

Contra Costa County Leadership Academy
Session #6 – Critical & Creative Thinking / Risk-Taking in Decision Making



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Critical & Creative Thinking

Risk-Taking in Decision Making

Contra Costa County
Leadership Academy

Session #6
March 4, 2026

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Overview Of The Day

Team Huddle reports

Critical thinking

Creative thinking

Risk taking in decision making

Risk-taking tolerance self-assessment

Elect 2 graduation speakers

Guest speaker Fire Chief Eric Saylor, El Cerrito/Kensington Fire Dept

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Team Huddle Reports



Taking action

- ❖ What short-term actions would stabilize coordination immediately?
- ❖ What long-term actions would ensure sustainable, equitable, and effective interdepartmental collaboration?
- ❖ How would you use the team's strengths to support implementation?
- ❖ How would you communicate the plan to Police and Fire leadership in a way that honors their values and operational realities?
- ❖ How would you communicate with the public to rebuild trust without over-sharing or creating liability?

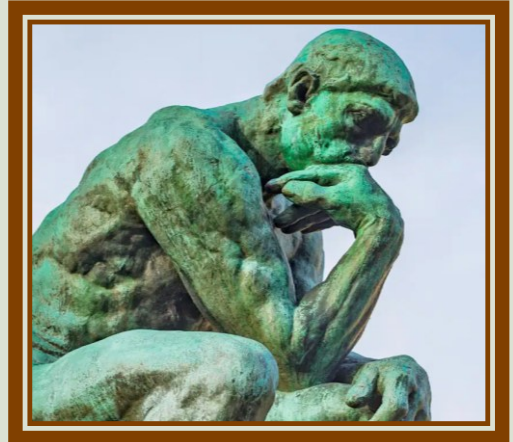
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Critical Thinking

“Critical thinking is thinking about your thinking while you’re thinking in order to make your thinking better.”

~ Richard W. Paul

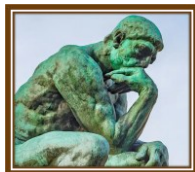


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Critical Thinking

- ❖ Critical thinking is the process of analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to make reasoned decisions and solve complex problems.
- ❖ Engaging in clear, rational, and logical thought, free from bias or egocentric tendency.



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Important Critical Thinking Skills

1. Analysis
2. Interpretation
3. Inference
4. Evaluation
5. Problem solving
6. Decision making



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Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills

- ❖ Be curious – ask questions – seek data and facts and perspectives
- ❖ Focus on the most relevant information
- ❖ Engage in self-reflection
- ❖ Understand and embrace different perspectives
- ❖ Practice evaluating information (what's there, what's missing, etc.) & problem solving
- ❖ Stay informed in a neutral way (non-bias)
- ❖ Lean into decision making, even when the outcome may be unclear

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Let's Practice



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Share:

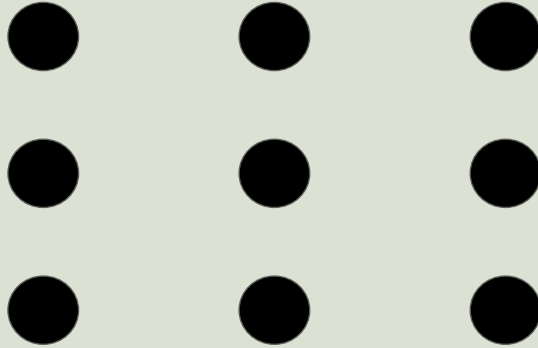
- ❖ How did your group come to a decision? If you did not reach a decision, what happened?
- ❖ What was most challenging for your group?
- ❖ In what ways did using the 6 critical thinking skills aid or hinder your discussions and decision?



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“The world that we’ve made as a result of the level of thinking we have done thus far creates problems we cannot solve at the same level of thinking which created them.”



~ Albert Einstein

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Creative Thinking



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Creative Thinking

- ❖ Creative thinking is developing *innovative* and *imaginative* solutions to problems/issues.
- ❖ Generating ideas that break away from the usual thinking patterns.



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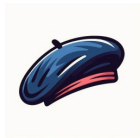
Four Roles of the Creative Process

Explorer – when you are searching for new ideas

Artist – when you are turning your resources into new ideas

Judge – when you are evaluating the merits of an idea

Warrior – when you are moving your idea into action



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The Explorer

- ❖ Searching – looking – probing
- ❖ Curious
- ❖ Venture off the beaten path



People who are only good with hammers see every problem as a nail.

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The Artist

- ❖ Transforming information into new ideas
- ❖ Doing something with and to your materials (information, patterns, ideas)



Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist after they grow up.

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The Judge



- ❖ Performs the evaluation function of the creative process
- ❖ Evaluating – deciding
- ❖ Balance openness and imagination with sense of reality and perspective

Make the decision.

*If you spend too much time warming up, you'll miss the race.
If you don't warm up at all, you may not finish the race.*

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The Warrior



- ❖ Carries the idea into action
- ❖ Move from “what if” to “what is” (action)
- ❖ Provides the payoff for the creative process

Whether you think you can or can't, you're right.

