BSB 7.0

BSBCRT311

APPLY CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN A TEAM ENVIRONMENT

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Apply critical thinking skills in a team environment

Release 1

Learner Guide

Aspire Version 1.1

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BSBCRT311 Apply critical thinking skills in a team environment, Release 1

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Before you begin

This Learner Guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBCRT311 Apply critical thinking skills in a team environment*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this Learner Guide

This Learner Guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the Learner Guide you need to read, and which Practice Tasks and Learning Checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this Learner Guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the Learner Guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▪ Read each topic in this Learner Guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples	▪ These highlight key learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice Tasks	▪ Practice Tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which Practice Tasks to complete.
Summaries	▪ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning Checkpoints	▪ There is a Learning Checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which Learning Checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

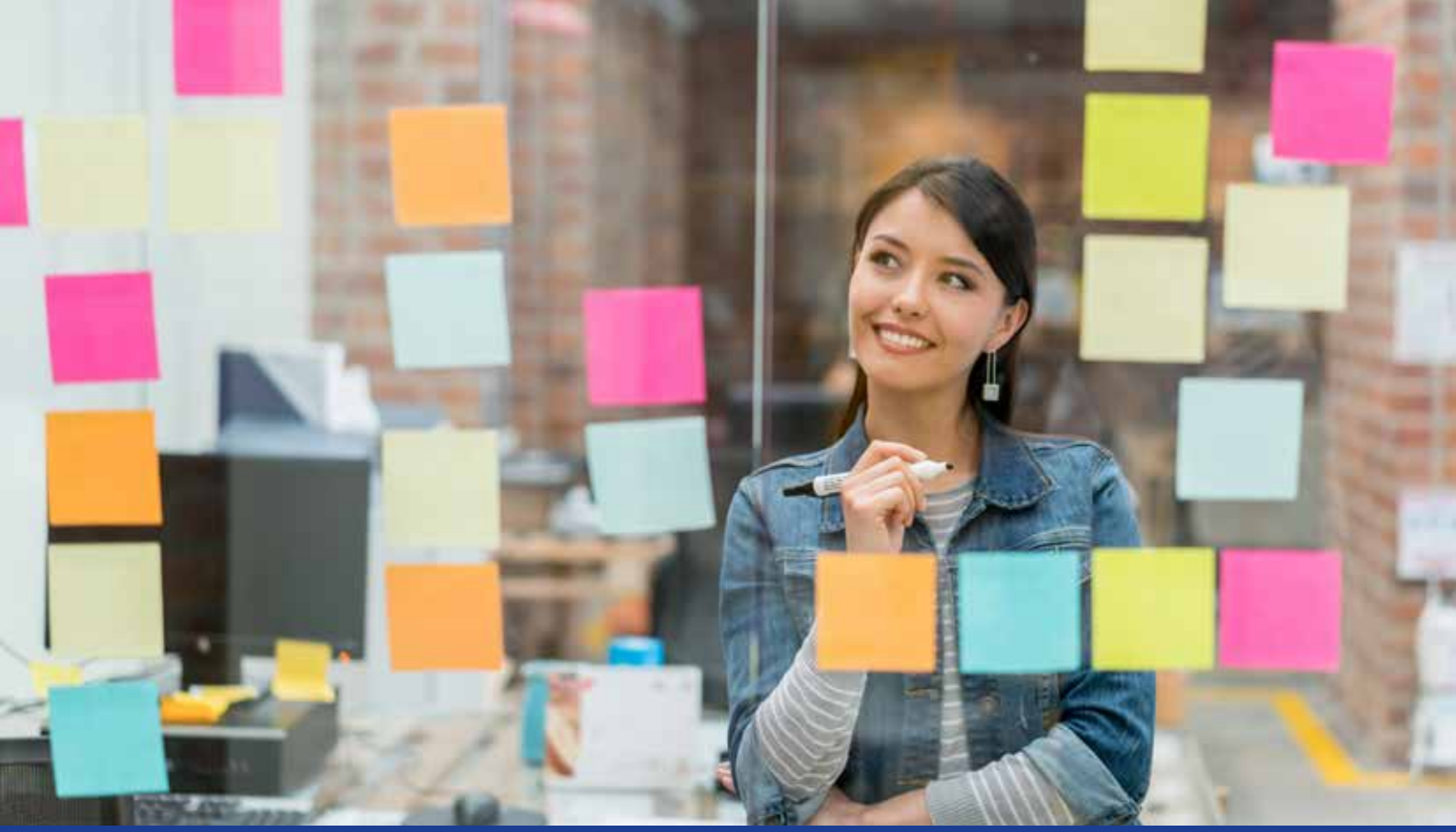
The following table provides definitions for each foundation skill.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	• Uses questioning as a strategy to expand knowledge • Reflects on existing thinking and current practices to generate new ideas
Oral communication	• Participates in a verbal exchange of ideas and elicits the view and opinions of others by listening and questioning
Reading	• Comprehends textual information and integrates ideas and concepts from various sources
Writing	• Takes notes on observations, experiences and thoughts
Teamwork	• Collaborates with others to test, strengthen and explore new ideas and different ways of thinking

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1: Prepare to address workplace problems	1A Workplace problems	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B Organisational and legislative frameworks	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C Develop questions	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1D Consult with key stakeholders	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2: Evaluate solutions for workplace problems	2A Use critical thinking techniques	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B Develop solutions in a team	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C Critically evaluate solutions	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 3: Finalise and review solution development processes	3A Present solution to stakeholders	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B Respond to challenges and questions	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3C Evaluate critical thinking processes and apply learnings	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident



Topic 1 | Prepare to address workplace problems

1A Workplace problems

1B Organisational and legislative frameworks

1C Develop questions

1D Consult with key stakeholders

1A Workplace problems

Identifying and solving workplace problems plays a key role in ensuring efficient business operations.

A problem can be defined as any unwelcome or harmful issue that needs to be overcome. Every problem has two common features:

Goal	The desired objective
Barrier	Whatever stands in the way of achieving the desired objective

Problems can be well-defined or ill-defined. Well-defined problems have a single correct answer, like a mathematical question. For ill-defined problems the goal is uncertain and could take many forms.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is the process or act of finding a solution to an issue in order to achieve a desired outcome.

To solve a problem, you need to overcome the barrier/s that prevent you achieving your goal. This is an essential work skill. Poor problem solving can lead to business failure.

As you work through the problem-solving process for this unit, it would be useful to take note of your thoughts, observations and experiences. This will help you reflect on what you have learned when the process is complete, and to apply these learnings to future problem-solving efforts in the workplace.

The problem-solving process involves six key stages:

The six stages of problem solving	
1. Identify the problem	Acknowledge that there is a problem, then identify and define it. Identifying and defining an issue can be difficult. What is the actual problem? Is this one or multiple problems? Firstly, in order to communicate the problem to others you need to understand what it is. Secondly, if a problem is incorrectly identified there is a risk that the solution will be ineffective.
2. Analyse the problem	Determine the relevant goals and the barriers. This stage is especially important when addressing complex problems.

The six stages of problem solving	
3. Find solutions	Generate possible solutions using the information gathered during the first two stages. Note that evaluating the value of each idea is not a key focus at this point. This stage often involves a group of people using critical-thinking techniques, such as brainstorming exercises. It is important to get a variety of contributions as each person will have different expertise and views on potential solutions.
4. Make a decision	Evaluate each of the potential solutions identified in stage 3 and select the best one. This stage is often the most difficult part of the problem-solving process. It requires decision-making skills.
5. Implement the solution	Act on the chosen solution. Additional problems may arise during implementation, especially if the previous stages in the problem-solving process were not done correctly.
6. Monitor success	Review the outcomes of the problem-solving process and seek feedback on the success of the solution.

In this unit, we will look at the first four stages of problem-solving.

Identifying and expressing problems

Effectively solving a problem requires a clear understanding of the problem itself.

Businesses often struggle to accurately identify problems. This is because people want to get to the solution as fast as possible, which means they spend very little time first examining the problem they are trying to solve.

Correctly identifying a problem is essential to solving it for two key reasons:

1. In order to communicate a problem to other people you need to understand what it is.
2. If a problem is incorrectly identified there is a risk that the solution will be ineffective.

