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# Critical Thinking, Decision Making and Mindfullness

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# CRITIAL THINKING, DEICIOSN MAKING AND MINDFULNESS

Assignment 1

by
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Critical Thinking and Decision Making

Nova Southeastern University
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**Mission Statement**

Promoting mindfulness in critical thinking and decision making to effectively solve problems.

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Decision Making and its Effects Within an Organization

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**Introduction**

Everyone in an organization have experienced the act of choosing. While some members may have to choose something very minuscule, other team members have to choose options that can be beneficial or detrimental towards the organization, depending on their position, rank or title. For example, education is an organization that constantly must choose options that will advance students' achievement. From having to choose the type of students that are placed into certain classrooms, to deciding whether the organization will use certain resources for students to use to gain success, the possibilities are endless. This process of choosing is entitled decision-making, and it serves as one of the primary factors that drives any organization to its plateau or its breaking point.

This module of the handbook emphasizes how decision-making is not an easy task but with the proper training and evaluations, one will learn how to effectively make better decisions that will elevate all aspects of the organization. This module will enlighten any members of an organization on an array of topics as it pertains to decision making. There are steps that needs to be extracted before, during and after the decision-making process and this handbook will guide you on the do's and don'ts of decision making. If you've ever had a question or just needed clarity on decision making, then this chapter should respond to all of your needs. This should serve as your go-to guide in formulating and executing decisions. Whether you are part of a committee of the organization, or take on a leadership role, this module is aimed to attract all members of the organization to become a better and avid decision maker.

**Definition and Philosophy**

"*Sometimes it's the smallest decisions that can change your life forever"* Kerri Russell

Decision making is closely associated and aligned with critical thinking. One cannot function without the other. In order to make executive decisions, there are three steps that must take place (Shaughnessy, 1985). First, augmentation of the critical thinking approach must be explored, established and sustained. Secondly, a plethora of skills that relates to metacognitive logic, rationality and reasoning are explored to promote and enhance future learning. Last, the position of ambiguity is centered to assist with the construction of thinking. All three components result in the importance of accounting multiple miens of performance in evaluation that influences personnel decisions (Masters, 2013). Decision-making is a thought process of selection. It focuses primarily on making a logical choice from the options that are presented. Weighing the options and putting alternatives into deliberation assist with making good decisions. However, when one is able to foreshadow different outcomes of each option at hand to determine which option is in fact, equivocal to success, effective decision making has surfaced from that individual.

**Building Decision Making Traits**



      In order to perfect a craft, one must study and implement certain skills to get better. Decision-making is no different from any other skills because it requires intensive practice. Using a systematic approach for decision-making builds traits that will support anyone to make the wisest and most effective choice for their organization. Below are seven traits that are useful for this particular approach (Stietz, 2015);

- ➢ Create a constructive environment that is open minded and diversified.
- ➢ Investigate the situation in its entirety and record all details.
- ➢ Reproduce good alternatives. Better to be safe than sorry.
- ➢ Explore your options. Your first choice should not be the only choice.
- ➢ Select your best solution. Process of elimination is vital.
- ➢ Evaluate your plan. Ask yourself *"Is this plan the best for the team?"*
- ➢ Communicate your decision and take action. Don't just tell, Do!

Following this system every time a decision needs to be made will create a routine of effectiveness. The more it is done, the better your chances are of creating decisions that are fruitful and exponential.

**Benefits of Decision-Making**

Benefits, factors and consequences are all associated with the art of decision making. For instance, many factors that are affiliated with decision making are perception, priority, acceptability, risks and resources (Armistead, 2010). When decision making is performed correctly, there are plenty of gains for the organizations. Those benefits include reaching goals, accessorizing values, meeting demands, and portraying proper style and judgement (Armistead, 2010). Decision making deals with being strategic. Once one thinks critically about the choices and evaluates the situation, decision making becomes a process of eliminating all factors that are gregariously upsetting for the organization. Take education as a demonstration. Educators have to make decisions that will uplift their students' mindset. Assessments are important in educational organizations because it is used as a guide for teachers to make decisions about different patterns of differentiated instructions/interventions for students to gain proficiency (Conderman & Hedin, 2012). Although assessment is a term that is popular in education, there are plenty "assessments" or factors that drives decisions for all organizations.

