

A guide to critical thinking philosophy essay

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Introduction

According to M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley in the book, "Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking (Tenth Edition), critical thinking is a process that begins with an argument and progresses toward evaluation. The authors define critical thinking: "as the awareness of a set of interrelated critical questions, the ability to ask and answer critical questions at appropriate times; and the desire to actively use the critical questions" (Browne & Keeley, 2010). Browne & Keeley (2010) recommend a strategic thinking process that involves answering the ten critical questions at appropriate times and using the results to critically evaluate any communication. This paper will apply the 10-step process outlined by Browne and Keeley to evaluate a memo from Ms. Mary Ford, APEU Director of Human Resources to Mr. Hector Fuentes, President, APEU Local No. 121. This memo is in response to Mr. Fuentes' request to evaluate the notification sent by the governor of New Mexico indicating that she intends to privatize the state's DMV information systems management function.

Step 1: What Are the Issue and the Conclusion?

The first step in the critical thinking process is to define what issue the author is trying to persuade the reader to believe. One must identify the issue set forth by the author and the subsequent conclusion. Finding an author's main point is the first step in deciding whether you will accept or reject it (Browne & Keeley, 2010). The issue set forth in Ms. Ford's memo is whether or not the APEU Local 121 union should oppose the state's intentions to outsource and privatize the information systems management function within the Department of Motor Vehicles (Ford, 2012). On October

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20, 2011 Governor Gloria Gainor sent a letter to the union on notify them of her intentions regarding privatization. Outsourcing this function will have an effect on 43 employees that are members of APEU Local 121. The conclusion set forth by Ms., Ford is that the APEU Local No. 121 should challenge the governor's proposed privatization of the DMV information systems management function as an unfair management practice.

Step 2: What are the Reasons?

After identifying what the issue and conclusion are, the next step in the critical thinking process is to determine why the author has come that conclusion. Identifying reasons does this and is an essential step in critical thinking. You cannot determine the worth of a conclusion until identifying the reasons (Browne & Keeley, 2010). Without reasons the issue has no argument. Ms. Ford reasons that the proposed privatization is an assault on the union. She supports this reasoning by stating, " Foreign agents will bid for this privatization contract and accept wages lower than our members receive" (Ford, 2012). A second supporting reason outlined by Ms. Ford of the assault on the union is that if privatization were to occur, members of the union would be dispersed thus demonstrating that the governor/management has control over the union. In the memo, Ms. Ford also reasons that privatization of the DMV information systems management function would set a precedent and allow the same to happen to other departments. This is supported by her assessment that privatization will " set the stage" for the state government to decrease employee wages in the future. Another reason identified by Ms. Ford to oppose outsourcing is that even though the Governor is offering to " similar" positions to displaced

employees, they " will be forced learn new jobs or " relearn" their jobs in a new environment." (Ford, 2012) She believes this the government's way off trying to force out older employees. Ms. Ford highlights the fact there are no assurances in place to guarantee vacancies will be available for displaced employees and she believes that the union members will end up with no job at all. Outsourcing is the cause of the current recession is the next reason provide by Ms. Ford to oppose the Governor's plan. According to her, with the downturn in the economy and the rising gas prices, there will not be " similar " jobs available, citing the personal experience of her brother-in-law to support this reason. He was downsized from a job in another state a year earlier and is still unemployed. His assertion is that management promises rehiring to gain support from the unions but 80% of the time the promise is not kept." Privatization of public sector responsibilities is a bad idea, not just for the union, but for the citizens of our state" (Ford, 2012) is another reason the union opposes privatization. The author of the memo reasons that if government departments are outsourced, there will no control of information systems and data will be compromised. She writes that the " outsourcing public services to private corporations creates instability." (Ford, 2012). Ms. Ford also goes provides evidence from Wikipedia that " privatization is a potential violation of the Pendleton Act of 1883 which curbed arbitrary and capricious acts of management and established that civil servants will be hired and retained on the basis of merit." (Ford, 2012), against outsourcing. Lastly, Ms. Ford uses the rational that outsourcing doesn't save money, rather it causes instability. She cites as statistic for a Wall Street newspaper article that reported that " the additional costs of overseeing third-party contractors adds 20% of hidden costs to the price of each government

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outsourcing contract (Ford, 2012). She further supports this reason by stating that if the contract were to go to a foreign owned company communication and culture problems will lead to additional costs.