The following table includes a technique that can be used to accurately identify problems in the workplace:

What is the itch?	Make a list of things that have a negative impact on your team. Ask yourselves: What is out of balance? What could be improved? None of your 'itches' need to be justified or clearly defined. Do not analyse them too closely. If necessary, organise the itches according to themes (e.g. leadership, teamwork, technology). Now, select a problem to focus on by asking: ▪ Which itch/theme do you (or your team) feel most strongly about? ▪ Which itch/theme resonates most for you (or your team)? ▪ Which itch/theme 'floats to the top'? ▪ Which itch/theme would be the most satisfying to resolve?
What is the impact?	Once you have selected a problem, think about its impact: ▪ What concerns you (or your team) most about the problem? ▪ Why did you choose that particular problem? ▪ How does this problem impact on you and/or the team? Look for the obvious and then look beyond the obvious. How does the problem impact on efficiency? How does it impact on relationships within the team and with customers? Now, choose the impacts that are most significant to you and/or the team. When the impact of the problem is clear, it is easier to generate the energy and passion to resolve it.
What is the information?	The next step is to articulate what you already know about the problem and what you need to find out. Take a sheet of paper and draw a vertical line down the centre. At the top, label the left-hand column 'Know' and the right-hand column 'Wonder'. In the left-hand column, list everything you know about the problem. If you do not know what to write, ask: ▪ What might be causing the situation? ▪ Do other teams experience similar problems? ▪ What solutions have been tried before? Once you have listed everything you know about the problem, move to the 'Wonder' side of the sheet. List all the things you do not know but would like to know. List anything that comes to mind, even if you think it would be impossible to find the answer. Answers are not as important as questions at this stage. Now, select those items from the right-hand column that are most important to understanding the problem. These items will be the basis for the questions you ask stakeholders.

Expressing problems

Once the problem has been identified, it needs to be clearly expressed. Problems are best expressed as questions, beginning with the words 'How can ...'

For example:

- How can we increase traffic to our company's website?
- How can we share information more effectively between teams?
- How can we encourage staff to use the new technology?

It is useful to write the question in a range of different ways. This helps to clarify the problem and may trigger other ideas.

The question you decide on should be exact and specific. If the problem is expressed in a vague way it will be difficult to find a clear solution.

Example

Identify and express a workplace problem

Abdo is a senior data analyst at Research Solutions, a medium-sized business that undertakes social research for government departments and not-for-profit organisations.

Abdo's team is responsible for analysing data. However, they often miss important deadlines to complete the work. He believes that the processes his team use to complete the analysis could be more efficient. Abdo raises his concerns at a team meeting and the group decide to discuss the issue further.

During the discussion, Abdo's team write up a long list of problems they believe may lead to them missing deadlines, then they consider which ones they feel the most strongly about. Eventually, they get to the point of agreeing on one major problem: they regularly receive incomplete data, which leads to significant delays in data analysis.

They spend some time expressing the problem in different ways. The question 'How can Research Solutions solve the problem of incomplete data?' is too vague. The group revises the question so it is more specific: 'How can Research Solutions improve the quality of data collection?'

Practice Task 1

Question 1

What are the two common features of all problems?

Question 2

Number each step from 1–6 in the problem-solving process.

- ◯ This stage involves acting on the chosen solution.
- ◯ This stage involves evaluating each of the potential solutions and selecting the best one.
- ◯ This stage involves reviewing the outcomes of the problem-solving process and evaluating the success of the solution.
- ◯ This stage involves fact-finding and analysis to determine the goals and barriers.
- ◯ This stage involves acknowledging that there is a problem and identifying and defining the problem.
- ◯ This stage involves the use of critical thinking to generate possible solutions to the problem.

Question 3

Which of the following questions are useful to ask when you are considering the *impact* of a problem? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ What concerns you most about the problem?
- ◯ Which issue resonates the most with you?
- ◯ What solutions have been tried before?
- ◯ What resources are involved?
- ◯ Why did you choose the particular problem?

Question 4

Why can it be helpful to express problems as questions?

1B Organisational and legislative frameworks

Organisational frameworks help to ensure that businesses are operating according to legislative requirements.

When individuals and teams within a business are making decisions about how to solve a problem, it is important to identify and reflect on the organisational frameworks relating to the legislation.

Organisational frameworks

These policies, processes and procedures help to ensure businesses are meeting legislative requirements and managing risk.

They are the standards and values that underpin how the business operates, providing employees with guidance on appropriate activities and behaviours in the workplace.

Examples of common business policies, processes and procedures are described below:

Examples	Description
Customer service	How to communicate and engage with customers face-to-face and online
Conflict of interest	When and how employees should declare a potential conflict between their personal interests and the interests of the business
Emergency procedures	The procedures staff need to undertake during an emergency, such as the evacuation procedure
Appropriate use of business resources	Acceptable use of technology, such as computers and the internet, and policies around the use of social media
Recruitment	Policies relating to issues such as staff induction, probation, leave and redundancies
Staff development and training	Policies relating to issues such as training budgets, performance reviews and performance management

Legislation

Businesses must comply with all legislation that applies to their operations.

Important questions include:

- What legislation is relevant to the problem?
- How does legislation limit the activities you can undertake to explore the problem?
- How does legislation limit your solutions?
- What are the consequences of breaching these laws?

Examples of legislative areas that impact on business are shown below:

Legislative area	Examples of legislation	Areas of impact	Relevant to problems such as
Taxation obligations	▪ *Goods and Services Tax Act 1999* (Cth) ▪ *Australian Business Number Act 1999* (Cth) ▪ *Fringe Benefits Tax Act 1986* (Cth) ▪ *Income Tax Rates Act 1986* (Cth)	▪ Record-keeping obligations ▪ Information management ▪ Income tax ▪ Goods and services tax ▪ Capital gains tax ▪ Fringe benefits tax ▪ Superannuation ▪ Stamp duty	▪ Pricing ▪ Payments to staff ▪ Invoicing ▪ Cashflow ▪ Accounting
Australian consumer law	▪ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth)	▪ Product safety standards ▪ Misleading or deceptive conduct ▪ Anti-competitive conduct ▪ Consumer protection	▪ Product design ▪ Marketing ▪ Customer service ▪ Customer rights ▪ Refunds ▪ Warranties and guarantees
Privacy	▪ *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)	▪ Collection, use, security and disposal of personal information	▪ Collection and use of customer data ▪ Information sharing with other entities

Legislative area	Examples of legislation	Areas of impact	Relevant to problems such as
Work health and safety	▪ *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) ▪ *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic.) ▪ *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* (WA)	▪ Work practices ▪ Accidents or injuries ▪ Workers' compensation	▪ Employer and employee obligations ▪ Health and safety representatives ▪ Workplace bullying and harassment
Employment	▪ *Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992* (Cth) ▪ *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) ▪ *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth) ▪ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) ▪ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) ▪ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)	▪ Discrimination ▪ Equal employment opportunities ▪ Superannuation ▪ Awards	▪ Recruitment ▪ Employment contracts ▪ Apprentices and trainees ▪ Foreign workers employed in Australia ▪ Rate of pay and employee entitlements ▪ Complaints and disputes
Online business	▪ *Spam Act 2003* (Cth) ▪ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth)	▪ Spam obligations ▪ Privacy obligations ▪ Consumer protection ▪ Online security	▪ Internet-based marketing ▪ Customer service
Tenders and contracts	▪ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth)	▪ Securing new business ▪ Managing government and corporate opportunities	▪ Viability and security of business ▪ Cashflow ▪ Resourcing
Intellectual property	▪ *Designs Act 2003* (Cth) ▪ *Patents Act 1990* (Cth) ▪ *Trade Marks Act 1995* (Cth) ▪ *Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Act 2015* (Cth)	▪ Patents ▪ Trademarks ▪ Product designs ▪ Trade secrets	▪ Product development

Example

Legislation and organisational frameworks

Archie works at Maverick, a small retail outlet that sells custom-made jewellery. Archie and his colleague Nyan have identified a problem with the process for providing customer refunds at Maverick. The current process seems complex and excessively time-consuming.

Prior to consulting with stakeholders about the problem, Archie and Nyan consider the legislative requirements that are relevant to the problem they have identified, notably those laws relating to Australian consumer law. Their supervisor helps them better understand these laws and how they are embedded in Maverick's organisational policy.

Practice Task 2

Question 1

In the left-hand column, state the appropriate legislative area that corresponds with the correct area of impact on the right.