**Negative Effects of Decision-Making**

Ultimately, decision-making is a process that has its pros and cons, but as a leader you should weigh out options that will epitomize the organization. If not, the elements below will serve as roadblocks.

| *Consequences* | *Barriers* |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Trying too hard to play it safe. | 1. Not enough info |
| 2. Letting fears and biases alter your thinking and analysis. | 2. Too much info |
| 3. Getting lost and distracted in the minutia can cause trouble. | 3. Too many people |
| 4. Yearning for unanimous approval. | 4. Vested interest |
| 5. Trying to make decisions that are outside your reach of authority and not adhering to protocol. | 5. Emotional attachments |
| 6. Overlooking viable alternatives or wasting time considering alternatives which have no realistic outcomes. | 6. No emotional attachments |
| | 7. Not communicating your decision |
| | 8. Resisting to take action |

**Management of Decision-Making**

  Every team member of an organization is responsible for making decisions. Whether it is personal or business-oriented, each person has a voice. But each person needs to know when and how their voice can be heard. There is a managerial process that is suggested when making decisions. Junge and Krvaric (2014) gave the framework of decision-making management and goes in-depth of what the process is.

- <u>Listing All Possible Options and Solutions:</u> Put all ideas on the table. Create a visual of the options that are available to have a visual representation of what is being offered and at stake.

- <u>Setting a Time Scale and Deciding Who Is Responsible for the Decision:</u> Time is of the essence. Create a deadline for a sense of urgency. Use protocol to decide who has the voice to make the particular decision. For instance, decide which team member from the department of the organization will make the decision so that everyone is on one accord.

- <u>Information Gathering:</u> Research everything about the choices. Be explicit when providing details of each option so that the best decision is made from the content that is being provided.

- <u>Weighing Up the Risks Involved:</u> Check to see what odds are in the organization's favor. The risks can be beneficial depending on the decision that needs to be made. Sometimes stepping back allows future steps to move forward and higher.

- <u>Deciding on Values:</u> Decision-making is about morals and ethics. Make decisions that involve intuition. What is popular is not what is always right. Using your inner voice to help you make decisions is key.

- ▪ <u>Weighing Pros and Cons:</u> Each option holds its own weight. But as a decision maker, you must decide which option will not weigh down the organization. Just because an option is the heaviest, does not always mean it is the best choice.

- ▪ <u>Making the Decision:</u> Once you have finalized on the best option, execute a plan for implementation. Decision should be stated verbally and action must be reciprocated.



**The Six "C's" of Decision-Making**

- ♦ Construct

- ♦ Compile

- ♦ Collect

- ♦ Compare

- ♦ Consider

- ♦ Commit

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Chapter 1 - Building Critical Thinking Competencies



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**Building Critical Thinking Competencies**

**Critical Thinking Philosophy**

Critical thinking is an essential skill that one must prove to be indispensable and professionally groom. The notion of critical thinking within an organization based on espousing this ability globally among stakeholders and organization members.  Moreover, due to the advancement of technology and virtual workforces, it's obligatory that companies and leaders warrant one's ability to make a sound decision to think critically. The mode of fostering cognitive development in diverse areas of disciplines' to improve a tangible goal and adhering to fair values. However, critical thinking classification is a universal concept implemented across many disciplines, professions, organizations, and philosophies. Essential theories of thinking originate from the Greek philosophy and etymology of "Kriticos and Kriterion," the foundation of decree and standards (Our Conception of Critical Thinking, 2017). Critical Thinking as a theory inquiry was introduced by Gerald Nosich, Richard Paul, and Linda Elder as primary contributors to critical thinking movement across the various discipline.

Werner and Bleich (2017) suggested that leadership contribution and ability to intellectually think critically and make a decision is chief to organizational success to defy any risk and consequences. However, cognitive thinking calls for a systematic approach to making decisions. Nevertheless, critical thinking defined as the overall process of individualizing discipline to objectively analyze, assess and conceptualize one's judgment and reasoning, and not on the center of emotion; the subjective process of quality thinking by managing situation and incorporating logical values (Defining Critical Thinking, 2017; Werner & Bleich, 2017).

Additionally, study classifies critical thinking as a skill and not a trait. Thus this unique

dexterity combined with decision making is parallel to Marco-logical proficiency (Bailin, Case,

Coombs and Daniels, 1999). In most area of discipline, critical thinking viewed as the most

desirable skill that aligned with performance, productivity, and perception. In proposing this,

Alsogoff (2007) stated the significant traits of critical thinking concertation consist of: (a)

reasoning (b) analyzing (c) evaluating (d) decision making, and (e) problem solving (p. 17).

