Can We Actually Teach Someone to Think? Transcript Summary

Transcript

https://otter.ai/u/p0o75iN5UNcmSJV0l-taVrhpPGg?view=summary

Overview

The group discussed how to translate broad requests for critical-thinking training into role-specific judgment and decision-making at work.

Define the Need

- **Connie** emphasized grounding the request in workplace context, evidence, and examples rather than relying on generic critical-thinking exercises.
- Participants noted that “critical thinking” may mean different outcomes, such as deciding independently, solving a problem, or escalating an issue.
- What specific decisions or behaviors does a stakeholder expect when they ask for critical thinking?

Practice in Context

- **Sandra** described clarifying role expectations and the business goal, while coaching employees to try approaches and seek help when needed.

- **Betsy** framed field-safety learning around recognizing environmental hazards and making decisions in realistic scenarios, rather than teaching a generic critical-thinking course.
- Participants discussed scenarios, tabletop exercises, pre-mortems, and tracing ripple effects as ways to practice job-relevant judgment.

Enable Safe Judgment

- Participants stressed that employees need authority and psychological safety to make decisions, learn from mistakes, and deviate from procedures when appropriate.
- Managers' responses can encourage independent thinking or teach employees to defer and offload decisions.
- How can organizations clarify when employees should decide, follow a process, or escalate?

Action Items

- Share the critical-thinking article with multiple relevant people.
- Develop the natural-hazards lesson around field environments, hazard types, decision-making, and scenario-based practice to help employees stay safe.
- Lead the next coffee chat on L&D trends from the year, including how participants are adapting those trends to their workflows. (@Shannon Tipton)

Outline

Defining Critical Thinking

- The term is broad and can conceal different stakeholder expectations.
- Start with context, observed evidence, and the specific work outcome being sought.
- Distinguish among independent decisions, problem-solving, and escalation.

Role-Based Application

- **Sandra** shared how clear expectations, purpose, coaching, and permission to try supported independent judgment in patient-access work.
- **Cynthia** noted that critical thinking differs across roles, such as customer support and IT, and must account for compliance boundaries.

- **Betsy** described teaching employees to assess field environments and respond to potential hazards through scenarios.

Learning Through Practice

- **Paul** described coaching with open questions, wait time, and small groups to help people reason through unresolved problems.
- Participants discussed scenario practice, tabletop exercises, pre-mortems, and examining downstream effects of decisions.
- Practice should focus on real decisions in the job rather than generic exercises or additional frameworks alone.

Leadership and Psychological Safety

- Employees need clarity about their authority, what good decisions look like, and when to escalate.
- Leaders' reactions to mistakes affect whether employees will exercise judgment or defer decisions.
- Participants raised the need to support deviation from procedures when appropriate without weakening necessary compliance.