say "What I'm hearing is..."
- Once someone has explained what has happened, restating what you heard back to them is a great way to make sure you heard it correctly.
- The person you are talking to will tell you if they believe you missed something and will correct you.

Tools you can use to strengthen your critical thinking skills — Find the root cause.



A great tool to help us really get to the heart of the matter and find the root cause of the problem is asking the **five whys** (peeling back the onion). This will help us ensure that we are addressing the real root cause of the problem instead of a symptom of a problem.

Asking **why** again and again will help you uncover the root cause.

Example:

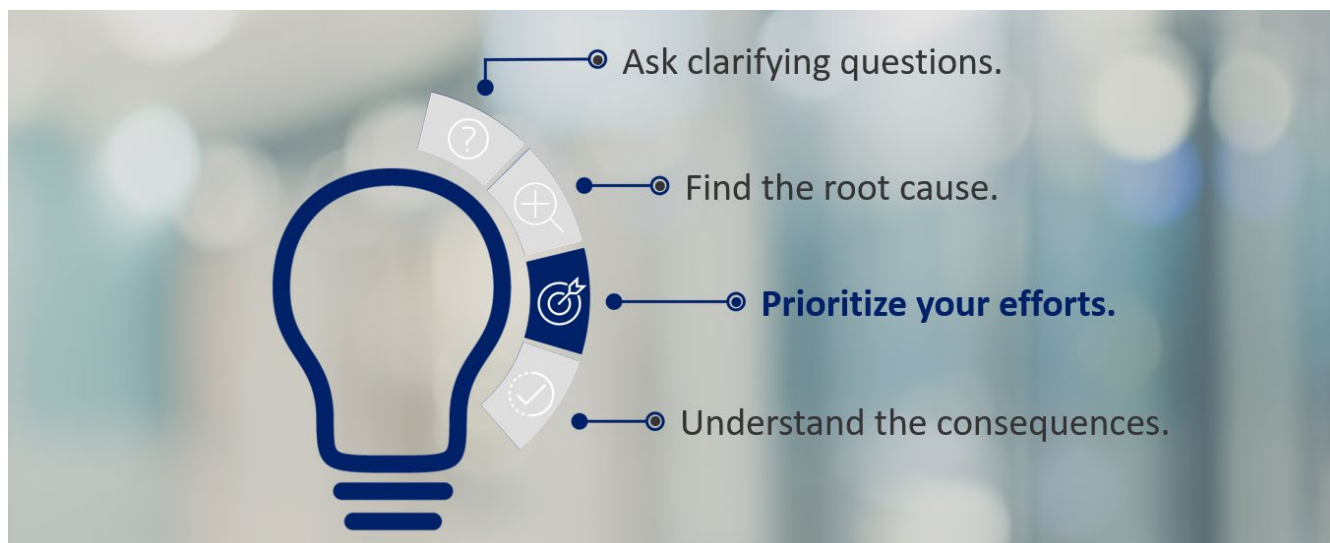
My team received low ratings on a customer satisfaction survey...

- **Why #1 – Why is the customer unhappy?**
Because their problem was not resolved
- **Why #2 – Why wasn't their problem resolved?**
Because there were long wait times to speak to the person on the phone
- **Why #3 – Why were there long wait times?**
Because we were at our maximum capacity for call volume
- **Why #4 – Why were you at maximum capacity?**
Because the customer service team also has responsibilities on the sales team
- **Why #5 – Why does customer service also have other responsibilities?**
Because there aren't enough employees to do both jobs

Journal prompt: Identify a current problem you are facing. Practice the five whys exercise to get to the root cause of your problem.

What did you learn? Are you better prepared to address the problem now?

Tools you can use to strengthen your critical thinking skills — Prioritize your efforts.