Step 3: What Words or Phrases Are Ambiguous

After identifying an author's argument, the next step in determining whether to reject or accept a conclusion is to identify key words or phrases within the reasoning that may have alternative meanings. " If each word had only one potential meaning about which we all agreed, effective communication would be more likely" according to Brown & Keeley (2007). Ambiguity refers to the existence of multiple possible meanings for a word or phrase. It is difficult to assess an argument properly without knowing what the author is intended meaning of keywords and phrases." This proposed privatization is an assault on our union" (Ford, 2012). How is this an assault on the union? There are many types of assault, verbal, physical, mental, emotional. The lack of clarity on the type of assault leaves much up to the interpretation of the reader." It is anti-American"(Ford, 2012). Here, the phrase anti-American can be considered ambiguous. According to whom is it anti-American and by what definition? This phrase is also an example of what Brown and Keeley call a " loaded term" - a term that triggers strong emotional appeal." If we allow this to happen in the Department of Motor Vehicles, it will happen in all departments everywhere" (Ford, 2012). This statement is ambiguous in multiple ways. The words " this" and " everywhere" need clarification. What is this? Where is everywhere?" The governor offers displaced union members so-called " similar positions" in other departments" (Ford, 2012). The phrase " similar positions" can have multiple interpretations. " Similar" to one

person can be mean something completely different to another. A similar position could be determined by pay rate, locations, job function or another arbitrary criteria that could be considered similar. The phrase "similar positions" need to be further clarified." I had lunch the other day with a group of our members, and everyone was in agreement that if you opposed this measure, they would vote for you." (Ford, 2012). Who is everyone? How many people does "everyone" include? This is an ambiguous word and potentially misleading statement. If Ms. Ford had lunch with only 2 or 3 members of the union, this is not a substantial amount of voted to "set the stage for re-election" as she writes in her memo. To better assess her statement, the author should clarify who was in the group of members attending lunch. I speak for truth and common sense (Ford, 2012). The author again uses language to stimulate emotions in the reader using ambiguous terms. One person's truth can be very different than another's. Common sense can be interpreted differently depending on your upbringing, culture and socio-economic status. These terms need to be defined further so as to clarify their meaning.

Step 4: What Are the Value and Descriptive Assumptions

Next, one must identify assumptions. In this step, the link between a reason and the author's conclusion as well as ideas that must be taken for granted for a particular reason to be believable are identified. Therefore, if the linkage assumptions are flawed, the reasons do not necessarily lead to the conclusion. The step of identifying the assumptions will help to determine whether an author's reasons successfully lead to the stated conclusion. Value assumptions and conflicts are hidden or unstated beliefs. All

arguments are presented with what appears to be logical reasoning but " if you miss the hidden links, you will often find yourself believing something that had you been more reflective, you would never have accepted."(2010). The value assumption in this memo is that the union must protect the union members for privatization. The values set forth are truth, common sense, loyalty and stability. Ms. Flores uses language such as " anti-American" and " assault on our unions" to convey her ideals she believes are shared by the reader of the memo. Ms. Flores makes a number of descriptive assumptions throughout her memo. First, she assumes ' that foreign agents will bid for the privatization contract and accept wages lower than the Union members receive." She continues to speculate by asserting that privatization will set a precedent for state government to decrease employee wages in the future. She has no basis for these assumptions. Ms. Ford also assumes that the Governor is trying to intimidate the Union and make promises that she will not. This assumption is unfounded and unsupported. Further, she assumes that the Governor is trying " to drive out experienced older workers who won't want to learn new jobs at this stage of their lives" (Ford, 2012). Finally, Ms. Ford's final assumptions are that " outsourcing public services to private corporations will create instability" and " if corporate greed is not fulfilled, the companies will pull out leaving the public high and dry" (Ford, 2012). After evaluation of the assumptions made by Ms. Ford in her memo, it can be deduced that Ms. Ford is against privatization of the and is in favor of leaving Union members in place at the DMV.

Step 5: Are There Any Fallacies in the Reasoning?

After identifying the reasons, the next step is to determine whether the author used any reasoning tricks or fallacies to support their argument.

Identifying a fallacy in reasoning, means that a reason does not provide good support for the conclusion (p. 88). Browne & Keeley identify a thirteen common fallacies used by authors in writing and speaking. The following table is outline s the type of fallacy and example of how they are used in the memo written by Ms. Ford.

Type of Fallacy

Definition

Example from memo

ad hominemSlippery SlopeThis style of argumentation constitutes a fallacy only when it is inappropriate to think if one were to accept the initial claim, one must accept all the other claims. This will set the stage for state government to decrease employee wages in the future. If we allow this to happen in the Department of Transportation, it will happen in all departments everywhere. Outsourcing is the cause of the current

recessionPerfect SolutionsThis fallacy occurs when an argument assumes that a perfect solution exists and/or that a solution should be rejected because some part of the problem would still exist after it were

implementedThe state will lose control of information systems and data will be compromised. Ad populumThe truth of a claim is established only on the

basis of its popularity and familiarityI had lunch the other day with a group of our members, and everyone was in agreement that if you opposed this measure, they would vote for you. Appeal to Questionable AuthorityWe often

rely on the opinions of experts. In accepting or rejecting expert opinion, we usually forgo some or all of the usual analysis. According to a recent article posted in a prestigious Wall Street newspaper, the additional costs of overseeing third-party contractors adds 20% of hidden costs to the price of each government outsourcing contract. Privatization is a potential violation of the Pendleton Act of 1883 which curbed arbitrary and capricious acts of management and established that civil servants will be hired and retained on the basis of merit" (Ford, 2012). False Dilemma/either-or Assuming only two alternatives exist when it is possible that there are more than two. Foreign agents will bid for this privatization contract and accept wages lower than our members receive. We must oppose this action now, or we do a disservice to our members and will regret it later. Glittering Generalities The use of vague, emotionally appealing virtue words that dispose us to approve something without closely examining the reasons. It is anti-American.

