

HOW CRITICAL THINKING HELPS IN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Conflicts are inevitable at workplace because of various factors including personal differences, conflicting goals, uncertainty and lack of clarity. If not handled well, these conflicts can prove costly and damage the social fabric of a team or organization. When confronted with a conflict, the first instinctive human reaction is to either battle the conflict or run away from it – both of which don't help the team constructively. During conflict (and any other threatening situation), our instinctive emotions takes the front seat keeping us away from the required thinking to amicably resolve the conflicting situation.

The truth is that conflicts, if managed well, are an opportunity to understand better, get to the root causes, introspect, improve and learn. A well-managed conflict often leads to improved clarity, better relationships and win-win situations.

Critical thinking is a very important tool in a leader's toolkit to manage conflict situations and turn them into opportunities. How does critical thinking help in resolving conflict more effectively? Let us explore.

- **Critical thinking allows you to look at conflict objectively.** In any conflict resolution process, one has to step back and away from the conflict. When you exercise critical thinking by looking at facts, recognizing assumptions and evaluating alternative viewpoints, you are looking at the conflict as an outsider from a different vantage point. It is said that when you are a part of the problem, you can never be a part of the solution. *Critical thinking allows you to clarify the goals of resolving the conflict* clearly which, in turn, sets the stage for an effective resolution.
- **Critical thinking focuses on problem, not on people.** In conflict situations, emotionally driven people often tend to point out mistakes in the approaches taken by others. Critical thinking allows a leader to separate a problem from people and moderate the resolution process keeping the problem in perspective.
- **Critical thinking means better evaluation of arguments.** In a conflict situation, there will invariably be a lot of arguments where personal viewpoints and beliefs will be shared by everyone involved. Critical thinkers entertain alternative and differing viewpoint without necessarily accepting them. This allows them to bring all the thought processes and reasoning on the table. Objective evaluation of these arguments (refer the RED Model) against the overall goal of resolution improves the chances of a favorable resolution.
- **Critical thinking brings facts on the table.** When faced with conflicts, critical thinkers always look for facts, data and trends associated with the problem. These facts integrated with a sound evaluation of arguments provide a formidable base for resolving the conflict.

It is said, *"We cannot solve problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."* It applies so well to conflict resolution. Critical thinking is a compass that gives direction to resolve conflicts in the best interest of the team and hence organization.