» _____	» Anti-competitive conduct
» _____	» Disposal of personal information
» _____	» Discrimination
» _____	» Trademarks
» _____	» Stamp duty

Question 2

Which of the following acts are relevant to the taxation obligations of a business? Select all that apply.

- ◯ *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- ◯ *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth)
- ◯ *Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992* (Cth)
- ◯ *Australian Business Number Act 1999* (Cth)
- ◯ *Spam Act 2003* (Cth)

Question 3

Identify and describe one common business policy, process or procedure.

Question 4

The marketing department has increased the advertising of products sold by the organisation. This includes a daily mass email of product specials for the day sent to all persons/businesses on the mailing list. In response some of the email recipients have contacted the organisation complaining that the emails are spam (unsolicited commercial email).

Before this problem is addressed, what legislative area and organisational policies or procedures should be considered?

1C Develop questions

Questions are a powerful tool in business: they encourage learning and innovation, aid in the exchange of ideas and help to build rapport.

Questions are used throughout the problem-solving process to facilitate an understanding of the problem – what the goals and barriers are, for example – and to explore potential solutions. They are also used for fact-finding and to expand knowledge.

Good questions encourage people to think in a deliberate and in-depth way. This type of thinking, often referred to as 'slow thinking', leads to better decisions, choices and actions.

Types of questions

There are two basic types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended.

Type of question	Description	Examples
Open-ended questions	▪ Broaden discussion and encourage people to participate in a dialogue. ▪ Useful for learning about people's attitudes, thoughts and feelings. ▪ When compared to close-ended questions, open-ended questions require a more thoughtful response.	▪ 'What did you think of the health and safety training module?' ▪ 'How do you think the efficiency of product delivery could be improved?' ▪ 'What is the data telling us about this problem?'
Closed-ended questions	▪ Require a specific and direct answer, such as yes, no or a predetermined option. ▪ Useful for gathering information and clarifying situations.	▪ 'Have you completed the training module on health and safety?' ▪ 'Has the customer received the order?' ▪ 'Would you prefer to attend a meeting in the morning or afternoon?'

A range of other question types exist, each of which serves a different purpose:

Type of question	Purpose	Example
Refocusing questions	Designed to refocus the respondent if they have gone off track, these restate the core question and are usually prefaced with a clarification of what the respondent has just said.	'I hear what you are saying about those problems with the chain of command, but can I bring you back to the key question: which process is the most efficient?'
Narrowing the focus questions	Used to limit the content of what is discussed.	'You've mentioned multiple improvements that could be made across the organisation, but in relation to the specific process we have been talking about, what do you think could be improved?'
Supporting questions	These questions are asked to link statements of inference, such as cause and effect, and provide respondents an opportunity to state their reasons for the labels, groups and classifications they have made.	'So, you are saying that you think the problems with the chain of command are negatively affecting your ability to follow the process?'
Recall questions	Recall questions encourage the respondent to expand on a previous statement. They allow the respondent to go into greater detail on a topic.	'When you said before that the old process was more efficient, what do you think made it more efficient?'

Question topics

Your question topics will depend on the problem you have identified.

Some potential topics and examples are listed below:

Potential topics	Examples of questions
Causes	▪ 'What factors do you think are causing the problem?' ▪ 'What do you think is the origin of this problem?' ▪ 'Do you think there is more than one cause of this problem?'
Impacts	▪ 'What is the impact of the problem on your team?' ▪ 'What is the impact of the problem on the business?' ▪ 'How is this problem affecting your ability to do your job?' ▪ 'How do you think this problem is affecting clients?'

Potential topics	Examples of questions
Previous solutions to the problem	▪ 'How has this problem been addressed in the past?' ▪ 'I know that one solution that has been trialled in the past is *[describe previous solution]*. Can you tell me what you know about that solution and what were the results?'
Potential solutions to the problem: ▪ feasibility ▪ cost ▪ risks	▪ 'Can you tell what you think could be done to solve this problem?' ▪ 'What do you think could be a feasible/workable solution to this problem?' ▪ 'What do you think would be the most cost-effective solution to this problem?' ▪ 'What are the risks of the solutions you have spoken about?'

Effective questions

Asking effective questions is the first step in developing effective solutions to problems.

To assist you in identifying, understanding and expressing the problem, then developing possible solutions, you need to ask effective questions. But how do you know you are asking the right ones?

When you have formed your questions in relation to your problem, work through the list of queries below. The answers you provide will show if you have developed effective questions:

- Is the question I am asking relevant? (i.e. the 'How can …' question that expresses the problem)
- Is the question based on an assumption?
- Is the question biased? (e.g. leading the respondent to answer the question in a specific way)
- Does the question allow the receiver to answer freely and provide all they know about the problem?
- Is the respondent able to answer this question?
- Does the respondent have the information they need to answer the question?
- Will the respondent be breaching any company policies or procedures by answering this question? (e.g. intellectual property, privacy)

There are six common methods for improving questions:

Open it up	If you want more than a yes or no answer, turn your closed question into an open question using words like 'What?', 'Why?' or 'How?'
Close it down	Closed questions can help you identify built-in faulty assumptions, so instead of asking 'Why is this a problem?' you may want to ask, 'Is this a problem?'

Sharpen it	Precise questions tend to yield better answers. So, rather than asking 'How is social media affecting our business?' it is better to ask 'How are the new forms of social media influencing our customers' buying habits?'
Add a 'why'	Adding 'why' to the end of a question can generate deeper insights. So, instead of asking 'What do you think is the best method for maintaining customer loyalty?' ask 'What do you think is the best method for maintaining customer loyalty? Why?'
Soften it	Questions can sound confrontational even if we do not intend them to be. By adding a 'softening phrase' to the beginning of a question we can show that our question is driven by curiosity not criticism. So, rather than asking 'Why do you do it that way?' ask 'I am curious to know: why have you decided to take that approach?'
Neutralise it	Your question should be neutral with no hidden agenda. Leading questions should be avoided. An example of a leading question is: 'The process is not working, is it?' A slightly better question would be: 'Do you think the process is inefficient?' Better still: 'What do you think of the process?'

Example

Develop questions

Ghita is a recruitment consultant at FX-OZ, a medium-sized business that creates visual effects for film studios. She and her team have identified a problem: when casual staff are employed they take a long time to become efficient. Ghita and her team turn the problem into the question: 'How can FX-OZ bring casual staff on-board at short notice in a more efficient way?'

To help them understand the problem and work on possible solutions, Ghita and her team develop a list of questions for stakeholders.

These questions include:

- Why do you think it takes casual staff a long time to become efficient?
- Do you think there are a number of reasons?
- Do we provide training to new staff to assist them?
- Where do we source our new staff from?
- How do the people in your area feel about the problem?
- Has this problem always existed?
- Have we tried to solve the problem in the past? If so, what did we do and what were the outcomes?
- Have you got any thoughts on how the problem may be solved?

Practice Task 3

Question 1

Which question type generates a more thoughtful response: open-ended or a closed question?

Question 2

Which of the following are close-ended questions? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ 'Have you finished the project?'
- ◯ 'Can you tell me a bit more about the problems with the website?'
- ◯ 'Would you prefer to go to the conference on Monday or Tuesday?'
- ◯ 'Did you enjoy the training session?'
- ◯ 'How do you think this issue could be resolved?'

Question 3

Identify one critical reflection question you can use to evaluate whether you are asking effective questions.

Question 4

Which of the following are methods that Warren Berger recommends for improving questions? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ Neuter it
- ◯ Neutralise it
- ◯ Sharpen it
- ◯ Shape it
- ◯ Soften it

Question 5

In the Example: Develop question, Ghita and her team develop eight questions to better understand a problem and assist in generating possible solutions.

List another two questions that could be asked.

1D Consult with key stakeholders

Consulting with key stakeholders will help you expand your knowledge of the problem.

Who you question and how you ask the questions is critical to obtaining the information you need to assist in problem-solving. Asking questions in a constructive way is a skill that can be learned. It requires emotional intelligence and the ability to make people feel comfortable. Factors such as tone, and the use of silence and body language are all important.

Deciding who to ask

The first issue to clarify is which stakeholders you are going to consult.

