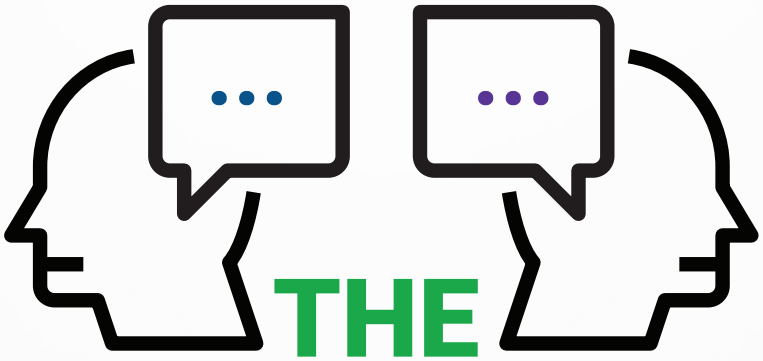

THE MISSING CONVERSATIONS

Critical Thinking During Times of Crisis

CRITICAL THINKING CANVAS GUIDELINES

By Dr. Craig Overmyer

> When working with a team to name and measure attributes of leadership excellence, I discovered one of the most powerful attributes for decision making: Critical Thinking. The assessment used in the Hallmarks of Excellence® in Leadership report was the Watson-Glaser Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA).

This critical thinking appraisal is one of the main evaluating tools for cognitive abilities in professionals, since it measures critical thinking. It is seen as a successful tool to predict job success, as well as being used to select good managers and finding possible future leaders. Critical thinking tests assess your ability to logically analyze assumptions, arguments, deductions, inferences, and interpreting information.

According to Wikipedia, critical thinking is the analysis of facts to form a judgment. The subject is complex, and several different definitions exist, which generally include the rational, skeptical, unbiased analysis, or evaluation of factual evidence.

Why is critical thinking important? **Critical thinking** enables **leaders** at every level to understand the impact of their decisions on the business as a whole and ensures both alignment with organizational goals and accountability for results. The mind-set that made **leaders** successful in the past probably won't ensure success in the future.

After coaching hundreds of leaders, as various levels of authority and accountability, our team discovered a pattern. When leaders scored high in critical thinking, they had the capacity to linger with ambiguity. Lingering with ambiguities is very important, especially for companies that are scaling up. Why is this important? Because, you can focus on solutions rather than just problem solving using old ways of thinking. Also, lingering with ambiguity can be as short as 60 second time out for a sports team, or a 60 minute planning meeting with a workplace team.

THE MISSING CONVERSATIONS

In my book, **Accelerate Thru Conflict: The Missing Conversations… Before It's Too Late**, I share the story of an owner of a commercial real-estate firm. Scaling Up became exhausting! The complexity of growth of her company became overwhelming for her. One of the reasons was low critical thinking skills. She was a problem solver, and whenever a threatening situation came up that required a decision, she was quick to put into practice this skill: **Hear to fix; tell to solve**. Often lots of money was on the line, and when in a threat state, she was quick to move into problem solving mode.

It seemed foreign to her when I suggested that she needed to improve practice Critical Thinking and learn implement the ability to linger with ambiguity, by practicing this skill: **Listen to learn; ask to empower.** Through the coaching, she discovered the need to shift from being the main problem solver, to a crucial thinker who could draw out new solutions with and through her leadership team and managers.

You and your teams are facing the challenges of the global health crisis that has become a global economic crisis that will impact your organization. These guidelines with help you and your team at work and your family at home. The Critical Thinking Canvas will help your brain think better. You will be practicing critical thinking skills to address the what Jim Collins describes in his book Good to Great, the "brutal facts" that you must address in this current crisis.

How does a leader put Critical Thinking into practice? One way to remember how to practice Critical Thinking is the following acronym: **CRAP**

Challenge assumptions

Root our biases

Ask questions that draw out new alternatives

Press for evidence to support new solutions

This process will teach you how to nonjudgmentally observe the brutal facts, the realities that will need new working assumptions and a plan of action to address particularly challenging harsh realities of the brutal facts you must face.

A **leader** with **critical thinking** skills can understand the logical connections between ideas, identify the relevance and **importance** of arguments, detect inconsistencies or mistakes in **reasoning**, and improve decisions making skills.

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Guidelines for completing the Critical Thinking Canvas

1. Set up a 60-minute meeting with your team, teammate or at home, with your spouse. Make sure each person has read these guidelines before attending.
2. The chosen facilitator starts the meeting with these questions found in STEP 1 of In-The-Moment Conversations found in the book Accelerate Thru Conflict: **Seize the Moment and Regain Focus**. Before you ask these questions, ask everyone to take moment for slow, deep breath for 30 seconds to a minute.
    a. What's on your mind, that needs to be addressed, or put aside, to be fully present and focused?
    b. What is the conflict, and what is the real challenge for you?
3. Using your Critical Thinking Canvas as a model, use flip chart paper of a whiteboard, virtual or on the wall to brainstorm ideas and prioritize decisions.
4. Make sure there are sticky notes available. For each the first 4 sections of the canvas, read the questions and ask each person to silently write their ideas and place them on the flip chart or white board. The facilitator says something like this: "When considering the questions, write down insights that come to mind without pre-judging those ideas. We are not generating ideas to prove ourselves; we are being open to insights that will improve our crucial thinking together."
5. After each for the first 3 sections is completed, the facilitator invites the team to organize and prioritize the ideas by moving the sticky notes into groups of similar ideas, and patterns. Ideas that are outside these clusters of thoughts can be very valuable for break through ideas.
6. When you get to the section titled, *Root Our Biases*, ask each person to reference the 20 Biases worksheet. Review each bias, one at a time, by reading it out loud. The facilitator encourages dialogue, and everyone must give their input. Then prioritize 1 to 3 biases that could be affecting your decision.
7. Now it is time to be decisive. Leveraging the bottom portion of the canvas, the facilitator will guide the team to consider 3 scenarios from outside circumstances beyond your control that may be probable. I like the 3 categories of good, bad or ugly. You choose what fits best in your situation. For example: Good-sales drop by 15%; Bad-sales drop by 30%; Ugly-sales drop 50%.
8. The previous sections of the canvas will help the team gain insights about new alternatives to handle each scenario. For the example just named, your may come up with new systems or processes for leads; new products to sell; new market segment. You get the idea.
9. Finally, use the "if, then" section to decide on a plan for each scenario. For example, "If customers are reluctant to buy, then we offer a new form of payments extended over time." I recommend reading pages 153-162 in the Accelerate Thru Conflict book.

Please contact Dr. Craig Overmyer for guidance and help at 317-506-5788 or online at www.culturesthatwork.com