

REVIEW ARTICLE

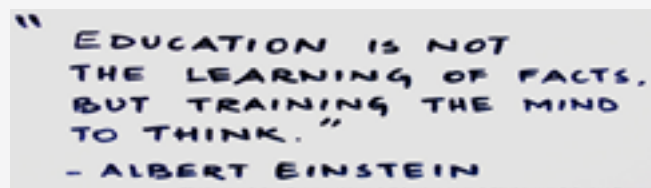
ORGANIZATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND CRITICAL THINKING OF MANAGERS

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Abstract

Organizations have been created with a preplanned agenda which one may call as Objectives, Expectations or aspirations. What shapes an organization and gives it a focus depends on the expectations of its members particularly the Managers who are key players. Several tools which help better management of organizations and people have been introduced from time to time and one such is Strategic planning. The strategy of an organization is not an isolated document but in essence it is the summation of critical and focused thinking of several members who are equally committed to the objectives for which the organization was created in the first place. In the world of academic thinkers, critical thinking skills are considered crucial to learning and development. Critical thinking is about creating an environment in which company teams are actively thinking about solutions to problems and viewing complicated situations critically — in both an analytical and objective manner. By applying some of these critical thinking practices to their own business, companies would find that these methods are not only more effective, but also save time in the long run. Managers are trained to solve problems by making use of their thinking skills in an incisive manner.



Keywords: Environment for Critical thinking, beginning of strategy, aspirations of managers, application of critical thinking for strategy development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is necessary to identify organizational problems and to create solutions. Problem solving is a day to day activity for managers, but when the problems are persisting and need a long term solution, it calls for strategic initiatives which are the culmination of such critical thinking capabilities. Organizational aspirations or more specifically the goals cannot be achieved without the participation of its managers and members. For this to happen, the organization has to streamline the managerial thinking to focus on its key objectives. Most of the business organizations, today achieve this through Training and recruitment of personnel suitable for company policies by focusing on the job descriptions for each and every position. Strategic management and thinking takes this critical thinking to its next level logically.

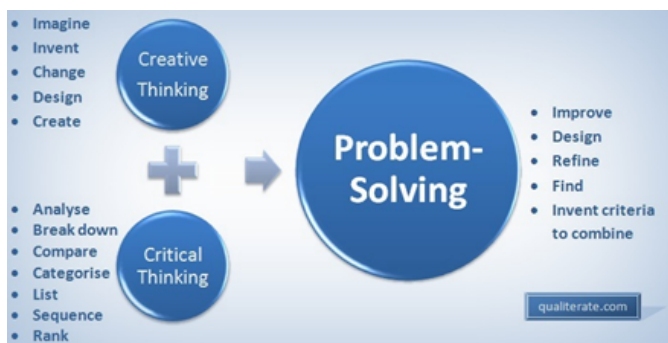


FIGURE 1: Developing criticalthinking

While the need for and benefits of critical thinking are clear, there are some aspects to these skills that companies often do not address. Some senior and executive-level professionals feel the next generation of business leaders lack the ability to implement strategic thinking, another component of critical thinking skills. These emerging leaders will have to visualize the future of the company and understanding how different aspects of the business work together to create a unified whole. Like critical thinking, encouraging employees to become “more strategic” in how they handle workplace and organizational issues sounds great in theory but can be hard to implement in concrete ways; but critical thinking by training and temperament will help the organizations to reach their goal.

Just like in school, some employees are afraid to ask questions because they fear looking stupid in front of their bosses or fellow employees. Instead of creating an environment in which there is “no such thing as a dumb or silly question”, companies should help workers practice asking “smart” questions, that are open-ended and don’t lead to only one answer. Provide space for Strategic Thinking and Development — while in their college, some employees might not have learned much about strategic thinking. Many degree programs are so focused on building skills that are directly applicable to a specific job, they fail to provide students with a broader perspective on how organizational systems work and function. Rather than looking at this as a negative, companies have the opportunity to train employees how to speak using more strategic language and give them time to think about problems and possible solutions before jumping to a decision.

While many businesses are looking for ways to develop and enhance their employees’ critical thinking skills in the workplace, there can be many outside institutions that target and train for this specific need of companies.