Some of the factors to consider when deciding which stakeholders to consult are shown below:

Factors to consider	Questions to consider
Expertise, interest and understanding	▪ Who has an in-depth understanding of the problem? ▪ Who is especially interested in the problem? ▪ Who might understand different aspects of the problem? (e.g. how it began, different causes) ▪ Who has observed the problem over time? (e.g. a long-term employee who has observed different ways of dealing with the problem)
Appropriateness	▪ Which stakeholders would be appropriate for you to consult with? (e.g. in some companies asking the CEO questions would be inappropriate)
Availability	▪ Who has time to answer your questions? Could you offer to ask questions via phone or email to make the process less time-consuming?

Gathering diverse perspectives	▪ Because people tend to view problems in a limited and superficial way, it is important to gather a diverse range of diverse perspectives on a problem. – This might mean consulting with stakeholders: – from different teams or branches of the business (e.g. marketing, human resources, customer service, IT) – from different levels of the hierarchy (e.g. junior staff, middle management, senior management) – who have different historical relationships with the business (e.g. new staff and staff who have been employed for a long time) ▪ It is also useful to include stakeholders who are not directly connected to or affected by the problem but have some understanding of it. Known as 'boundary spanners', these people understand but are not part of your world. For example, an Executive Assistant who has observed how senior managers have responded to a problem may have a fresh perspective on what is likely to work, and what is not.

How to ask questions

The wording of your questions and how you ask the questions are critically important.

Consider the following when asking questions:

Use silence	▪ Leave a pause between the answer and the next question. This gives the respondent time to gather their thoughts and gives you an opportunity to absorb what has just been said. ▪ Pausing after the initial response to a question (rather than going straight into the next question) encourages the respondent to expand on their answer.
Get the tone right	▪ Use a casual rather than formal tone when you are asking questions. A casual tone encourages people to be more forthcoming. ▪ Ask questions using a curious rather than critical tone. For example, rather than asking 'Do you really think that would work?' ask 'I am interested in what you are saying about that, can you tell me a bit more?'
Use open- and closed-ended questions strategically	▪ Most of your questions should be open-ended but you may need to ask closed-ended questions to clarify something the respondent has said.

Avoid questions that assume the answer is obvious	▪ An example of an assumptive question is: 'You know that what you are proposing has been tried before, and it did not work?' Assumptive questions elicit negative reactions and shut down conversation.
Avoid questions that provoke defensiveness	▪ An example of a question that provokes defensiveness is: 'Why haven't you tried a different way of doing this?' Instead, focus on understanding the respondent's perspective: 'Tell me about the approaches you have tried to address this problem'.

Your body language is also important when asking questions. Following are some points on using effective body language:

- Consider if it is more appropriate for you both to be seated or standing during the questions/discussion.
- If you are standing, make sure you keep an appropriate distance – do not crowd the other person or they may feel threatened.
- Hold your body in an open, relaxed position – do not cross your arms across your chest or fidget.
- Look people in the eye when asking questions. It shows them you are interested and want to hear what they have to say.

Active listening

Active listening involves making a conscious effort to hear what another person is saying.

This is a critical skill for anyone who wants to succeed in the 'art of questioning'. The benefits of active listening are that it:

- encourages the respondent to keep talking
- indicates that you are paying attention and interested in what they are saying
- establishes a relaxed tone.

Active listening involves five key strategies, each of which can be demonstrated through various means.

Strategy	How to demonstrate
1. Pay attention	▪ Face the person ▪ Give the person your undivided attention ▪ Do not look at your phone, watch or other people in the room
2. Show you are listening	▪ Be aware of your body language – crossed arms can be read as judgment ▪ Use brief verbal comments to encourage the person (e.g. 'Okay', 'I see', 'Yes, I understand what you are saying') ▪ Use facial expressions to encourage the person, such as nodding and smiling
3. Provide feedback	▪ Reflect on what the person has said by paraphrasing ▪ Summarise the person's comments ▪ Ask related and relevant questions
4. Respond appropriately	▪ Try not to interrupt the person unnecessarily ▪ Respond openly and honestly ▪ Treat the other person respectfully
5. Defer judgment	▪ Demonstrate empathy ▪ Avoid making assumptions ▪ Listen to the entire answer to your question before commenting

Documenting responses

Decide on whether or not stakeholders' responses should be recorded and how.

Do you need to record respondents' responses to your questions? If no, can you be sure you will remember what they said? If yes, how you are going to record responses? Some of the options include: a voice recorder, handwritten notes and typing responses directly into a template.

If you are asking a stakeholder questions in person and typing their responses directly onto your laptop, it can make the respondent feel that you are not listening. Similarly, if you are staring at a notebook while they are talking, it can be difficult to build rapport.

It is good practice to let the respondent know that you are going to take notes before you start asking questions and to check with them to make sure that is okay. That way, they will understand why you might need to occasionally look away.

Try to keep your notes brief and accurate, note down what the person is telling you, not your interpretation of what they are saying.

Example

Who and how to ask questions

Marius works on the information booth of a large department store. His main role is to direct customers to the right location in the store; however, he also manages some customer complaints.

He has identified a problem with how customer complaints are recorded in the company's database. He has worked with his team to develop some questions about the problem and is now deciding which stakeholders he should consult.

Marius initially decides to speak with two managers who are directly responsible for managing and recording customer complaints, as well as a member of the IT team.

Marius's manager suggests he also speaks with a new junior staff member involved with managing customer complaints, as they may be able to bring a 'fresh set of eyes' to the problem, as well as a long-term employee who was previously involved in a responding to customer complaints.

Before he meets these stakeholders, he thinks about the way he will ask the questions. He reminds himself to speak clearly and allow the respondents plenty of time to answer; he also knows to keep eye contact, listen carefully and nod on his understanding on what is being said, that way he will show that he is interested in their responses. During the discussion he knows he will need to take notes, but he tells himself not to let that dominate his time and stop him from listening properly or put the respondents off talking.

Practice Task 4

Question 1

Refer back to Example: Who and how to ask questions

What is a possible advantage of asking questions of the new junior staff member?

Question 2

Read the example on the previous page.

What is a possible advantage of asking questions of the long-term employee who was previously involved in a responding to customer complaints?

Question 3

Identify two benefits of active listening.

Summary

- Every problem has two common features: a goal and a barrier.
- Correctly identifying and clearly expressing a problem is an essential step in the problem-solving process.
- Once a workplace problem has been identified, it important to identify and reflect on relevant organisational and legislative frameworks as these can have an impact on potential solutions to the problem.
- There are two basic types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended.
- Open-ended questions are useful for learning about people's attitudes, thoughts and feelings.
- Closed-ended questions are useful for gathering information and clarifying situations.
- The questions directed to stakeholders about a problem need to be informed by skilled reasoning.
- Factors to consider when deciding which stakeholders to ask about a problem include experience, appropriateness and availability.
- It is useful to speak with stakeholders who understand the problem but are not directly affected by it (i.e. boundary spanners).
- The wording of questions is important but so, too, is how questions are asked, including methods such as the use of silence and active listening.

Learning Checkpoint 1

Prepare to address workplace problems

Part A

1. Why is it important to correctly define a problem at the beginning of the problem-solving process?

2. Name three areas of an organisation that are impacted by legislation. For each area, give one example of specific legislation that may apply.

3. Why can it be beneficial to include 'boundary spanners' in your stakeholders when asking questions?

Part B

Case study

Armelle works in the Warehouse and Distribution department at a company that buys and sells second-hand office furniture. She has identified a problem with stock movement in and out of the warehouse: it takes a long time to be loaded or unloaded and often gets damaged.

Armelle wants to get a better understanding of the problem and has developed some questions to ask the two removal staff. She asks you to assist her to rewrite and improve the questions.

1. Rewrite this to neutralise the question:
   - Why is the loading and unloading process so bad?

2. Rewrite this question to change it from a closed question to an open question:
   - Do you have equipment to help load and unload the furniture?

3. Change this question so it generates more information or deeper insights:
   - How can we reduce the time it takes to load/unload stock?

4. Soften this question:
   - Why do it this way?

5. In addition to the asking questions of the two removal staff, who else could Armelle ask questions of to gain information?

Topic 2 | Evaluate solutions for workplace problems

2A Use critical thinking techniques

2B Develop solutions in a team

2C Critically evaluate solutions

2A Use critical thinking techniques

Using critical thinking techniques involves analysing and evaluating thinking, with the goal of improving it.

