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Elements of Intellectuality in Decision Making

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Abstract

This brief research note stresses the role intellectual and cognitive elements play in critical thinking and decision-making. Critical thinking skills are highly desirable among young adults and students, employees, teachers, and creative artists. The various elements of the functional brain that contribute to critical thinking are those that define our complex cognitive system. Critical thinking, like any other intellectual process, necessitates the use of focused attention, information processing, and reasoning abilities. It is an essential skill that has important applications in decision-making and in various domains of creative endeavors. A competent critical thinker is able to take a more rational approach to decision making. This paper highlights these issues and urges individuals to make space for critical thinking, which is so much in demand in these fast-paced digital environments.

Keywords: *Critical thinking, decision-making, rational choices, Intellectual process.*

1. Introduction

“Cogito, ergo sum,” the famous declaration of Rene Descartes which we must not forget when it concerns our thoughts on thinking. Thinking can mean forethought, prudence and planning, belief, intuition, and judgment, or, ordering of our views and considerations. According to Holyoak and Morrison (2012),

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“Thinking is the systematic transformation of mental representations of knowledge to characterize actual or possible states of the world, often in service of goals”.

If thinking (or cogitation) is a cognitive function, then critical thinking is not just a skill—it is an essential quality of a thinking mind. Critical thinking is a process—a methodological way of reflective thinking. Critical thinking is an essential component of rational thought processes and is required for making sound decisions. According to many scholars, "critical thinking" and awareness sharpen our minds (Cottrell, 2017).

Thinking, reflecting, and understanding are the three distinctive intellectual and cognitive abilities that set humans apart from animals. We have these as natural gifts bestowed on us through evolution by nature to make us more thoughtful. Thus, our ability to become the best version of ourselves depends to a great extent on how we think, reflect, and understand things clearly. In the words of the author Cottrell (2017), "critical thinking" refers to an ordered organisation of the thinking process, which some people find difficult. According to Cottrell (2017), some individuals indeed find it difficult

“...to order their thoughts in a logical, consistent, and reasoned way”.

However, just because we are able to think critically, it doesn't mean that we always think correctly or make correct decisions all the time. In this brief note, I shall discuss these things critically, with an eye on how individuals can become better critical thinkers, or become better at thinking critically, and how they could develop enhanced, far-reaching capabilities allied to thinking and mentation that are required

for enhancing their decision-making capabilities. Such skills are necessary in today's contexts to enable us to make rationally correct decisions and prevent us from making poor choices that result in wrong decisions (Walsh-Southeray, 2022). Such decisions, made in haste and without careful consideration of the rational instruments of cogitation, may cost us our time, resources, relationships, and wealth.

2. Critical Thinking in Rational Decision Making

The present society is the fruitful effect of past human thoughts and activities that have contributed largely to the changes that we are observing today. Through the passage of time, we have observed unprecedented developments in the modes of production and, likewise, witnessed drastic changes in our consumption pattern. Based on the changing patterns of consumption-driven economic production of goods and services, we are being forced to face the problem of complexity in each and every sphere of human activity.

The complexity arises from the differentiating choices and preferences of a diverse population for the reason that individuals have their own choices and preferences and have complex wants and desires. This has resulted in human thoughts and activities becoming so obtrusively complex that they demand critical consideration from thinking minds. Likewise, we must be able to make smart decisions while trying to solve our everyday, complex, and evolving problems. In knowledge organisations too, rational and creative thinking skills are prerequisites to making strategic decisions (Gudonavius & Savaneviene, 2018). All of these necessitate decision-making skills that involve specific parts of the human faculty to aid in contemplation, critical analysis, inquiry, and examination of the contexts surrounding a given problem.

Smart artificial intelligence-based tools and systems have been developed and deployed to aid the human brain in making decisions in such a way as to leave no room for error in those decisions. In this context, human rationality is now constantly being challenged by computer-based decision-support systems and machine rationality and intelligence, which work on the principles of heuristics, natural language processing (NLP), and artificial neural network-based systems, to name a few (Pohl, 2008).

Human decision-making, therefore, now demands more precision to be error-free. It calls for greater participation and proper utilisation of our cognitive system, natural intelligence, acumen, and thinking power (Pohl, 2008). We "think" before we make any decision, which is universally advisable as well. The level of thinking required is determined by the situation, context, or problem at hand. And to avoid making mistakes, we should be better equipped with knowledge of options and contexts when making any critical decision. Making informed decisions is thus a necessary step towards handling complex problems more competently. This, too, involves the utilisation of a great degree of rational intelligence only to improve on the decisions made. Decisions are now based on quality metrics that have some value. There are various factors that help determine the quality of our decision-making abilities, and among those, the most important one concerns our "understanding" of the context in which a problem sets in. If we understand a problem clearly, ask insightful questions, and examine the options carefully, we could do better at making the right decisions by choosing correctly. Besides the application of rational thought, the use of appropriate tools and technologies is essential to making critical decisions in science and technology, for instance, and especially in the clinical sciences. In fact, to deliver high-

quality clinical practise and services, it requires multiple levels of thinking strategies (Benner, Hughes, and Sutphen, 2008).

3. Discussion

Rule-following makes us fast and efficient. When rules are implanted into routines that need to be followed, it creates "automatic tedium." When human thinking is restricted to the boundaries of a subject, what results from such simple rule-following isn't very creative to an inspired mind. Hence, there would remain very little to be pondered upon for a free mind, for it binds the mind into a routine, not allowing it to think further beyond what's prescribed in a routine. Free thoughts—on the other hand, are boundless, though they are time-consuming, and it takes a different level of competency to think creatively. Critical thinking is time-consuming, too, and it must occur freely and outside the box.

Careful analysis of choices and options and evaluation of alternative courses of action are thus the necessary steps that characterise the process of competent decision-making. When decision-making involves a choice-based process, its outcome depends on individual choices as much as on individual behaviors. Outcome analysis is part of a decision-making repertoire that helps individuals weigh their options and trace the most probable trajectories that their individual actions could generate. But given the overabundance of information bombarding us every moment, it often becomes difficult for decision-makers to choose rationally (or with absolute precision)—so as not to regret their decisions later on. Critical thinking herein may help on such occasions that involve systematic and procedural thinking through a decision being made. Critical thinking skills provide an individual or group with a high level of expertise in making sound decisions.

Herein, knowledge (information) becomes the chief and primary input to a decision-making process.

Critical thinking does not always imply being sceptical of everything we see around us; there is no need to be sceptical of simple things that are based on strong natural laws. However, we should not take everything for granted as well, for it is in the process of learning to think critically that we learn to make decisions that are rationally correct and reasonably coherent (Leat, 1993; Walsh-Soucheray, 2022). By asking questions beyond the square, by challenging putative verities, and by refuting established norms and amending rules accordingly that need to be followed, we can carve out a niche space for us to allow us the freedom to think bit by bit, level by level.

If we understood the processes that underlie critical thinking precisely, we would then be able to enhance our levels of competency in thinking critically. For this, we define a simple model of decision-making that takes into account various factors that contribute to its stability. We consider rules as fixed parameters of success and enhanced productivity that seldom change, and yet following rules is advantageous rather than working arbitrarily.

4. Conclusion

This short paper discusses the various aspects of critical thinking and attempts to understand how critical thinking helps in effective rational decision-making. There are many benefits of critical thinking: it is advantageous to learning, challenges uncontested theories, helps in developing good intuitions, and aids in making rational decisions. Good thinking yields good strategy. A good strategy helps you make effective and error-free decisions, and it is critical thinking that contributes to designing such good strategies.

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