2 | OBJECIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Organizations are created for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. Strategic planning as a tool of management has been embraced for some time now. Thinking as we all know precedes any action. Since strategic planning process involves actions which will have an impact on the long term survival and health of an organization, the thinking process involved has to be very critical considering the impact of the plans. The thinking process involved has to take into account the pros and cons of actions which will follow. That is why it is called critical thinking. Business environment impacts the way organizations think and act. So, any thinking including critical

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thinking has to consider the environmental pressures which shape the survival and growth of businesses. With these considerations in mind following specific objectives have been identified for the current research paper:

1. A brief review of current business environment.
2. The impact of environment on the organizational thinking process.
3. Why critical thinking is important and relevant for businesses.
4. The relationship between critical thinking and strategic planning.
5. How critical thinking can help and shape the future of organizations.
6. Conclusions and suggestions.

Critical Thinking is a systematic way to form and shape one's thinking. It functions purposefully and exactly. It is thought that is disciplined, comprehensive, based on intellectual appreciation, and, as a result, well-reasoned. Critical Thinking is distinguishable from other thinking because the thinker is thinking with the awareness of the systematic nature of high quality thought, and is continuously checking up on oneself, striving to improve the quality of thinking. As with any system, critical thinking is not just a random series of characteristics or components. All of its components — its elements, principles, standards and values — form an integrated, working network that can be applied effectively not only to academic learning, but to learning in every dimension of living. Critical thinking's most fundamental concern is excellence of thought. For these reasons and the nature of the subject various methodologies were considered. In the first instance a brief inventory of available literature was considered.

One of the methods considered was to get the information through a suitably designed and administered questionnaire. But this was soon discovered to be inadequate to get the kind of qualitative feedback required to make conclusions from data collated.

During the process of a detailed search for suitable information it was found that several earlier research papers has been done on related topic and published in journals and web pages. A cursory view of these publications and the web search enabled the researcher to identify suitable information for the purpose of collating and editing to extract data suitable for the specific objectives as identified above. So a methodology based on comprehensive desk research work, collection of data, classification and identification for suitability for the objectives as cited above was selected. When the actual data was compiled, it became amply clear that the methodology so selected was ideal for getting answers to the research questions as detailed in the Objectives and methodology section. As may be seen from the following pages, the compilation was excellent and sufficient and data adequacy was good. Data analysis and conclusions thereof have been made and can be seen in the pages to follow. A few suggestions have been added for the purpose and guidance of future researchers on organizational effectiveness.

3 | REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Critical thinking is based on two assumptions: first, that the quality of our thinking affects the quality of our lives, and second, that everyone can learn how to continuously improve the quality of his or her thinking. Critical thinking implies a fundamental, overriding goal for education in schools and in the workplace: always to teach so as to help students and employees improve their own thinking. As members of an organization learn to take command of their thinking and continuously improve its quality, they learn to take command of their lives, by improving the quality of their lives.

A personal knowledge and mastery of process can help to develop critical thinking skills, where sense-making includes observing, studying, challenging (especially one's assumptions), and evaluating. Developing these skills takes practice, appropriate feedback and an environment that supports critical thinking. The process of developing these skills is depicted in the Figure 2, given below



FIGURE 2: simplistic way of critical thinking

“Critical thinking calls for a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends. It also generally requires ability to recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems, to gather and marshal pertinent information, to recognize unstated assumptions and values, to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discrimination, to interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions, to draw warranted conclusions and generalizations, to put to test the conclusions and generalizations at which one arrives, to reconstruct one’s patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience, and to render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life.



FIGURE 3: web based critical thinking

Critical thinking can also be developed through web based tools as indicated in Figure 3. This may be suitable in the current environment of networked society and mobile tools and applications.

Flattening the organization is one way to open communications and delegate responsibility but asking employees to engage in real critical thinking, and accepting the resulting actions, will not work unless

there is a two-way flow of power and authority. Critical thinking is not just thinking more deeply but also asking difficult and discomfiting questions. Without power and authority, these become meaningless.

4 | COMPREHENSIVE CRITICAL THINKING HAS THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS

It is thinking which is responsive to and guided by integrity Standards, such as relevance, accuracy, precision, clarity, depth, and breadth. Without standards to guide it, thinking cannot achieve excellence. [Note: most so-called “thinking skill” educational programs and approaches have no intellectual standards.]