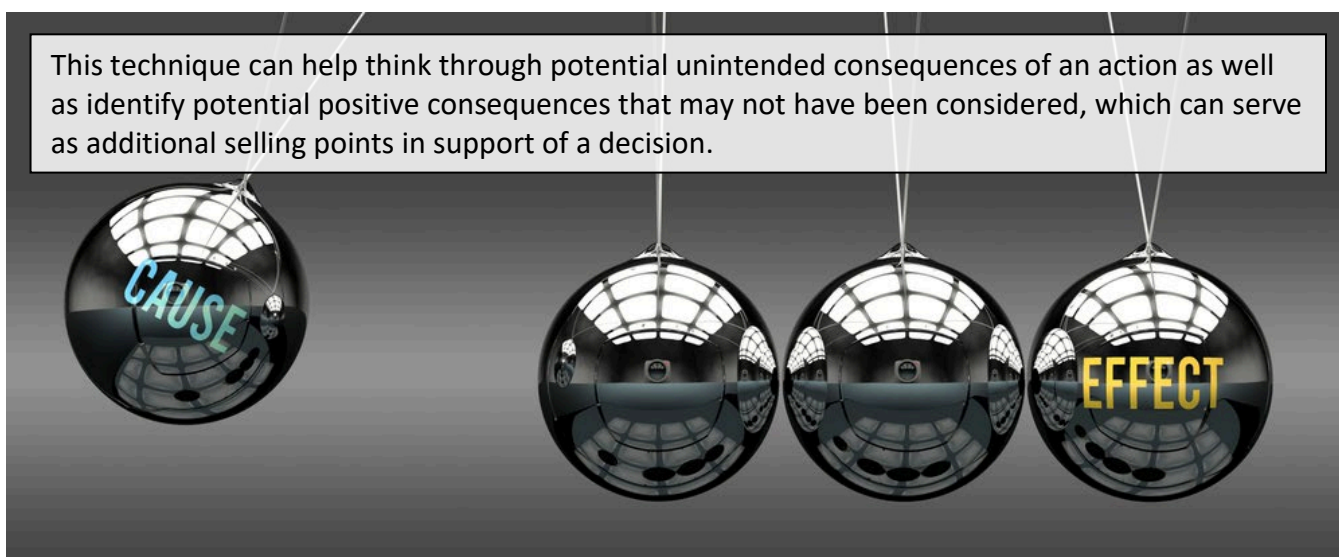


Another tool you can use to develop your critical thinking skills is **the 80/20 Rule, which is a great way to help sort through priorities.** Known as the Pareto Principle, it is a proven way to help you prioritize your efforts so that you are focusing on those items that will have the biggest impact.

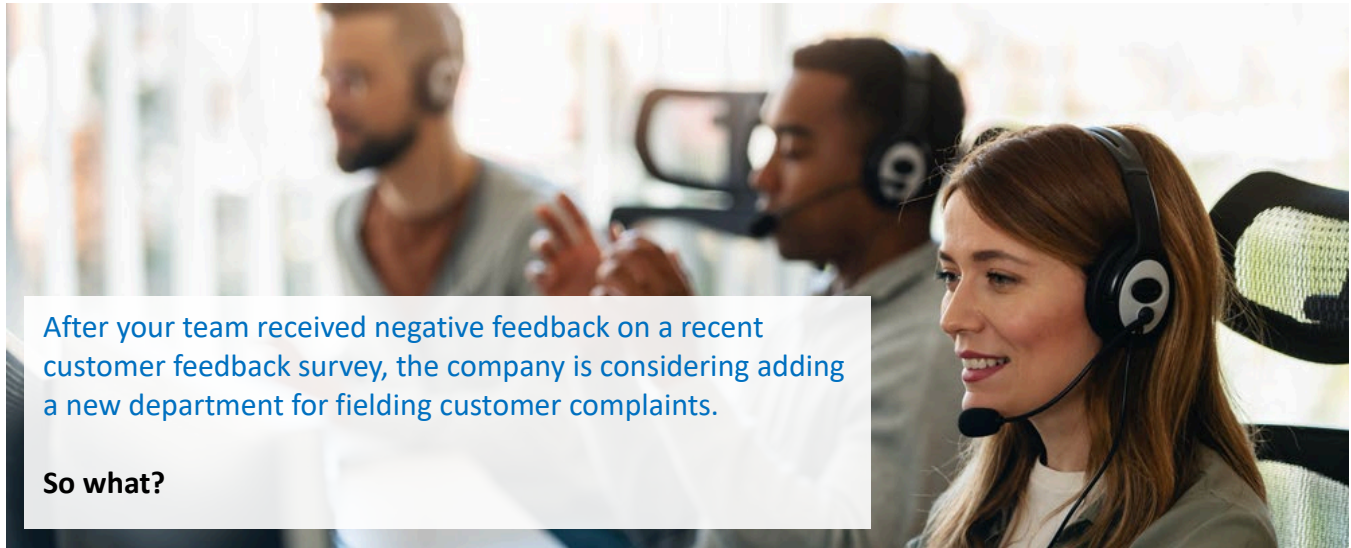
Tools you can use to strengthen your critical thinking skills — Understand the consequences.



Now we need to understand that every possible solution brings its own set of consequence that could be good or bad. Like asking **why** five times, this tool involves asking “**so what**” several times.



Tools you can use to strengthen your critical thinking skills — Understand the consequences, continued



Ask yourself “so what” seven times to determine the potential consequences in this scenario.