Everybody thinks, but much of our thinking can be biased, distorted or uninformed if we don't think through problems critically. Critical thinking enables us to identify and challenge incorrect assumptions. When people think critically, they use reason to work through issues and take time to assess a topic from multiple viewpoints. They examine their own bias, question their views and seek further information.

The critical thinking process

This is used to interpret data, facts and experiences in order to solve problems.

The critical thinking process outlined below encourages people to widen their perspective, put aside their assumptions and generate logical and effective solutions.

Process	Description	Key questions to ask
State the question	▪ The question lays out the problem and guides our thinking. ▪ The problem or question should be clear and precise.	▪ What question am I trying to answer? ▪ Is the question clear? ▪ Should I be asking a different question?
Gather relevant and sufficient information	▪ Information (data, facts, evidence, experiences) is the foundation of reasoning. ▪ The information should be relevant to the problem that is being explored.	▪ What information do I need to answer this question? ▪ Is this information relevant to the problem? ▪ Have we left out any important information we need to consider?
Check assumptions	▪ Assumptions are beliefs we take for granted. ▪ Identify assumptions and check whether they are justifiable.	▪ Am I assuming something? ▪ What assumption is leading me to this conclusion? ▪ What is this (question, conclusion, solution) assuming?
Consider different perspectives	▪ Everyone has a point of view, the place from which they view something. ▪ Understand your own point of view and consider other relevant viewpoints.	▪ How am I looking at this situation? ▪ Is there another way to look at this situation? ▪ Have I tried to understand and appreciate the point of view of others?

Process	Description	Key questions to ask
Watch your inferences and develop conclusions	▪ Inferences are the conclusions we come to based on available information. They are informed by assumptions. ▪ Inferences should logically follow from the evidence.	▪ Does this interpretation of the information make sense? ▪ Does our solution reflect the information we gathered? ▪ Are there other solutions that should be considered?
Test conclusions	▪ Test conclusions against relevant criteria.	▪ Does our solution meet the evaluation criteria we developed? ▪ Will our solution be looked on favourably by relevant stakeholders (e.g. other teams, managers, customers)?

Using critical thinking to generate solutions to problems

There is a clear relationship between the number of ideas a person or a team produces and the quality of those ideas.

The greater the number of ideas that are produced, the higher the chance of coming up with a good idea.

A range of critical thinking techniques can be used to identify multiple solutions.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a well-known method for generating solutions to problems. This technique involves a group of people generating ideas together.

Despite being very well-known, brainstorming is widely misunderstood and often poorly applied. To ensure it is done correctly, it is important to follow five basic rules:

Criticise nothing	People often feel nervous about sharing new ideas in a group. Criticising or mocking new ideas prevents creative thinking: those people who have new ideas will be less likely to share them.
Develop lots of ideas	Although one idea might sound great, try to come up with as many ideas as possible. The more ideas you come up with, the more possibilities you have to consider.
Be daring	Do not limit the discussion to 'sensible ideas.' Be daring. Do not hold back.
Build on ideas	Build on the ideas that emerge by asking a lot of 'What if?' and 'What else?' questions. See where those questions take you.
Stay focused	Avoid drifting off from the problem. The potential to lose focus is common when multiple people are discussing new ideas and concepts.

State the goal in different ways

Stating the goal in different ways is a technique used to generate ideas. It involves identifying four–five potential goals that address the main problem from different angles. Solutions can then be developed for each of the identified goals.

The following table shows how this process can be applied to a specific problem: a large percentage of a city's population fears crime. The process is being applied by the mayor.

The potential goal	Description of goal	Potential solutions to achieve the goal
Goal 1: Reduce crime	This the most obvious goal and a common political response to a fear of crime in the community.	▪ Introducing tougher penalties ▪ Increasing the number of police on the street
Goal 2: Make life safer for citizens	This goal emerged when the team looked at the problem from the point of view of potential victims of crime – those people who want to feel safe in their community.	▪ Providing better security for citizens ▪ Teaching citizens self-defence ▪ Organising neighbourhood anti-crime groups
Goal 3: Reduce the number of criminals	This goal emerged when the team focused on numbers rather than methods.	▪ Deporting every criminal to another country ▪ Implementing preventative programs in schools to discourage a life of crime
Goal 4: Reduce the community's fear of crime	This goal emerged when the team changed their perspective and looked at the problem from a sociological perspective. Perhaps the fear of crime is out of step with the actual rates of crime, suggesting that the problem is not so much crime itself but the perception of crime in the community.	▪ Provide information to the community that shows the crime rate is actually very low ▪ Introduce activities to increase a sense of community belonging and reduce the mistrust that drives the fear of crime

While some of the solutions identified are more appropriate than others, the aim of the exercise is to generate solutions, not critique them. It may be that by coming up with different goals and seeing the problem from different perspectives, this technique leads to a unique solution.

Improving your critical thinking skills

There are many ways to improve your critical thinking skills. The following list identifies just a few:

- Collaborate – listen and learn from others.
- Practice active listening.
- Look at and think about existing evidence.
- Reflect on something that has occurred or something you have been told.
- Question why.
- Ask questions.
- Think about the choices you have. Evaluate the choices.
- When you need or want to understand something, try and work it out yourself before asking others.
- Do not make assumptions: observe and analyse.

Creative thinking

This is often referred to as 'thinking outside the box'.

It helps people challenge the status quo and drives change and innovation.

Creative thinking is:

- generative – the purpose is to make something out of nothing
- non-judgmental – you cannot think creatively if you are being judgmental
- expansive – by generating ideas and exploring them without judgment, you tend to get more ideas.

Although it comes easier to some people than others, everyone can think creatively. One method of creative thinking is called 'blue sky thinking'. It involves three steps:

Step	Description
1. Relax	In order to unlock your unconscious mind, and thereby fire up your imagination, you need to relax.
2. Doodle	Once you are relaxed, take a sheet of paper and start sketching randomly. Ask yourself vague, silly or provocative questions about the problem you have identified. For example, if your problem relates to the location of a shop, what would it look like if it was in a different country or on a different planet?
3. Stretch	When you think you have reached the limits of your imagination, do one of the following: a) Redouble your efforts – ask yourself twice the number of questions you asked before and give yourself half as much time to answer them. b) Take a break – step away from the exercise, make a cup of tea or take a walk. Both of these steps can generate new solutions because they help to switch your mind into a different state.

Example

Use critical thinking techniques

Oscar works at Tom Thumb, a small business that sells gardening tools and equipment. Recently Tom Thumb has experienced a downturn in online sales. One of the techniques Oscar's team uses to generate solutions to the problem is to state the goal in four different ways:

1. Increase the number of customers coming to the site (an obvious goal).
2. Increase the amount of money customers spend online (an obvious goal).
3. Make the website more user-friendly to the target market (based on the customers' perspectives).
4. Increase the number of products available online (using numbers rather than methods).

Using each of these four different goals, Oscar's team generates 17 solutions to the problem of poor online sales. Blue sky thinking is used to help develop these solutions.

Practice Task 5

Question 1

Number each step from 1–6 in the critical thinking process.

- ◯ Watch your inferences and develop conclusions
- ◯ State the question or problem
- ◯ Test conclusions
- ◯ Gather relevant and sufficient information
- ◯ Check assumptions
- ◯ Consider different perspectives

Question 2

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ It is good practice to set a limit on the number of ideas generated in a brainstorming session.
- ◯ Examining goals from a range of different perspectives is a useful tool for identifying potential solutions.
- ◯ One of the characteristics of creative thinking is that is designed to be non-judgemental.
- ◯ Blue sky thinking involves four key steps.

Question 3

Which of the following are basic rules of brainstorming? Select all that apply.

- ◯ Be daring
- ◯ Criticise everything
- ◯ Build on ideas
- ◯ Stay focused
- ◯ Think rationally
- ◯ Focus on consensus

2B Develop solutions in a team

Each member of your team will have insights into the problem and its potential solutions.

As team members bounce ideas off each other and build on them, their diverse knowledge and skills will help create unique solutions.

Using critical thinking techniques in a team

Bringing team members together to apply critical thinking processes to a problem is an effective way to find solutions.