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Chief Eric Saylor's Career Journey

- ❖ Listen & take notes
- ❖ Try to discern some key traits, characteristics, pivotal points, highs-lows, and decisions



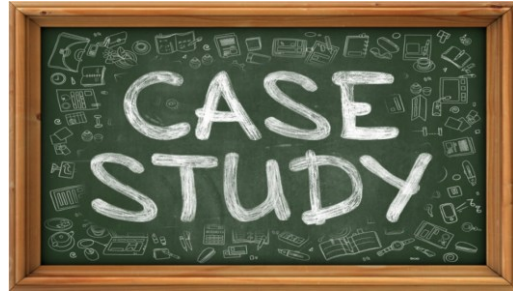
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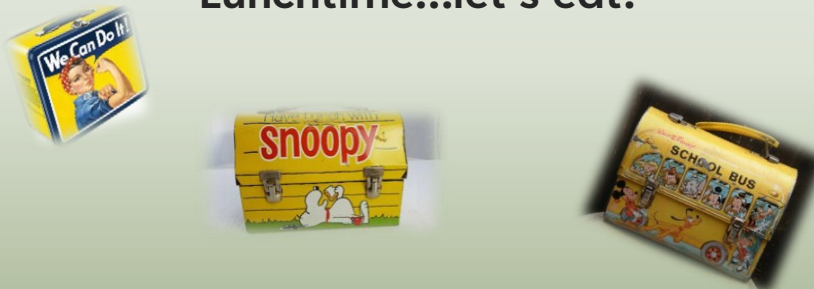
Chief's Case Study

Listen & take notes

- ❖ What went well?
- ❖ What did not go so well?
- ❖ What can we learn for our future practice?



Lunchtime...let's eat!

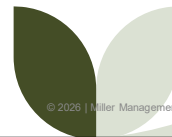


Connection Between Critical & Creative Thinking



General capabilities of Critical and Creative Thinking:

- ❖ Reflecting on thinking and processes
- ❖ Inquiring – identifying, exploring and organizing information and ideas
- ❖ Analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating reasoning and procedures
- ❖ Generating ideas, possibilities, actions



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CRITICAL THINKING & CREATIVE THINKING

CRITICAL THINKING	CREATIVE THINKING
Analytical	Generative
Convergent	Divergent
Vertical	Lateral
Probability	Possibility
Judgment	Suspended Judgment
Hypothesis testing	Hypothesis forming
Objective	Subjective
Answer	An answer
Closed	Open-ended
Linear	Associative
Reasoning	Speculative
Logic	Intuition
Yes but	Yes and



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Why **BOTH** Are Needed

- **Critical thinking** skills analyze what is wrong with a situation
- **Creative thinking** skills identify how to fix it in innovative ways

Complementary, interdependent problem-solving and decision-making skills essential for:

- ✓ Solving complex public problems
- ✓ Fostering innovation
- ✓ Building public trust
- ✓ Enhanced policy development
- ✓ Improved public sector processes
- ✓ Efficient resource management
- ✓ Improved service delivery



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Let's Practice



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Discuss In Your Teams

- ❖ How did your team do?
- ❖ How did you use creative thinking – which of the 4 roles were activated?
- ❖ What assumptions if any did you make, and how might that have hindered your team?



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Risk Taking & Decision Making



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Share:

- ❖ On a scale of 0-5, what is your agency's level of risk tolerance?
- ❖ What supports risk taking in decisions within your agency?
- ❖ What are barriers to risk taking in decisions within your agency?

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Personal Risk Tolerance Assessment



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Critical & Creative Thinking & Risk Taking

Putting it all into practice

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In Your Teams, Discuss:

- ❖ The criteria your team used
- ❖ The approach taken
- ❖ Any assumptions made
- ❖ The level of risk taken: on a scale of 0 (no risk) to 6 (high risk)
- ❖ How was the level of risk you took similar/different from the level of risk that you take:
 - ❖ in your organization?
 - ❖ in your personal life?
- ❖ What encouragement or discouragement did you observe in the group's activity?
- ❖ How was it helpful/not helpful?

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One key takeaway for me from today is...

How I will use that insight going forward is...



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Resources

- ❖ Blais, A.-R., & Weber, E. U. (2006). *A Domain-Specific Risk-Taking (DOSPERT) Scale for Adult Populations*. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 1(1), 33–47.
- ❖ Foundation for Excellence. *Critical and Creative Thinking | Newsletter*. (2021). Retrieved from <https://ffe.org/critical-and-creative-thinking-newsletter-october-2021/>
- ❖ Gelb, Michael J. (2000, Feb 8). *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day*. ISBN-10: 0440508274
- ❖ Gelb, Michael J. (1999, June 15). *The How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci Workbook: Your Personal Companion to How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*. ISBN-10: 0440508827



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Resources

- ❖ Von Oech, Roger. (1986). A Kick in the Seat of the Pants. ISBN: 0-06-015528-0
- ❖ Von Oech, Roger. (2024, May 7). A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative. ISBN-13: 978-1538759417
- ❖ Watanabe-Crockett, Lee. (2019, May 10). The Critical Thinking Companion. ISBN-13: 978-1092887915
- ❖ Watanabe-Crockett, Lee. (2019, April 1). The Essential Guide to Essential Questions. ISBN-13: 978-1098654122
- ❖ Zhang, D. C., Highhouse, S., & Nye, C. D. (2019). *Development and validation of the General Risk Propensity Scale (GRiPS)*. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 32(2), 152–167.

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Preparing for April 1

- ❖ Topic is: Political acumen – a necessary leadership skill
- ❖ Short article to read
- ❖ Guest trainer – Frank Benest, retired City Manager
- ❖ Beyond the Leadership Academy
- ❖ Graduation @ 2:30 p.m.

Pre-Work

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Thank you for today

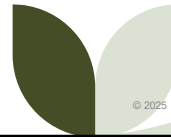


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