

Week 17

Strategic thinking

2 phases

The understand of an important principle of mental functioning.

Using that understanding strategically to produce a mental change in ourselves

Components of strategic thinking

1. An identifying component
2. An intellectual action component
In 2, must figure out 4 things
 1. What is actually going on in the situation as it stands
 2. Your option for action
 3. A justifiable rationale for choosing one of the options
 4. Ways of reasoning with yourself when you are being unreasonable, or ways of reducing the power of your irrational state of mind.

Practice

Identify an area of your life in which you use thinking that is possibly irrational. If you are having trouble, think of a situation in which you felt a powerful negative emotion and had difficulty dealing with it. Write out the answers to these questions:

1. What is actually going on in the situation as it stands? Elaborate on the details.
2. What are your options for actions?
3. Which option seems best? How do you know? Can you view the situation in any other competing ways?
4. Construct the reasoning you need to rehearse when you are again in this situation or a similar situation.

Key Idea 1: thoughts, feelings, and desires are interdependent

1. Identify a feeling you have experienced that you suspect might be irrational
2. What thinking would account for the feeling? There may be more than one possibility here. If so, figure out which possibility is most likely.
3. Determine the extent to which the thinking is reasonable. Pay close attention to the reasons you give to justify the thinking. Is it possible that these are not your actual reasons? Can you think of any other motives you might have? Consider alternative interpretations of the situation.
4. If you conclude that the feeling is irrational, express precisely why you think so.
5. Construct thinking that would represent a rational response in the situation.

Practice

Focusing on a negative feeling you sometimes or often experience, go through the five-point strategy outlined above, writing out your answers in details.

Key Idea 2: there is a logic to this, and you can figure it out

1. Questioning goals, purposes, and objectives
2. Questioning the way in which questions are framed, problems are posed, issues are expressed.
3. Questioning information and sources of information
4. Questioning interpretations or conclusions
5. Questioning the assumptions being made
6. Questioning the concepts being used
7. Questioning the point(s) of view being considered
8. Questioning implications

Practice

Think of someone you know well—a parent, a brother or sister, an employer, a friend. Try to figure out the logic of this person’s thinking by focusing on the eight elements of his or her thought. Humans in many circumstances and contexts act with a hidden agenda. As a consequence, human behavior is often other than it seems to be. After figuring out the logic of this person’s thinking, try to assess the thinking that he or she does within each element. Complete the template:

1. the main purpose of this person is. . . I think this person is or is not justified in pursuing this purpose because. . .
2. The main issue for this person, and its related question, is. . . I think this question is/is not worth pursuing because. . .
3. The main information this person uses in pursuing his or her goals is. . . this information should/should not be used in this person’s thinking because. . .
4. The main assumptions this person uses in thinking are . . . these assumptions are/are not justifiable because. . .
5. The main concepts this person comes to are. . . These concepts are/are not being used justifiably because. . .
6. The main conclusions this person comes to are. . . These conclusions are/are not logical because. . .
7. The point of view of this person is. . . This person is/is not fully considering the relevant viewpoints of others because. . .
8. The main implications of this person’s thinking are. . . this person is/is not concerned about these implications because. . .

Key idea 3: for thinking to be of high quality, we must routinely assess it

Focusing on

clarity/precision/accuracy/relevance/logicalness/breadth/depth/justification in thinking

Key idea 4: our native egocentrism is a default mechanism

Key idea 5: we must become sensitive to the egocentrism of those around us

Key idea 6: the mind tends to generalize beyond the original experience

Practice

Think of a situation you were recently in where you felt an intense negative emotion that generated a chain reaction of further negative states in your mind, leading to a generalized feeling of depression. At that moment, your life looked bleak and unforgiving. Figure out the “big picture” thinking that was missing from your mind as you fell prey to egocentric immediacy.

Complete these statements:

1. The objective situation was as follows:
2. I responded irrationally to the situation by. . .
3. I felt these negative emotions:
4. The “big picture” thinking that I needed but didn’t develop is something like the following:
5. The information I was failing to consider in my thinking was. . .
6. I can best avoid this situation in the future by. . .
7. I now realize. . .

Key idea 7: egocentric thinking appears to the mind as rational

Key idea 8: the egocentric mind is automatic in nature

Practice

Although the egocentric dimension of the mind uses many defense mechanisms to maintain its self-centered view, we will single out just one for this activity: denial. Think of a relationship you are in now in which you have a selfish interest in seeing things a certain way although the facts probably don’t support your view. Let’s say you want to believe that your boyfriend or girlfriend really loves you, even though his or her actual behavior toward you indicates that he or she likely is using you (perhaps as a vehicle of his or her self-gratification).

Key idea 9: we often pursue power through dominating or submissive behavior

Key idea 10: humans are naturally sociocentric animals

Practice

Identify a group I am focused on is. . .

The taboos or behaviors not allowed within the group are. . .

The injunctions or requirements are. . .

In analyzing my behavior in this group, I realize. . . about myself.

After analyzing this group's taboos and injunctions, I think it is/is not in my interest to be involved in this group, for these reasons:

Key idea 11: developing rationality requires work