Critical thinking in any organization is an essential component to organization success and

change. To some, critical thinking viewed as a skill, however, in this module we will further

examine and compare core competencies of critical thinking.



**Benefit of Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking can be a complicated process for many to fathom by the composition,

climate, and core of any organization. However, cognitive thinking benefit and contribution

impacts productivity, performance and success. The advantage of critical thinking encompassed

of individualizing input, talent, and conscience ability to reason. The perceptive of essential

elements that relegate the fundamental interest of thinking is to refute any barriers such as

egocentrism and socio-centrism (Doane University, n.d.). Also, the advantage of good critical

thinkers must pose a series of characteristics utilized to support their mental process and

judgment. Jones (2016) posited the attributes of a critical thinker is:

(a) Self-confidence
(b) Knowledge of all information
(c) Open-mildness to alternative perspective
(d) Remaining unbiased to own belief
(e) Ability to make sound Judgement
(f) Questioning any risks.

Hence, these distinctive traits unleash the potential of being efficacious throughout the mental process. Optimally, reinforcing critical thinking in all disciplines' is fundamental to the methods used for quality and thoughtful consideration of ideas. Furthermore, the benefit of developing critical thinking skill is by taking surveys for thinking that can measure your level being an effective critical thinker.

**Critical Thinking Skills Assessment**

| | **Critical thinkers are able to:** | **Low** | | | **High** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Evaluate information in a systematic way. | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 2 | Identify inconsistencies in others' thinking | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 3 | Understand the logical connections between ideas | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 4 | Effectively solve problems and make informed decisions | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 5 | Separate what is important and what is irrelevant information | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 6 | Construct strong evidence-based arguments | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 7 | View situations from different perspectives | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 8 | Ask hard questions to challenge observations and assumptions | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 9 | Interpret what information really means | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 10 | Analyze ideas and arguments | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 11 | Reach conclusions based on evidence | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 12 | Assess whether people got the facts right | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |
| 13 | Identity misconceptions and gaps in their own reasoning | **1** | **2** | **3 6** | **4** | **5** |

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&FileName=Module%206%20-

%20Critical%20Thinking%20Participant%20Booklet%20v4.pdf

**Building Personal Critical Thinking Traits**

Furthermore, research has shown that with proper assessments and training the ability to make swift and accurate decisions can be improved drastically, in turn, improving the desired outcomes of the organization (Mangieri, 2008). However, self-awareness plays a significant role in one's ability to think critically to make rational decisions to process challenges to clarity, validity and in-depth logical reasoning and develop a solution (Werner & Bleich, 2017). Also, to the improved desired outcomes also include increased employee morale and job satisfaction.  It is essential to assess and address problematic areas within an organization to minimize risks and increase productivity (Magieri, 2008).

In the domain of building critical thinking traits, the norm is chief for the balance of being a practical thinker in the process. Paul and Elder (2008) posit that there are six developmental stages of critical thinking which can aid understanding your essential styles of thinking; the six steps are:

- Stage 1: Unreflective Thinker
- Stage 2: Challenged Thinker
- Stage 3: Beginning Thinker
- Stage 4: Practicing Thinker
- Stage 5: Advanced Thinker
- Stage 6: Master Thinker

**Critical Thinking Management and Leadership**

Specifically, essential principles of critical thinking are interested in "self-concepts" comprehending one's actions and perception on making quality decisions. With no restrictions, being self-guided and self-disciplined permits for the ability to process and identify any flawed thinking left abandoned; intellectually weakening the propensities of egocentric and sociocentric (Our Conception of Critical Thinking, 2017).

In proposing critical thinking management, which affords individualize intellectual reasoning growth in areas of integrity, humility, civility, empathy, sense of justice and confidence (Our Conception of Critical Thinking, 2017). The improvement of conscious thinking is associated with self-awareness, action, and belief in diverse environments, yet realizing that limitations and risk are typical throughout the process.

In a global workforce, it intuitive that leadership adapts to the 21st-century model and concept, encouraging a competitiveness. In a global and virtual market, selective reasoning is fundamental to moving the organization mission in a positive direction. Leadership ability to think critically applies to strategically approaching challenges, in which companies rely on leaders to be high-performing in developing their reasoning skills.

