

## Stephen Brookfield's Four Critical Thinking Processes

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The questions that follow each of the following four major critical thinking processes will help you focus your thinking about the immediate situation.

### *Contextual Awareness and Deciding What to Observe and Consider*

This includes an awareness of what’s happening in the context of the situation, including values, cultural issues, and environmental influences. Sample questions include:

- What was going on in this situation that may have influenced the outcome?
- What factors influenced my behavior and others’ behavior in this situation?
- What else was happening simultaneously that affected me in this situation?
- What happened just before this incident occurred that made a difference?
- What emotional responses influenced how I was reacting in this situation?
- What else do I need to know? What information is missing?
- How do I go about getting the information I need?
- What about this situation have I seen before? What is different /dissimilar?
- Who should have been involved in order to improve the outcome?
- What’s important and what’s not important in this situation?
- What changes in behavior alerted me that something was wrong?

### *Exploring and Imagining Alternatives*

This involves thinking about and imagining other ways of looking at the situation, not just the first thing that comes to your mind. It involves exploring as many alternatives as you can think of for the given situation. Sample questions include:

- What is one possible explanation for (insert what is happening)?
- What are other explanations for what is happening?
- What is one thing I could do in this situation?
- What are two more possibilities/other alternatives?
- What else would I want to know in this situation?
- Are there others who might be able to help me develop more alternatives?
- Of the possible actions I am considering, which one is most reasonable? Why are the others not as reasonable?
- Are there other resources that need to be mobilized?

## **Brookfield's Four Critical Thinking Processes (con't.)**

### ***Assumption Recognition and Analysis***

This involves analyzing assumptions you are making about the situation as well as examining the beliefs that underlie your choices. Sample questions include:

- What has been taken for granted in this situation?
- Which beliefs/values shaped my assumptions?
- What assumptions contributed to the problem in this situation?
- What rationale supports my assumptions?
- How will I know my assumption is correct?

### ***Reflective Skepticism/Deciding What To Do***

This critical thinking approach involves questioning, analyzing, and reflecting on the rationale for decisions. Sample questions include:

- Am I sure of my interpretation in this situation?
- What rationale do I have for my decisions?
- What aspects of this situation require the most careful attention?
- Why was it important to intervene?
- What got me started taking some action?
- In priority order, identify what I would do in this situation and why.
- What priorities were missed?
- Having decided what was wrong/happening, what is the best response?
- What might I delegate in this situation?
- What was done? Why was it done?
- What would I do differently in the future, after reflecting on this situation?
- What else might work in this situation?