Here are seven **so what** questions you could ask in this scenario:

1. **So what?** The company will have a new department to field customer complaints.
2. **So what?** Adding a new team will take time to create and cost money.
3. **So what?** There could be temporary dissatisfaction as the new team is created.
4. **So what?** Creating a new team will let one department focus on customer issues.
5. **So what?** Employees will have greater capacity to resolve issues.
6. **So what?** Quicker responses could improve customer satisfaction.
7. **So what?** Increased customer satisfaction could lead to more repeat business and greater success.

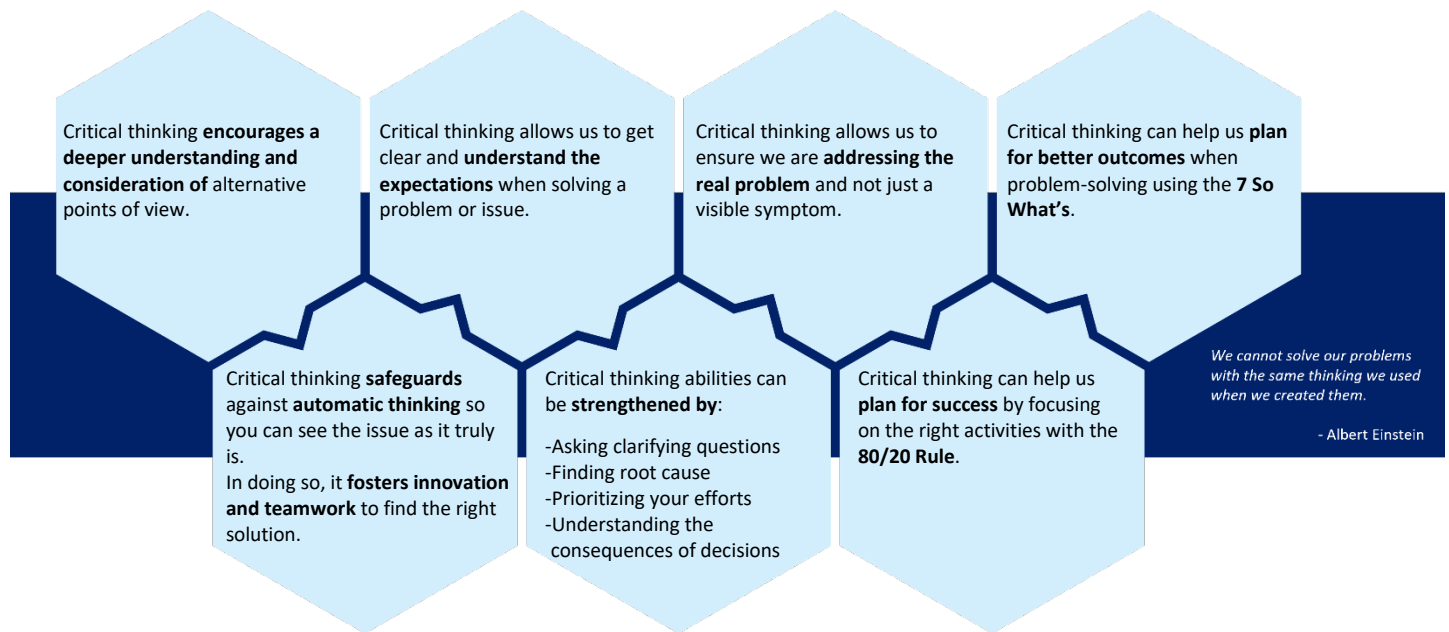
Journal prompt: Now that you have identified the root cause of your problem, practice the seven so whats activity to help you identify all potential consequences.

Using critical thinking tools

As you are faced with a challenge or situation that requires you to think critically, use the critical thinking tools to assess the situation and determine how to proceed and address the issues.

Document your understanding of the issue:
Determine what questions you want to ask to clarify the issue:
Based on understanding the issue, use the five whys technique to identify at least one root cause of the issue:
Prioritize efforts by focusing on the items that will have the biggest impact to address the root cause of the issue:
Use the seven so whats to consider the potential and unintended consequences:
Given the analysis, make recommendations to proceed and address the issue/challenge:

Critical Thinking – summary



Critical thinking is used in everything we do.

- It helps us solve problems more effectively.
- It builds teamwork by encouraging a deeper understanding and consideration of alternative views.
- It helps us be more objective and less emotional when solving problems by taking the time to follow logic and look at the facts.
- It also allows us to better self-regulate when acting with others because we understand what is truly happening around us.

We all have problems to solve, and we make decisions every day, which makes critical thinking a skill you will truly use the rest of your life.

Incorporate all the tools and tips we covered today, and you will be a natural at it.