**Barriers to Critical Thinking**

Research further supports that many leaders are born with critical thinking skills that can be shaped and altered in early adolescence up to the age of 12 (Mangieri, 2008). However, it is difficult to reshape and teach critical thinking skills later in adulthood. Barriers to critical thinking include but are not limited to areas of competency assessments of cognitive processes associated with creative and critical thinking with the ability to perform and lead others successfully (Mangieri, 2008). Within, the thinking process it's necessary that decision made with a real objective and exhaustive solutions possibility. Based on the notion, one of the barriers to critical thinking the stressful and emotional factor of judgment that may directly or indirectly impact the outcome, efficiency, performance, and organization success.

Consequently, the misconception of critical thinking is the isolated conjecture that individual will be the experts in the processes; yet, mental proficiency drives the development of being a critical thinker (Bailin, Case, Coombs, & Daniels, 1999). The central assumption of

thinking may actualize poor decision-making without an objective process can result in consequences of the decisions or solution. Critical thinking permits all possible options that can provide support to forming a resolution. For instance, there has been confusion with critical thinking and creative thinking. Creative reasoning and critical thinking connected in the sense that using your creative thoughts to approach a matter strategically. Iqbal (2016) suggested the purpose of creative rationale is to go far beyond originality and limitations; while critical thinking the goal of being analytical, which requires a mental process and judgment made. However, in some instance, creative thinking may overshadow the critical thinking process resulting in flawed consequences.

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# The Ultimate Cheatsheet for
# Critical Thinking

**Want to exercise critical thinking skills? Ask these questions whenever you discover or discuss new information. These are broad and versatile questions that have limitless applications!**

## Who
... benefits from this?
... is this harmful to?
... makes decisions about this?
... is most directly affected?

... have you also heard discuss this?
... would be the best person to consult?
... will be the key people in this?
... deserves recognition for this?

## What
... are the strengths/weaknesses?
... is another perspective?
... is another alternative?
... would be a counter-argument?

... is the best/worst case scenario?
... is most/least important?
... can we do to make a positive change?
... is getting in the way of our action?

## Where
... would we see this in the real world?
... are there similar concepts/situations?
... is there the most need for this?
... in the world would this be a problem?

... can we get more information?
... do we go for help with this?
... will this idea take us?
... are the areas for improvement?

## When
... is this acceptable/unacceptable?
... would this benefit our society?
... would this cause a problem?
... is the best time to take action?

... will we know we've succeeded?
... has this played a part in our history?
... can we expect this to change?
... should we ask for help with this?

## Why
... is this a problem/challenge?
... is it relevant to me/others?
... is this the best/worst scenario?
... are people influenced by this?

... should people know about this?
... has it been this way for so long?
... have we allowed this to happen?
... is there a need for this today?

## How
... is this similar to _____?
... does this disrupt things?
... do we know the truth about this?
... will we approach this safely?

... does this benefit us/others?
... does this harm us/others?
... do we see this in the future?
... can we change this for our good?

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Stress Management for Critical Thinking and Decision Making in an Organization

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**Stress Management for Critical Thinking and Decision Making in an Organization**

Effective critical thinking and decision in any organization requires leaders to view the big picture and simultaneously maintain their emotional intelligence and emotional regulation. Critical thinking can invoke stress in a leader, and if not managed effectively, can lead to poor decision making (Thompson, 2012).

Distress, or bad stress, and eustress, or good stress, affects each person individually. There is no universal standard for stress management, as it is incumbent on the individual to manage their stressors. Effective stress management has been noted as key in decision making (Selye, 1951; Thompson, 2012).