Step 6: How Good Is the Evidence?

How can we tell if a reason provided by an author in support of a conclusion is a good one? The sixth step in the process is to identify the evidence offered in support of a reason. This will help to evaluate the worth of the reason. If the evidence is good, the reason will better support the author's conclusion. Overall, the evidence supplied by Ms. Ford is not good. Multiple times she cites evidence from questionable sources. First, she references her brother-in-law who had been laid off a job in another state and still unemployed. According to him, management uses a promise for rehire to gain union support for outsourcing and 80% of the time they don't keep their promise. Second, Ms. Ford writes " Moreover, according to the online website

Wikipedia, privatization is a potential violation of the Pendleton Act of 1883 which curbed arbitrary and capricious acts of management and established that civil servants will be hired and retained on the basis of merit" (Ford, 2012). Wikipedia is not a credible source. Multiple contributors can update Wikipedia posts and posts may not always be verified making it untrustworthy. Lastly, Ms. Ford cites a "prestigious Wall Street newspaper." The citation claims ", the additional costs of overseeing third-party contractors adds 20% of hidden costs to the price of each government outsourcing contract." Without knowing the name of the newspaper, credibility cannot be established. Further, the content and quality of the article could be being distorted. These factors diminish the existence of dependable evidence to support the author's conclusion.

Step 7: Are There Rival Causes?

Brown & Keeley (2007) states "you need to look for rival causes when you have good reason to believe that the writer or speaker is using evidence to support a claim about the cause of something" (p. 138). Step seven is trying to identify rival causes for the author's conclusion. In other words, finding alternative explanations for an event. If there are alternative explanations, the author's explanation should be questioned because another of the other explanations may be more plausible. Thus, looking for rival causes is another step in deciding whether to accept or reject an argument (p. 136).

Step 8: Are the Statistics Deceptive?

Authors often provide statistics to support their reasoning. The statistics appear to be hard evidence. However, there are many ways that statistics can be misused. According to (Browne & Keeley, 2010, Chapter 11), step 8 in <https://assignbuster.com/a-guide-to-critical-thinking-philosophy-essay/>

the critical thinking process is to identify any deceiving statistics presented to justify the author's conclusion. Because problematic statistics are used frequently, it is important to identify any problems with the statistics. Ms. Ford presents a deceptive statistic when referencing her brother-in-law when he says "management uses a promise for rehire to gain union support for outsourcing and 80% of the time they don't keep their promise." How was the 80% derived? Is this 80% based on his particular experience? Is this everywhere in the United States or just in Arizona where he was laid off? This statistics is based on personal bias and the author uses it in a deceptive manner to support her conclusion. A second deceptive statistic presented by Ms. Ford is, "According to a recent article posted in a prestigious Wall Street newspaper, the additional costs of overseeing third-party contractors adds 20% of hidden costs to the price of each government outsourcing contract" (Ford, 2012). She is providing information from an unverifiable source and doesn't discuss how this number was calculated. She concludes that outsourcing will actually cost money but without information regarding the figures used in the calculations, this conclusion should be questioned.

Step 9: What Significant Information Is Omitted

Author's is trying to persuade readers, often leave out important information. Step 9 in critical thinking is to identify if any significant information was omitted that would alter the author's conclusion. By looking for omitted information, a determination on whether the author has provided enough information to support their reasoning can be made. Ms. Ford leaves out significant information when discussing the fact that outsourcing will save the state approximately \$250, 000 per year in budgeted personnel costs and

would help to ensure that the Department of Motor Vehicles would continue to receive state-of-the-art information systems hardware, software, and professional expertise" (Ford, 2012). Out of the 75 employees, 43 are Union members. There is no information on how many union members will be affected. The lack of this information can lead the reader to assume all Union members will be displaced thus helping to support Ms. Ford's conclusions. She also fails to discuss any of the benefits of the proposed privatization.

Step 10: What Reasonable Conclusions Are Possible?

The final step in the critical thinking process outlined by Browne and Kelley is to determine that the author has come to the most reasonable conclusion. By identifying alternative reasonable conclusions, one can determine which alternative conclusions, if any, can be accepted in place of the one laid out by the author. One would think that the obvious conclusion, after reading Ms. Ford's memo would be that Department of Motor Vehicles should be privatized; however after critical analysis we can understand as an informed reader that there are different assumptions and reasonable conclusions that a reader can be left with. If drawn upon the empathy of the HR Manager the general public can believe that that the privatization of the Department of Motor Vehicles is immoral and unethical and against all best practice principles. As noted, there are some reasonable deceptions throughout the argument and the lack of evidence is then supported by ambiguity. We all possess different perceptions of the same statement; therefore Ms. Ford's memo allows some of us to support her position of privatization of the Department of Motor Vehicles, while others have not succumb to the fallacies in the reasoning and been affirmed in their original position that the

lack of privatization is what will allow an organization to be competitive and move forward with the times of the future.