- It is a process that intentionally encourages the development of Intellectual Traits in the thinker, such as intellectual humility, intellectual integrity, intellectual perseverance, intellectual empathy, and intellectual self-discipline, among others. [Note: most “thinking skill” programs ignore fundamental intellectual traits.]
- It is a type of thinking in which the thinker can identify the Elements of Thought that are present in any problem, such that the thinker makes the logical connection between the elements and the problem in consideration. The thinker will routinely ask questions such as:
 - What is the purpose of my thinking?
 - What precise question am I trying to answer?
 - Within what point of view am I thinking?
 - What information am I using?
 - How am I interpreting that information?
 - What concepts or ideas are central to my thinking?
 - What conclusions am I coming to?
 - What is I taking for granted, what assumptions am I making?

- If I accept the conclusions, what are the implications?
- What would the consequences be, if I put my thought into action?

For each element, the thinker must be able to reflect on the standards that will shed light on the effectiveness of thinking. Critical thinking skills have moved up in the Managerial Priority in managerial skills as seen below Figure 4:

Top 10 skills

| in 2020 | in 2015 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Complex Problem Solving | 1. Complex Problem Solving |
| 2. Critical Thinking | 2. Coordinating with Others |
| 3. Creativity | 3. People Management |
| 4. People Management | 4. Critical Thinking |
| 5. Coordinating with Others | 5. Negotiation |
| 6. Emotional Intelligence | 6. Quality Control |
| 7. Judgment and Decision Making | 7. Service Orientation |
| 8. Service Orientation | 8. Judgment and Decision Making |
| 9. Negotiation | 9. Active Listening |
| 10. Cognitive Flexibility | 10. Creativity |

FIGURE 4: Managerial priority skills

Critical thinking is based on self; self-assessing, self-examining, and self-improving. The thinker takes steps to assess the various dimensions of thinking, using appropriate intellectual standards. The thinker is able, not only to critically examine his/her thought as a whole, but also to take it apart, to consider its various parts, as well. In most circumstances, the critical thinker is aware of the full variety of ways in which thinking can become distorted, misleading, prejudiced, superficial, unfair, or otherwise defective. The thinker strives for wholeness and integrity as fundamental values. If we know quite explicitly how to check our thinking as we go, and we are committed to doing so, and we get extensive practice, then we can depend on the results of our thinking being productive. Good thinking produces good results. It is a kind of thinking that is responsive to the social and moral compulsions to not only enthusiastically argue from alternate and opposing points of view, but also seeks and identifies weaknesses and limitations in one’s own position. when one becomes aware that there are many legitimate points of view, each of which — when deeply thought through — yields some level of insight, then one becomes keenly

aware that one’s own thinking — however rich and insightful it may be, however carefully constructed — will not capture everything worth knowing and seeing.

For starting the thinking Process one needs to have the knowledge of the subject matter on which thinking is focused. Knowledge leads to more ideas, and while applying ideas and analyzing results leads to a synthesis and evaluation that ultimately results in creation of new perspectives and opens the door for new products, materials and processes as indicated in Figure 5 below:

During the early years of a company’s life, the founders and senior leaders generally focus on product development and customer development. During this period of formation, the team is working out its basic product, initial value proposition, market focus, and go-to-market approaches. Once the product and customer development has reached a reasonable point of maturity, the team then begins to turn its attention toward company development. One of the best steps an organization can take at this point is to become aspirations driven company (also referred to as mission-driven or vision-driven). An aspirations driven company is one whose leaders make clear the organization’s mission, vision, values, and priorities. These aspirations, in turn, serve as a guide for all employees and market participants involved with the company.

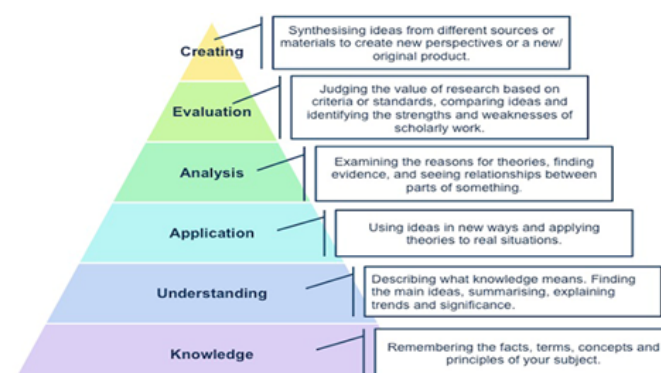


FIGURE 5: How knowledge is directed to critical thinking

Your aspirations are what you aim to be as a company. They are the longest term and most aggressive goals for your business. Your aspirations can

be organized in many different ways, but most frequently are set as your mission, vision, values, and priorities. Organizational changes take place as a consequence of several environmental pressures as depicted in Figure 6. Factors internal as well as external to the organizations can put pressures. Organizational expectations and performance depends on such pressures. There are some factors over which the organizations have no control (ex: technological advances, Government policies, Political and social values etc), but other factors over which they have control are to be addressed forth with.