Regardless of which technique is used, it is important to do the following when planning a group session to conduct critical thinking:

Explain the process	Provide team members with information before the discussion takes place. This could include information about: ▪ the problem to be solved ▪ the critical thinking techniques that will be used ▪ who will be involved in the decision-making process and their roles (e.g. facilitator, minute-taker) ▪ how long the decision-making process is expected to take. This information can be provided either formally or informally but should allow sufficient time for team members to prepare.
Leave egos and personal agendas at the door	Effective group discussions are founded on mutual respect. Egotism undermines respectful attitudes to others because it is founded on beliefs such as 'My ideas are better than other people's ideas.' Personal agendas can interfere with people's ability to be objective and open-minded.
Contribute but do not dominate	Productive group discussions occur when everyone is contributing ideas, sharing information and participating. If you tend to talk a lot, try to hold back. If you are more reserved, try to share your ideas more readily.
Be clear, direct and concise	Avoid rambling, mumbling and using meaningless expressions (e.g. 'It is so random'). This will help other members of the group to understand what you are trying to say.

Do not be quick to judge	Avoid basing judgments on initial impressions or feelings. Give unfamiliar ideas (and the people who are proposing them) a fair hearing. Remember that each team member has knowledge and experience relevant to the problem.
Resist the urge to shout or interrupt	If you believe your ideas are sound and reasonable, you do not need to raise your voice or silence other people. If someone is raising their voice or interrupting you, it is better not to respond with the same behaviour.

When working together your team should aim to collaborate. Collaboration is an approach that involves people with diverse expertise working together to accomplish common goals. It is not the same as cooperation. Collaboration can create conflict, however not all conflict is bad. Constructive conflict through rigorous debate can contribute to effective decision-making.

Beliefs and behaviours that undermine critical thinking

It is important to be aware of beliefs and behaviours that can undermine critical thinking in a team. These include:

Face saving	When we are too proud to admit we were wrong, we are face saving. Face saving inhibits clear and rational thinking because our decisions are based on our pride and ego, rather than a rational consideration of the facts.
Resistance to change	Rejecting new ideas and perspectives is characteristic of a resistance to change. We need to be able to suspend judgment long enough to give ideas the chance to prove themselves.
Conformity	Not all conformity is bad. Harmful conformity is what we do when we go along with a group to avoid the risk of being different. It is important to think for yourself and not worry too much about whether other people share your point of view.
Stereotyping	Stereotypes are fixed and unbending. They impede our ability to have an open mind and distort our view of reality.
Self-deception	In order to generate and evaluate solutions, we need to be honest with ourselves about our capacities, beliefs and limitations.

Example

Develop solutions in a team

WoodWorks is a timber supply company. The customer service team at WoodWorks have identified a problem with how new customer enquiries are managed. Kylie, the team manager, suggests that the team use brainstorming as the main technique for generating solutions.

Kylie sends out some information to her team before the brainstorming session so they have the chance to prepare in advance. This includes examples of the customer enquiry problems and an overview of how the brainstorming process will be conducted. She asks her colleague Akong to co-facilitate the session because Akong has experience facilitating group discussions.

During the brainstorming session, one member of the team, Jin, is especially passionate about sharing his ideas but is dominating some of the quieter members of the team. Akong reminds the group about the importance of giving everyone a chance to participate.

Half-way through the session, enthusiasm has waned. Akong suggests that the group has a break. When they return, Kylie encourages each team member to try a blue sky thinking exercise.

Practice Task 6

Question 1

Which of the following are important considerations when undertaking critical thinking techniques in a group setting? Select all that apply.

- ◯ Use jargon
- ◯ Base the conversation on mutual respect
- ◯ Contribute but do not dominate
- ◯ Share wisdom
- ◯ Listen actively

Question 2

Identify **one** belief or behaviour that can undermine critical thinking in a group.

Question 3

Which information would be useful to provide to team members before they take part in the process of generating solutions? Select all that apply.

- ◯ Background information about the problem to be solved
- ◯ Information about the critical thinking process
- ◯ Information about how the business is going to implement solutions
- ◯ An explanation of the techniques being used
- ◯ Information about the professional background of the facilitator

2C Critically evaluate solutions

No solution is perfect and there is always room for improvement.

The potential flaws in a solution may only come to light when your team starts to examine the solution more closely. Critically evaluating solutions by using criteria is an effective way to identify the best option.

Decide on criteria

When evaluating solutions, it is important to first decide on the criteria you will use.

Developing criteria to evaluate solutions is important for two reasons:

1. It helps to ensure the process of selecting a solution is rational and objective.
2. It helps to ensure that the solution is feasible and workable within your workplace.

There are no standard criteria for evaluating solutions. The criteria that is used depends on numerous factors including the problem itself, the business setting and context. Some common decision-making criteria are listed below:

Common decision-making criteria	Example of criteria
Ease of implementation	The solution can be integrated into current systems and processes.
Costs	The cost of the solution is within budget.
Savings	The solution will lead to cost savings for the business.
Sustainability	The solution will work even if conditions change (e.g. periods of high and low demand).
Employee morale	The solution has no foreseeable negative effects on employee morale.
Legalities	The solution complies with necessary laws and regulations.
Ethics	The solution does no harm to our staff, customers, the environment and/or broader community.
Organisational alignment	The solution aligns with the overall vision and mission of the business.

The information obtained from consulting with key stakeholders in *Topic 1D* will help you to identify criteria. For example, stakeholders may have provided information about what solutions are affordable, ethical and acceptable. Try to integrate this information into the process of deciding on criteria.

You should also use critical thinking processes when developing your criteria. For example:

- Do you need more information to determine which criteria is important?
- What assumptions are being made about which criteria needs to be met?
- How would the criteria be different if it was chosen by another person/ another team?
- What frames of reference are the team using to select criteria?

Having identified the important criteria, your team may want to rate each one. This will help you define their relative importance.

Critically evaluate solutions

Once your team has generated multiple solutions to the problem, it is time to apply the criteria you developed to select the most suitable option.

Eliminate those solutions that do not meet the criteria and then, if more than one solution remains, use critical thinking to evaluate the remaining solutions. During this process, it is important to be aware of, and avoid, the following common assumptions.

Assumption	Explanation
Other people who are familiar with the problem will share your team's enthusiasm for the solution.	This is a common expectation, but it is rarely correct. Other people are likely to have their own ideas about how to solve the problem.
Small imperfections in the solution will not affect people's acceptance of it.	If there is a flaw in your idea people who have a different idea are likely to magnify it because they are looking for an excuse to reject it. Small imperfections provide that excuse.
If the idea is clear to us, it will be clear to others.	The fact that you (and your team) understand the solution does not mean that other people will understand it. If you want the solution to be clear you must consciously work on making it clear rather than assuming that it is.
People who stand to benefit from your idea will accept it automatically without any persuasion.	Never assume that the value of your team's ideas will be universally accepted. Expect that you will have to persuade people.

Example

Critically evaluate solutions

Shona is an assistant curator at Chutzpah, a small business that sells Australian art. Chutzpah formerly operated online but has recently opened a gallery where they exhibit and sell artworks.

The small Chutzpah team has worked together to generate several solutions to the problem of low numbers of foot traffic to the new gallery. They are at the point of selecting one of those solutions, which they will then present to the gallery director.

The team develops several criteria, including the budget allocated for solving the problem, the time required to implement the solution and the level of alignment with the business's philosophy. Applying the criteria leaves the team with two solutions. The team applies critical evaluation techniques (including identifying and challenging their own assumptions) to pick the best option.

Practice Task 7

Question 1

Identify one question that can be asked when applying critical thinking to developing criteria to evaluate solutions.

Question 2

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ When deciding on the criteria for selecting a solution, you should try to integrate the information gleaned from stakeholder consultations.
- ◯ Developing and applying criteria enables solutions to be selected subjectively.
- ◯ Developing criteria for selecting a solution helps to ensure that the solution is feasible and workable within the workplace.
- ◯ There are standard criteria that can be used for evaluating most business decisions.

Question 3

Which of the following are common assumptions that people make when evaluating solutions? Select all that apply.

- ◯ If the idea is clear to us, it will be clear to others.
- ◯ Other people who are familiar with the problem will share our team's enthusiasm for the solution.
- ◯ People who are strongly affected by a problem are more likely to accept a solution.
- ◯ People who stand to benefit from our idea will accept it automatically without any persuasion.
- ◯ If people like our team, they will accept our solution.

