Five Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking

Facilitation Guide

What is it?
Understanding our strengths and weaknesses in critical thinking is an important part of catching ourselves from falling into repeated cognitive traps. Use this reflective activity to help participants consider their strengths and weaknesses in critical thinking.

Why use it?
Critical thinking builds on the Intellectual asset of truth-seeking, with its focus on considering multiple perspectives and evaluating sources of information to ensure that they are grounded in reality and objectivity. Critical thinking is also rooted in intellectual humility—as critical thinkers, we must be willing to question our own beliefs and open to changing our minds in response to new or conflicting information. Critical thinking is necessary for moral and ethical decision-making (Practice M2): by insisting on bringing together sufficient information to inform decision-making (Practices C1 and C2), it ensures that Principled Innovation moves away from egocentrism to consider one’s own beliefs in light of others’. Critical thinkers understand that as we engage in dialogue with others, our beliefs today become tomorrow’s biases, and the process of learning is never complete.

This reflective activity surfaces five important tips for improving our critical thinking. Knowing our own strengths and weaknesses in this important skill is a starting point for helping us avoid missing out on key insights into the root causes of the problems we face and in staying open-minded to possible solutions.

What you need
- Time: 15 minutes of participants’ time
- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHjgKe7JMNE

Instructions
The speaker in this video spells out five tips for improving critical thinking:

1. Beware of confirmation bias
2. Embrace nuance and complexity
3. Practice intellectual humility
4. Check your sources
5. Avoid fallacies

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which of these five actions come easiest to you?
2. Which are the hardest? Why are these areas hard for you?
3. The speaker mentions two important fallacies. Provide an example of how you have seen politicians or other social actors engage in these fallacies.
   a. How do those fallacies short circuit the critical thinking process?
   b. What are the implications of that for our society’s capacity to solve its greatest problems?
4. Being skeptical of claims is often considered to be a fundamental component of critical thinking. How could these tips be seen as a way of acting on healthy skepticism?
5. What steps can you take to increase your propensity to engage in critical thinking?