FIGURE 6: Aspirations create pressure for organizational change

The ultimate goal of identifying, expressing, and living your company aspirations is for everyone in and around your organization to embrace and act in a manner consistent with those objectives. Essentially, you reach your aspirations by living your aspirations. As mentioned before, your aspiration goal can be broken down into mission, vision, value, and priority goals:

Mission — People in your organization, understand your company’s purpose, and work toward realizing that purpose in their daily work. Essentially, you are answering the question, “Why are we building this organization?”

Vision — Members of your organization understand what you want your company and customer set to “look like” in the long term, and they use this understanding to both motivate and guide their work. Essentially, you are answering the question, “What are we aiming to achieve?”

Value — Employees in your organization work in a manner that is consistent with your values and principles. Essentially, you are answering the question, “How should we act?”

Priorities — Different departments in your organization understand your priorities and if there is ever any conflict between individual aspirations. Aspirations serve as a guide to everyone inside and outside of your organization for explaining who you are, where you want to go, and how you’re going to get there. But aspirations are a confused idea in most companies. Some think of aspirations as a poster to motivate employees. Other companies have senior managers who believe that aspirations are for the “troops” but not for them.

5 | BUSINESS BENEFITS OF COMPANY ASPIRATIONS

As your company grows, it’s important to communicate who you are to new and existing employees and other stakeholders, which company aspirations help you do. Company aspirations help everyone in the company guide their activities, behaviors, and decisions. When aspirations are well expressed and baked into a company’s culture, they help you:

- f* Hire the people who best fit your aspirations
- f* Help the “right-fit” people know that you are the best company to work for
- f* Help the “wrong-fit” people know that your company is not the right company for them
- f* Inspire your staff
- f* Separate staff that are not aligned with your aspirations
- f* Give guidance for the millions of activities, behaviors, and decisions that are made in your company every week
- f* Enable your product market participants to understand where you’re going, why you exist, and what is important to you
- f* Inspire your product market participants to purchase and use your products and services

An aspirations-driven company gives people, both inside and surrounding the company, extreme clarity on what to expect and what is expected, which helps you accelerate at a higher velocity toward your goals. If your company has identified and expressed the aspirations, you are off to a good start. However, at this point, your aspirations are just words on a page.

If you do not live and reinforce your aspirations, they will never move beyond words to become second nature to your staff. You have several hurdles to overcome during this phase: Most employees won't remember your aspirations even after you communicate them three or more times, perhaps more! Many employees won't really understand what your aspirations mean in general. Many employees won't know how their work relates to your aspirations and probably won't raise their hands and ask questions.

Everyone is busy and unless the senior management constantly puts aspirations onto the table and into the conversation, everyone will revert back to their day-to-day work. Some vehicles for reinforcing aspirations include: It is better to have some smaller team dinners to discuss your aspirations, what they mean, and how each person can live them. While you are making decisions, bring up the aspirations as the criteria for making the decision (e.g., when making a decision to work on a particular initiative or hire a particular person). Communicate that you are taking certain actions because they are aligned with your aspirations. Communicate that you are not doing something because it is not aligned with your aspirations. Give ongoing feedback by praising people who do things that align with your aspirations; conversely, give helpful feedback on different ways of doing things to people who take actions that conflict with your aspirations. Reinforce all or part of your aspirations at your regular staff meetings. Discuss how well the group is living the aspirations at your retrospective meetings. Openly give praise or a reward to someone who is particularly good at living your aspirations. One of the crucial learning developments is an awareness of differing approaches to a problem, alongside an ability to assess those approaches critically.