*K. Starcke, M. Brand / Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews 36 (2012) 1228–1248*
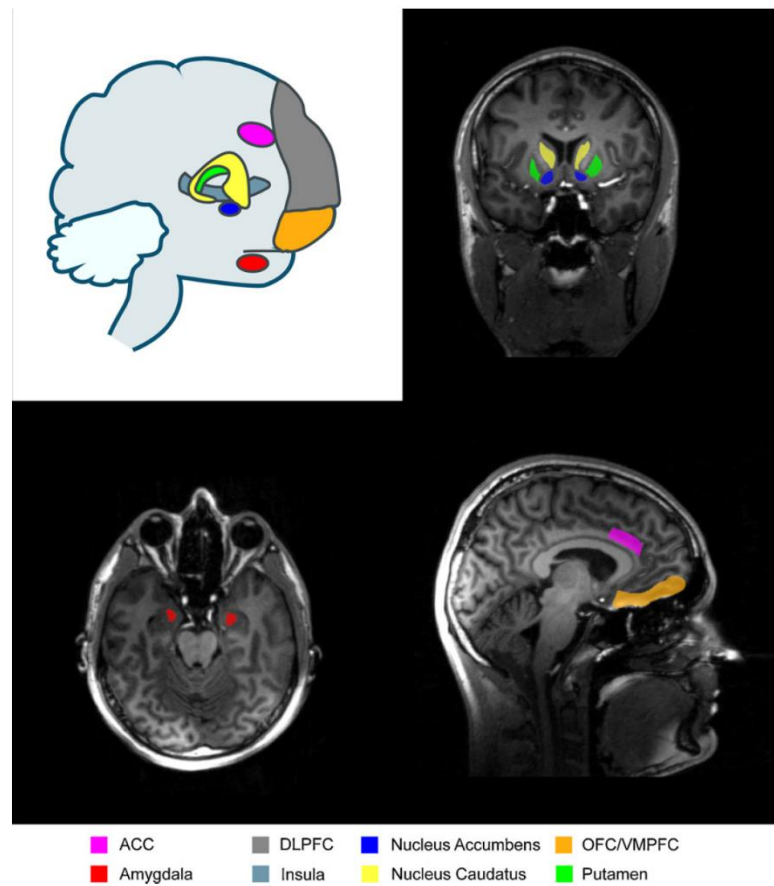
Stress directly affects the decision-making areas of the brain responsible for stress management, including the amygdala and pre frontal cortex. Stress changes the brain, thus altering how a person thinks and makes decisions (Starcke & Brand 2012). Poor stress management has an effect on the cardiovascular system, as the body analyzes the stress as a threat, and responds with an automatic physical reaction (Starcke & Brand 2012).

If an individual is confronted with a major stressor, there is a tendency for the person to triage the stressor, in order to ascertain if the stressor was fatal, harmful or trivial (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Stressors which exceeded the person's ability to cope, may cause the person to suffer mental health issues (Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Thompson 2012). The phenomenon was found in the general workplace regardless of the setting (Lazarus 1991).

Chronic stress leads to hazardous decision-making (Pabst, Brand, & Wolf 2013a), as the person's amygdala is over stimulated and unable to cope with the stress, which leads to high levels of cortisol and ineffective decision-making Pabst, Brand, and Wolf (2013b).

Stress is subjective and can take many forms, from going to work to organizational decisions. If a stressor is not resolved within a short amount of time, it could have a cumulative effect (Thompson, 2012). Individuals do not respond to stress the same way; in some cases, major stressors cause individuals a great deal of stress, while others are seemingly unaffected. Leaders are faced with additional stressors and the stress tends to be collective over time (Thompson, 2012).

There is a direct correlation between acute stress and the ability to fully appreciate the cost of making a decision under stress (Shafiei, Gray, Viau, & Floresco 2012). Individuals making decisions which they perceive as a threat are at a greater vulnerability for poor decision making (Hartley & Phelps 2012). Individuals under stress utilize their executive functioning

section of their brain, the prefrontal cortex, in interesting ways to process decisions (Coutlee, & Huettel 2011; Thompson 2012).

An individual under stress who is quick to make a decision based on their own personal biases with incomplete knowledge can lead to a decision with negative ramifications (Porcelli & Delgado, 2009).

**Stress Rationale**

The General Adoption Syndrome Model (Selye, 1951) suggested that there were two factors which mitigate or exacerbate a stress. First is the level of stress; and the second is time. For some people, they are able to process stress in a relatively short amount of time to find a resolution; others may spend a disproportionate amount of time ruminating on the stress. Long term effects of stress include sleep deprivation and other semantic complaints (Selye, 1951).

Leadership stress requires additional clarification. Stress has an adverse reaction in the human brain, and on the human body. In terms of stress, the brain is bombarded with a myriad of chemicals including cortisol. High levels of cortisol have been linked to heart disease and many other physical health illnesses and complaints. Prolonged exposure to stress has negative effects on an individual's physical body, emotional stability, and cognitive performance. Some individuals will embrace the stress and challenge it directly, while others will flee from the stress including dissociation (Thompson, 2012).