Summary

- Critical thinking involves analysing and evaluating thinking in order to use reason to develop solutions to problems.
- The critical thinking process is used to interpret data, facts and experiences in order to solve problems.
- Critical thinking techniques include brainstorming and stating the goal in different ways.
- Creative thinking involves thinking outside the box.
- A common creative thinking technique is blue sky thinking.
- Critical and creative thinking can be done as a group, although this process needs to be managed in order to be effective.
- Numerous behaviours and beliefs can undermine critical and creative thinking, including resistance to change, face saving and self-deception.
- Evaluating solutions using criteria enables a solution to be selected objectively, rationally and feasibly.
- Common criteria used to select a solution include costs, sustainability and ethics.
- When evaluating solutions, it is important to avoid assumptions.

Learning Checkpoint 2

Evaluate solutions for workplace problems

Part A

1. Identify and briefly describe a critical thinking technique that can be used to generate solutions to problems.

2. What are the three steps involved in blue sky thinking?

Part B

Case study

Brendan is a training officer at Here to Help, a business that provides home help to older people. Brendan's team manages induction and ongoing training for staff.

One of the problems Brendan and his team is currently facing is that many ongoing staff are not completing their mandatory training requirements. Brendan has been asked to organise a team brainstorming exercise to come up with solutions to this problem.

1. What are two details regarding the brainstorming process that Brendan should provide to the team in advance of the brainstorming meeting?

2. What are three strategies Brendan should use during the brainstorming meeting to get the best out of the team members in the room?

3. Brendan's team is now deciding on the criteria they will use to evaluate their solutions. They are not sure which criteria to use. Identify three common criteria that Brendan and his team could use to evaluate their solutions.

4. Refer to the following points to determine why Erik's assumption is flawed.
   - Brendan's team have generated numerous solutions to the problem, and they are now critically evaluating each.
   - One of the solutions to the problem is to set aside a space in the office where staff can complete the training exercises.
   - Brendan's colleague, Erik, responds to his concern by saying, 'That's a small problem. It's not going to make any difference to the director's willingness to agree to our solution.'

Topic 3 | Finalise and review solution development processes

3A Present solution to stakeholders

3B Respond to challenges and questions

3C Evaluate critical thinking processes and apply learnings

3A Present solution to stakeholders

Presenting a new idea to a group of colleagues can be exciting and nerve-racking, especially if you are presenting to supervisors and managers.

It is normal to feel nervous about how your idea will be received. There are several strategies you can use to make the presentation process as effective as possible.

Presentation strategies

Before presenting to stakeholders you should carefully prepare what you are going to say and how to say it.

When you are planning and rehearsing your presentation, consider how you can incorporate the following steps to encourage a positive response to your solution:

Begin with the familiar	▪ Begin with a point that stakeholders are familiar with, ideally something you all agree on. This sets a positive tone for the presentation and has a powerful effect on the audience's responses. ▪ If you cannot find anything that you agree on, start by talking about the significance of the issue and note that, like all controversial issues, it generates debate and conflicting viewpoints.
Respect your audience	▪ When we feel strongly about an idea and someone disagrees with it, it is common to view that person unfavourably. This poisons debate and makes persuasion difficult, and sometimes impossible. ▪ Respect for your audience is shown through your manner and expressions; you cannot fake it. ▪ To generate a sense of genuine respect for your audience it may help to remind yourself that disagreement reflects the complexity of the issue rather than problems with the person who is disagreeing.
Select the most appropriate tone	▪ Tone is the mood or attitude suggested by a presenter. ▪ Certain tones are always inappropriate, including forcing your ideas onto the group or using a mocking or sarcastic tone. ▪ The safest tone is calm, objective and courteous.
Emphasise the evidence for your view	▪ The most important factor is the evidence that has informed your solution. ▪ The amount and kind of evidence you need to present will depend on the solution you are proposing.

Consider timing	▪ When problems are at the front of stakeholders' minds, take that opportunity to talk about your solution. ▪ Present your solution to stakeholders when they are not distracted by other pressing concerns. ▪ If your business has already committed to a competing solution, the wisest course of action is to wait and see if this solution works before presenting your idea.
Look at your audience	▪ Try to give your audience the sense that you are speaking to them; shift your gaze from front to back and side to side. ▪ If you need to look at your notes, do so briefly.
Speak loudly and express yourself clearly	▪ Be aware of any mannerisms of speech that may impact on your ability to communicate with your audience – such as mumbling, whispering or slurring your words – and try to avoid them as much as possible.
Channel your energy	▪ Giving a presentation can be nerve-racking. Instead of trying to eliminate your anxiety, channel your energy into enthusiasm for the solution you are proposing.
Pay attention to your body language	▪ Stand straight and use gestures freely and in a natural way. ▪ Avoid body language that indicates defensiveness.

Explaining critical thinking processes

The audience you are presenting to may or may not understand the concept of critical thinking.

Explaining the critical thinking process and how it was used will help to reassure your audience that the solution you are proposing is based on clear, rational and objective thinking and decision-making.

The table below lists the stages of the critical thinking process, along with key points you could address during your presentation.

Step	Key points that could be addressed to explain the process
State the question	▪ How the question was chosen (e.g. the 'What is going on' technique). ▪ Why the question was chosen (e.g. concerns, impacts).
Gather relevant and sufficient information	▪ The process of developing questions for stakeholders. ▪ How stakeholders were chosen (e.g. expertise, interest, differing perspectives).
Check assumptions	▪ The principles and techniques that were used by the team to avoid assumptions (e.g. frames of reference, creative thinking).

Step	Key points that could be addressed to explain the process
Consider different perspectives	▪ The techniques used to look at the problem in different ways and from different perspectives (e.g. restating the problem, frames of reference).
Watch your inferences and develop conclusions	▪ The process for generating different solutions (e.g. brainstorming, stating the goal in different ways).
Test conclusions	▪ How criteria to assess solutions were chosen. ▪ How criteria were applied to select a solution.

Example

Present solution to stakeholders

Jaycee is a social media coordinator at Toffy, a small business that sells men's socks. Jaycee and his colleague Trinh have used the process of critical thinking to come up with a solution to poor brand awareness. Jaycee is now presenting his proposal to all nine people employed by the business.

There are very different viewpoints among the team about how to increase awareness of the Toffy brand, so Jaycee begins his presentation by talking about why increasing brand awareness at a national level is especially important to Toffy's success. He then describes some of the critical and creative thinking techniques he and Trinh used to come up with their solution.

Practice Task 8

Question 1

When you cannot think of anything you and your team agree on, what should you do when you begin your presentation? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ Talk about the significance of the issues.
- ◯ Remind the audience of what points they disagree on.
- ◯ Note to the audience that controversial issues often generate debate and conflicting viewpoints.
- ◯ Seek to gain consensus on the issue before continuing.
- ◯ Avoid discussing the fact that there may be different viewpoints on the issue.

Question 2

Identify two key points you could cover with an audience of stakeholders when explaining your critical thinking process.

Question 3

Identify one way that a presenter can generate a sense of genuine respect for their audience.

3B Respond to challenges and questions

Even the most confident presenters get nervous about responding to challenges and questions from their audience.

To prepare for your presentation you should consider the types of challenges and questions that your audience is likely to ask. This will help you respond in a confident and positive way.

Why people reject ideas

Understanding why people usually reject ideas enables you to anticipate potential challenges from your audience.

Common reasons why potential solutions are rejected include that they are:

- impractical
- expensive
- unethical
- inefficient
- unworkable
- disruptive to existing processes
- unfair.

Before presenting to the group, it may be useful to prepare some notes on how each of these factors were accounted for when you evaluated the solution.

Know your audience

When preparing a presentation, it is useful to learn something about your audience beforehand.

Consider the following questions:

Will your audience understand the problem as clearly as you?	The stakeholders may not have had the opportunity to examine the problem in the same depth as you. It may help to explain the different ways you and/or your team examined and defined the problem.
Is your audience likely to be familiar with the facts relating to the problem?	Which facts are the stakeholders least likely to know about? Are they likely to know about issues such as the impact of the problem on efficiency, staff morale and customer satisfaction? Emphasise these facts in your presentation. Ignorance of facts can be an obstacle to accepting new solutions.
Does your audience appreciate the various solutions?	If your audience believes another solution will work, they are not likely to agree with yours. If you show them how the other solutions you considered are less ideal, you will help them come around to your solution.

