



Stronger Reasoning & Decision Making: Training Tools and Techniques

Techniques for Trainers of Reasoning Skills and Decision Making

Use these techniques to strengthen the training strategies you currently use to improve thinking skills and mindset in your trainee and student groups. Apply these strategies to all training exercises where the goal is to improve thoughtful problem identification and reflective decision making. Reflecting periodically on these three directives will offer you insights about your current best training practices and help you to focus your training efforts on critical thinking across content domains and educational contexts.

Reflecting on these directives will help you identify when and where you are most effective in training reasoning and decision making. Work to recall what you actually SAY and DO in training sessions, team meetings, field work exercises, case conferences and mentoring sessions:

A: Model strength in critical thinking to set the standard for trainees. Modeling is the most powerful way to communicate what is valued in the working professional and what will be rewarded in the trainee. Trainees typically seek to emulate those who have achieved the status of mentor. Consider when and where do you currently DEMONSTRATE strength in thinking using these methods?

- Describe aloud the problem being addressed, separating it from other problems that are related.
- Evaluate aloud the quality and significance of available data, determining what data is still needed.
- Identify patterns of events, pointing out pattern details, and naming the pattern.
- Explain aloud the reasons and relevant evidence that supports a key decision.
- Thoroughly explain aloud the implications and possible application of available data.
- State aloud the inferences being made, or those that should be made, in a given situation.
- Evaluate aloud the relative applicability of alternative solutions.
- Critique the quality of a decision-making process (Was our process evidence-based? organized? fair-minded? ethical? comprehensive? etc.) adding the details used to support your critique.
- Comment on the fair-mindedness of a judgment or communication, providing the evidence you are using for your evaluation.
- Explain aloud your evaluation of the quality of a previous decision by reviewing details of the decision-making process and the evaluative criteria you applied.

B: Require trainees/students to demonstrate evidence of their thinking process. In order to evaluate your trainees thinking, you need to hear evidence of their process, not just their conclusions or opinions. You also need to allow time for the process to occur. Where do you REQUIRE evidence of thinking process? Where do you use these methods?

- Require a few moments of silence whenever a difficult or key question is asked, so that everyone can think well about possible responses.
- Ask what a collection of data might mean, requiring a full explanation of observed relationships.
- Stop a report to ask for the reasons behind a judgment to assure that it is more than just a guess or an opinion.
- Ask for recommendations over time in an evolving case where the problem changes or becomes more complex.
- Ask whether action is called for, and then carefully elicit reasons for both action and inaction.
- Think aloud with trainees to determine why an action failed to provide an expected result.
- Review and evaluate a group decision process, analyzing the roles of each group member.
- Require trainees/students to demonstrate each of the skills described in 1) through 10) above.

C: Structure training programs to match the decision responsibility that will be required by program graduates.

- Expose students/trainees to novel problems where they must analyze what is being demanded of them
- Assure that the judgment process will have similar time constraints to problems that trainees will face in real circumstances.
- Include sensitive topics in the training, Humans must be competent and ideally strong thinkers, even when they are in highly uncomfortable circumstances.
- Set the training expectations to allow trainees to be challenged to provide support for their views and decisions.

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