Time plays a factor in stressful decision making. Decisions made under a time constraint present an ethical dilemma, especially during acute decision making (Suter & Hertwig 2011). In some cases, a person will suddenly rise to the challenge and do what they feel is ethical and moral. In making decisions, which requires a moral decision under stress, an individual may not

be able to fully appreciate the magnitude of their decision (Youssef, Dookeeram, Basdeo, Francis, Doman, Mamed, Maloo, Degannes, Dobo, Ditshotlo, & Legall, 2012).

**Stress management**

Every day stressors (Table 1) for leaders in an organization can include, but not limited to, preparing for the day, child care, domestic responsibilities, commuting via public transportation, the potential of arriving to work late due to public transportation, arriving to a stressful job, making difficult decisions while at their job, making difficult decisions which may be contrary to their moral code and ethics, conflict with their supervisor or leader, and rapid stressful decision-making. Effective stress management is imperative for any leader. Regardless of their leadership style, the leader must be in control of their emotions when making decisions. A leader with the ability to think clearly will have a grasp of the larger picture and be able to make more effective decisions, even under stress (Thompson, 2012).

## Signs of Stress – Table 1

- Frequent headaches.
- Cold or sweaty hands and feet.
- Frequent heartburn, stomach pain, or nausea.
- Panic attacks.
- Excessive sleeping, or insomnia.
- Persistent difficulty concentrating.
- Obsessive or compulsive behaviors.
- Social withdrawal or isolation.
- Constant fatigue.
- Irritability and angry episodes.
- Significant weight gain or loss.
- Consistent feelings of being overwhelmed or overloaded.

Source: Mind Tools Content Team

**Proactive measures**

    Leaders with a positive mindset and self-efficacy are better equipped to manage their

stress and emotional intelligence (Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck, & Manz 2012). Leaders should

be mindful of their role within an organization, as their decisions directly affect the employee

stress level. In a supportive environment, employees have reported less stress and increased job

performance. Supportive leaders who took into account the needs of others were more likely to

make sound decisions (Khalid, Murtaza, Zafar, Zafar, Saqib, & Mushtaq, 2012; Selart &

Johansen 2011). A supportive leader's employees were less distressed and yielded higher job

performance. The leader is a diplomat between the employee and the stress (Khalid et. al 2012).

Effective leaders adopt a leadership and decision-making style, commonly referred to as a transformational leadership. The transformational leader has been shown to be effective in decision-making and emotional regulation. Being mindful requires leaders to control their emotions and not make decisions based on limited information, personal bias, or on their emotions (Mustafa & Kingston, 2014). Transformational leaders who practice mindfulness have been shown to make effective decisions under stress, including sudden decision-making (Mustafa & Kingston 2014; Noone, Bunting, & Hogan, 2016).



https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/10-steps-to-mindfulness-meditation

Mindfulness is the practice of monitoring one's emotions, body responses, and reactions to stress, and information exchange (Noone et al., 2016). Practicing mindfulness, a leader is able to regulate their emotions and focus on the big picture before making a decision (Noone et al., 2016).

Mindfulness involves training in meditation that has many forms. Some mindfulness focuses on breathing techniques, others focus on the state of mind and awareness, while others believe it is a person's adaptability to change (Rahl, Lindsay, Pacilio, Brown, & Creswell, 2017). Regardless of the mindfulness techniques used, being mindful during times of stress, critical thinking, and decision-making will allow a leader to make a more informed and healthy decision, which directly benefits the organization.

**Conclusion**

Critical thinking and decision making is a crucial component of any organization, as each decision directly affects every member of that organization. Critical thinking entails the leader to examine the larger picture of the decision, allowing the individual to analyze the data from all the varying angles, in order to ascertain the choice which most benefits the organization. The actual decision making is the result of effectively looking at all aspects of a situation,  prior to making the decision, taking into account how that decision will affect the employees, the management, and the mission.  Effective decision making is based on data, information, and logic, rather than the individual's biases or emotion; this is the major benefit to critical thinking: decisions based on rationale. What is imperative for effective critical thinking and decision making is for the leader to practice mindfulness and stress management to maintain emotional intelligence, in order to isolate personal biases or emotion. It is that balance which makes a leader effective. An effective leader is key to a successful organization.

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