



Applying the Critical Evaluation Competency

This activity has its roots in suggestions 1, 3, 4 and 9 of ways to develop critical thinking/evaluation skills (see Slide 22) which are, respectively:

1. Debate different points of view.
3. Formulate an argument by developing points in a logical sequence that leads to a conclusion.
4. Look at both strengths and weaknesses.
9. Be a devil's advocate.

Before the Critical Evaluation session, select one of the following possible debate topics. Instructors can also use their own topic, or consider working with the class to create one. Instructors should feel free to use ideas of their own, which may be drawn from current events, issues in the local/regional economy or even issues facing the school itself. As long as you keep the content fresh and relevant while providing opportunities for students to examine meaningful issues from opposite angles, the exercise can be worthwhile.

During the class session that you cover the Critical Evaluation competency, assign students to one side of the debate (pro or con):

1. After hiring for a few key positions, a start-up firm is considering whether to forego hiring additional staff and instead use workers sourced from the on-demand/gig economy on an as-needed basis.
2. After beginning operations, a business that has had a few years of steady growth suddenly experiences exponential growth, tripling in size to 120 employees in the span of only six months. The firm leadership wonders if it should not offer any medical insurance, and instead opt to avoid the costs and hassles of administration and just pay the Affordable Care Act (ACA) penalties.
3. After a period of stagnant growth and performance, an organization is evaluating if it should change the compensation for its sales team to 100% commission only.
4. After much consideration, an organization is deciding whether to close its call center and instead offshore its customer tech support to a firm overseas.
5. The leadership of a firm has been approached regarding a merger with a competitor in its market. Upper management is deliberating the pros of the merger versus continuing to put resources into organic growth.

Assign students homework to think of pros and cons to the proposed course of action.

At the appropriate point during the Critical Evaluation competency session, instructors may wish to return to Slide 22, "Ways to Develop Critical Thinking/Evaluation Skills," to point out the ways noted

above that are the basis for this activity. You can revisit this slide either before or upon concluding this activity.

The Great Debate

Directions:

Divide the class into an even number of groups. Depending on class size, multiple smaller groups or two larger groups may be possible, but the class must be divided roughly evenly, and the sizes must be manageable.

The first half of the class is the pro group. Group members will discuss the agreed-on issue and list only the *advantages* they came up with during their advance preparation, including answers to questions such as the following: Why should an HR professional take action? Why is taking action advantageous to the organization? What are the benefits of doing something? What are the strengths inherent in a particular course of action? How will it improve our competitive ability?

The other half of the class is the con group. Group members will discuss the agreed-on issue and list only the *disadvantages* they came up with during their advance preparation, including answers to questions such as the following: Why should an HR professional not take action? What are the risks? What are the costs? Will taking this action interfere with our time, personnel or budget to do something else that might have greater value?

Give the class about eight minutes so they can compare notes and share their respective lists they created in advance.

When time has elapsed, have the groups review their lists. To make this activity more fun and more of a debate, alternate back and forth between the pro groups and the con groups, allowing each to present one point. Also alternate respondents from each group to maximize student participation. Allow each person to select one item to share from his or her own list or from the combined group list.

After the groups have completed their exchanges, look for commonalities among the pro group and the con group (or *groups*, if the class had multiple groups). Then, ask the following:

- Was it difficult to look at only one side or the other?
- What was the advantage of being forced to look at only one side?
- What was the disadvantage of being forced to look at only one side?
- Did you have ideas for the *other* side that you couldn't express because you were forced to view the issues from only one angle?
- Did the other team(s) capture your ideas for the opposite point of view?

Alternative Option

If time allows, for instructors who wish, take this exercise one step further. Operate the activity as described above regarding advance topic selection and advance preparation, except instead of just having an exchange of students' identified pros and cons, allow the groups to analyze one another's points, cross-examine, reinforce their own points and identify weaknesses in their opponents' recommendations.