Imaginary dialogue

One of the techniques you can use to help yourself prepare for challenges to and questions about an idea you are proposing is imaginary dialogue.

This technique involves imagining yourself discussing your idea with someone who objects to it. For best results think of a specific person – ideally, someone you know quite well who would probably disagree with you.

Imagine yourself proposing your solution. Then put yourself in the shoes of the person who disagrees with you. Respond to this objection as yourself. Respond as the other person and so on. It is important to verbalise the imaginary dialogue (rather than playing it out in your head).

It is not necessary to write down your responses. Instead, try to focus on how your imaginary opponent might be thinking as they pose objections. This will help you better understand where they are coming from and, thereby, the most effective way of responding to them.

Here are some strategies for effectively handling challenges and questions from stakeholders:

Address all questions	In situations where you are seeking support or approval it is important to respond to all questions and challenges posed by the audience, even if they seem irrelevant. Left unanswered, these objections can pose a barrier to support.
Set a time for questions	At the beginning of your presentation, indicate when you would prefer to take questions: during or after the presentation.
Use active listening	Employ the skills of active listening when listening to questions and comments. If you are not sure you understand the question, repeat it and check that your interpretation is correct.
Be honest	If you do not know the answer to a question, say so and offer to find out. If the stakeholder accepts your offer, make sure you follow through.

Example

Respond to challenges and questions

Pippa is a customer liaison consultant at GrassWorks, a medium-sized landscaping company. Pippa is preparing a presentation outlining a proposal she and her team have developed to address a problem relating to fluctuating seasonal demands for services.

The stakeholders Pippa is presenting to her are mostly managers and Pippa knows they will not have an in-depth understanding of how fluctuating seasonal demands impact on the morale of the landscaping staff. Using the information gathered during her consultations, Pippa will highlight this fact in her presentation.

After she has presented her proposal, a senior manager asks, 'What are the implications of this for transport costs?' From Pippa's perspective, the question is irrelevant, but she knows it is important to answer every question. 'I'm sorry, Greg,' Pippa responds calmly, 'I don't know the answer to that question but I'm happy to speak with a few people about it and get back to you.'

Practice Task 9

Question 1

Which of the following are common reasons why people reject solutions? Select all that apply.

- ◯ The solution is too expensive.
- ◯ The solution is controversial.
- ◯ The solution is inefficient.
- ◯ The solution is unworkable.
- ◯ The solution is not innovative enough.
- ◯ The solution is unfair.

Question 2

Identify one question you can ask yourself while you are preparing your presentation to help you learn more about your audience.

Question 3

Which of the following statements are correct? Tick all that apply.

- ◯ One of the common reasons why people reject ideas is that they believe it will disrupt existing procedures.
- ◯ Ignorance of facts can be an obstacle to an audience member accepting a solution.
- ◯ During a presentation on a solution, it is important to emphasise how the team feels about the solution.
- ◯ When presenting your solution to stakeholders, it is reasonable to ignore irrelevant questions from the audience.
- ◯ Considering the thoughts and feelings of an imaginary opponent is an important aspect of imaginary dialogue.

3C Evaluate critical thinking processes and apply learnings

Evaluating the critical thinking process will help you and your team address workplace problems in the future.

It is important not only to reflect on what you have learned individually and as a team, but to also take steps to apply those learnings.

You and your team can use the following five-step process developed by the Australian Institute of Business to evaluate the critical thinking process you have undertaken:

Revisit project goals	What was the question (problem) your team posed? Did you answer it?
Explore team feelings and concerns	As a team, discuss the group dynamics. For example, what worked well and were there any concerns about the process or the way the team worked together?
Listen to each other	Use the principles and techniques explored throughout this unit when listening to each other, such as giving people a fair hearing, adopting a non-judgemental attitude and using active listening.
Identify challenges	Identify the key challenges of the process. Common challenges experienced during the critical thinking process include: ▪ difficulties focusing on the problem rather than the solution ▪ difficulties in questioning long-held beliefs and assumptions ▪ difficulties getting into the headspace for creative thinking ▪ difficulties in dealing with vested interests and personal agendas.
Plan	Identify what you, as a team, can build on (what worked well), and improve or follow up on (responding to concerns and challenges).

Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the practice of thinking about beliefs and actions for the purpose of learning.

It involves taking time to think about your goals and behaviours, and the factors that guide your thinking.

Self-reflection helps you build self-awareness and reflect on how your feelings, beliefs and values impact on your decisions. The following table identifies several areas of learning you may consider during the self-reflection process.

Areas of learning	What did you learn about yourself?
Assumptions	How did your assumptions inform your decisions? Did you become aware of any stereotypes, biases or distortions that influence your thinking?
Points of view	What did you learn about the different points of view of people within the business? What did you learn about your ability to empathise with people who have a different point of view to your own?
Courage	What did you learn about your willingness to question popular beliefs? Were you willing to voice unusual ideas or proposals?
Egocentricity	Did you make any observations about how defensiveness, insecurity or anger can affect people's thinking? What did you notice about your own egocentricity?
Asking questions	Were you able to question your own thinking processes and beliefs? What did you learn about asking other people questions about complex problems?

Applying learnings

SMART goals provide a framework for developing an action plan at both the individual and team level.

These goals will help you and your team to build on and apply what you learned during the critical thinking process.

SMART goals have the following characteristics:

Specific	Have you clearly defined what you want to achieve?
Measurable	How will you know when you have achieved your goal? What measures will you use?
Attainable	Do you have the time and energy to spend on the goal? Is the goal achievable or is it too challenging?
Relevant	Is the goal relevant to the feedback you received? Will the goal improve your critical thinking?
Time-framed	When should the goal be achieved? Do you have a way of tracking your progress?

Example

Evaluate critical thinking processes and apply learnings

The team at GreenClean, a small business that sells eco-friendly cleaning goods, is meeting to discuss their use of critical thinking processes. They begin by revisiting the problem they were trying to solve: How can we increase the GreenClean customer base?

One of the concerns the team discusses is the amount of time it took for them to generate a range of solutions to the problem. As a small business, they have limited time to participate in these types of activities.

They agree to trial some new ways of making this process more efficient and two team members agree to put together a draft plan, using the SMART framework, for addressing this and other areas for improvement identified by staff.

Individual team members are also encouraged to undertake a self-reflection activity to identify what they have learned. Staff are reminded that they don't need to share the outcomes of the self-reflection activity with their colleagues but can use what they learn from that process to inform their next performance development plan.

Practice Task 10

Question 1

Number each step from 1–5 in the process for evaluating team performance.

- ◯ Explore team feelings and concerns
- ◯ Revisit project goals
- ◯ Plan
- ◯ Listen to each other
- ◯ Identify challenges

Question 2

Identify one question you could ask yourself when self-reflecting about the use of courage during the critical thinking process.

Question 3

What does the A in the SMART acronym stand for?

- ◯ acceptable
- ◯ Adaptable
- ◯ Attainable
- ◯ Affordable
- ◯ Assignable

Summary

- When presenting to an audience, some of things a presenter can do to help ensure their proposal is received positively include beginning with something that is familiar, emphasising the evidence and speaking clearly.
- Regardless of whether an audience is familiar with the concept of critical thinking, it is a good idea to explain it before presenting a solution.
- When a presenter understands the reasons why people commonly reject ideas, they have a basis for responding effectively to challenges from their audience.
- When preparing a presentation, it is useful to consider what your audience knows, such as what they know about the problem and its effects.
- Evaluating team performance at the conclusion of a critical thinking process is useful for identifying areas for improvement.
- Reflecting individually on areas such as assumptions, points of view and egocentricity can help team members identify what guides their thinking.
- SMART goals provide a framework for applying learning at an individual and team level.

Learning Checkpoint 3

Finalise and review solution development processes

Part A

1. What is the technique of imaginary dialogue? What is it useful for and what does it involve?

2. Identify two challenges commonly encountered during the critical thinking process.

3. What is one question you would ask yourself to check if a goal is measurable?

Part B

Case study

Shona is an assistant curator at a private art gallery. Shona and her team have put together a solution for increasing foot traffic to the gallery. Shona is now at the point of presenting this solution to her gallery director.

1. Identify three strategies Shona can use to help ensure her presentation is received positively by the gallery director.

2. Based on what we know about the most common reasons why people reject ideas, identify four reasons why the gallery director might object to Shona's proposal.