

Critical Thinking



ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

Quick Signals Critical Thinking Is Weak

- People escalate basic decisions instead of proposing options.
- Teams debate opinions, not evidence, assumptions, or tradeoffs.
- “We need alignment” is code to avoid deciding.
- Mistakes repeat because nobody does cause + learning.
- Meetings end with “next steps” but no decision.

If you want better critical thinking, don't start with training. Start with how decisions get made, challenged, documented, and learned from.

1. START WITH YOUR TEAM

Name What's Happening

Use this framing: We're paying a tax in meetings, rework, and escalations.

Let's improve how we think and decide (not blame).

Pick 1 case or issue to start and continually reinforce a critical thinking approach.

3. MAKE CHALLENGE SAFE

Normalize Pressure-Testing

Discussions should cover:

- What assumption is this built on?
- What would change our mind?
- What's the counter-argument?
- What are we optimizing for?
- What decision are we not making?

Leader move: thank people for surfacing risks—even when inconvenient.

2. SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Thinking Retrofit 30-Min Meeting

Write answers live. Keep it blunt.

- **Decision needed:** What are we deciding today?
- **Problem statement:** What is happening + why it matters?
- **Known vs assumed:** What do we know? What are we guessing?
- **Options:** Include “do nothing.”
- **Tradeoffs:** What are we optimizing for? What are we sacrificing?
- **Risks:** If we're wrong, what happens? How will we notice early?
- **Recommendation:** What do you recommend and why?
- **Next step:** Smallest action/test + owner + due date.

Rule: If you can't write #1, you're not ready for a meeting.

4. BUILD JUDGEMENT FAST

“Bring Me This” Escalation Standard

When someone escalates, ask for a 1-paragraph recommendation:

- Decision needed: ...
- My recommendation: ...
- Because: (top 2 reasons)
- Risks/tradeoffs: (top 1-2)
- What I need from you: ...

5. BUILD THE ORG MUSCLE

Decision Hygiene

- **Information quality:** Define trusted sources, reduce dashboard sprawl, standardize metric definitions.
- **Decision record:** 1 page max – decision, rationale, tradeoffs, owner, date, revisit point. Store it where people actually look.
- **Learning reps:** *Weekly* – 1 real decision review, focus on reasoning, not blame. *Monthly* – premortem, it's 90 days later and this failed—why?

TRACK IMPROVEMENTS | 30-60 Day Indicators



- Fewer meetings per decision
- Reduced rework / repeat issues
- Fewer escalations, quick questions, reopened decisions
- Faster cycle time from problem → decision → action

Manager mantra: “I'm not asking for certainty. I'm asking for reasoning.”