Rather than relying on a standard, uniform problem-solving method, you can learn how to identify other, often more valuable, approaches, and thereby increasing your chances of success. With a Critical Thinking mindset, you will know that not all information that is available is relevant to decision-making, but often we do not know how to filter out the irrelevant from the relevant. Critical Thinking also helps you to know that a decision is ultimately a good one; an appreciation of differing worldviews

is a direct result of learning how to empathize with other points of view... This empathy and understanding is crucial to effective teamwork and leaders. By teaching you to analyze and build your evidence for any given premise, Critical Thinking can make you a more effective communicator. Consistent and relevant points to support your theory are pivotal in communicating a proposal or idea proficiently. When you know your stuff, so will they. Decision-making abilities are transformed with a Critical Thinking approach, and made a lot easier. You leave intuition or guesswork decision-making behind, and begin to work on a more analytical and considered basis, resulting in sounder decisions. Not only will you become a more reasoned and balanced problem solver, you will learn the two types of reasoning – inductive and deductive – and when it is appropriate to use one over the other. Grounding decisions in reason and logic over emotion or instinct makes for effective problem solving.

6 | ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Critical Thinking is more than just a concept, it is a real-life model upon which you can build successful and efficient problem solving skills, skills that prove highly valuable in the workplace and beyond. This technique, with its roots in Greek philosophy, is the application of logic to enable better, more reasoned decision making. It can revolutionize your everyday life, by improving how you interpret opinions, rationalizations and problem solving practices. Critical Thinking is a system that is often misjudged as criticism, but rather it focuses on the ability to follow logical steps and arrive at a decisive and appropriate conclusion. With some careful and structured training, you too can become a more informed, reasoned decision maker.

Current business environment is characterized by a lot of turbulence due to availability of multiple sources of fast data thanks to digital connectivity. Often this connectivity provides a slant information and point of view as the same is filtered through several layers of digital transference. Actually what one gets is often a review of information rather than original point of view as the information goes through

the maze of digitalized comments, recommendations and strong opinions, often to the detriment of a proper analysis, perspective and control. The other aspect of the environment is, of course, the speed of communications, which at times sacrifices accuracy and context.

The immediate impact of these developments for businesses is that the thinking process is undergoing a lot of change. The aspirations of organizations are conveyed through management thinking and planning which follows such thinking. Several vital issues have to be considered concurrently for current organizations to take a strategic view and decide on the action plan to be ahead of the next competitor for the products and or services offered. This calls for Critical thinking, involving all aspects of business. As seen from the review of literature, organizations have to provide leadership and guidance to employees at different levels to take quick and appropriate decisions. The management delegates these responsibilities to employee teams in the best interest of customers and markets. For example if the company products are to be sold in new markets by expanding sales in contiguous territories, it becomes the responsibility of Marketing and sales to do so to support the corporate plan. So, it is not only for top management but employees and supervisors at different levels have to shoulder the responsibility of critical thinking for effectiveness.

Critical thinking is the brick and mortar aspect of strategic planning process. Company strategy is a grand stand for achieving company purpose with available and critical resources. So, it implies that employees at all levels reflect this concern for efficiency and effectiveness. Strategic Planning would only outline the broad objectives of company in the long run and win the war, but short term objectives are the cannons on which such battles are dependent and hence the critical thinking perspective for organizations to be effective at all times and under conditions which vary swiftly due to changes in business perspective. The day to day planning of activities of each and every department must synchronize with the corporate strategic initiatives.

The future is built on the present and the present becomes past experience soon to be analyzed and re-invented. It is the present which is vital when actions

can be taken to secure a good future for the company. Operations management in the present must improve productivity of all aspects. The product design and process departments have to follow up and execute strategies, which needs to be in line with corporate business plans. The various business units in a corporate company will have to synchronize their activities to suit the corporate and business objectives. While the corporate and business objectives will be broad in nature and will outline only initiatives to be taken in a direction, specific and quantitative targets will have to be planned and executed by concerned departments to be concurrent with corporate objectives and strategies.

7 | SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Thinking precedes actions. This is vital to be recognized by companies and businesses to be successful in their endeavors. As outlined in the review of literature thinking is what differentiates a successful company from a not so successful one. As thinking precedes action, businesses and organizations need to concentrate on the development of the thinking process and direct their efforts on training employees at all levels for focused thinking or what may be termed as critical thinking. Since critical thinking is focused on corporate business and functional objectives this will be successful as the several functions of an organization are performed with the objective view of the various functions resulting in achievement of the corporate objectives.

One such initiative is MBO (Management by objectives). This is a management process in which company and corporate objectives are broken down with a succession of departmental objectives to achieve the strategic objectives of the company as may be outlined in company business plan.

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