School: Humanities
Course: Critical Thinking & Decision Making
Faculty: Dawn Hays, Workers' Compensation Claims Supervisor, UFG Insurance

Summary

In the course "Critical Thinking & Decision Making" taught by Dawn Hays, the focus is on cultivating critical thinking skills within the workers' compensation context. Hays emphasizes that critical thinking is essential for making timely and reasonable decisions that benefit injured employees, employers, and other stakeholders. The course encourages professionals to adopt a mindset of whole-person recovery management, where decisions are based on thorough questioning and a thoughtful evaluation of evidence.

Hays introduces critical thinking as a disciplined process of analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from observation, reflection, and reasoning. She cites definitions from notable scholars, including Daniel Kahneman and Tom Chatfield, who emphasize that critical thinking is a method for determining beliefs and actions through rigorous evidence evaluation. The course also highlights that critical thinking is a skill that requires practice, evolving from novice to expert over time.

A major component of the course is the distinction between fast and slow thinking, as proposed by Kahneman. Fast thinking is automatic, intuitive, and often useful in familiar situations, such as driving. However, when applied to complex decision-making in workers' compensation, it can lead to errors. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is deliberate, analytical, and resource-intensive but is crucial for making well-informed decisions. Hays points out that while slow thinking requires cognitive effort, it ultimately leads to better outcomes.

The course also addresses the role of biases and noise in decision-making. Hays explains that biases, such as the availability heuristic and confirmation bias, can distort judgment by leading professionals to rely on familiar past experiences or only seek information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs. Noise, which refers to irrelevant or distracting information, can further complicate decision-making. Hays encourages professionals to practice "decision hygiene," a concept that involves delaying intuition, preserving the independence of information sources, and focusing on accurate, reliable, and relevant data.

Another important aspect of critical thinking in workers' compensation is managing communication noise. This noise can come from various sources, such as environmental distractions, emotional stress, or differences in cultural or semantic understanding. Hays

stresses the need to be aware of these influences and to sift through noise to extract meaningful information. Critical thinkers must learn to ask good questions that clarify understanding and reveal unobvious details.

The course emphasizes that critical thinking is not about finding fault or assigning blame but rather about making decisions that are fair and unbiased. It also connects critical thinking to emotional intelligence, recognizing that emotions play a significant role in decision-making. A critical thinker must manage their own emotions and help others navigate theirs, especially in high-stress situations involving injured workers.

In conclusion, this course encourages professionals in the workers' compensation field to develop their critical thinking skills through continuous practice, deliberate analysis, and an awareness of biases and noise. By asking good questions and focusing on reliable information, workers' compensation professionals can make better decisions that serve the needs of all stakeholders.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the definition and importance of critical thinking in workers' compensation decision-making.
2. Learn how to apply critical thinking to ensure timely and fair decisions in complex cases.
3. Recognize and manage biases, emotional influences, and communication noise during the decision-making process.
4. Explore the concepts of fast and slow thinking to make well-reasoned, informed choices.
5. Develop skills in asking thorough questions and evaluating information for accuracy, reliability, and relevance.

Primary Takeaways

1. It involves thorough questioning, evaluation of information, and avoiding emotional or biased decisions.
2. Fast thinking is intuitive and automatic, while slow thinking is deliberate and essential for critical decisions in workers' compensation.
3. Understanding how biases like availability heuristics and communication noise affect decision-making is crucial for avoiding poor judgments.
4. It takes time to develop, but with practice, professionals can improve their ability to make sound decisions.
5. Practices like delaying intuition and preserving independence in judgment are important for reducing errors in decision-making.

Course Outline

1) Introduction to Critical Thinking
   a) Definition and Importance
      i) Critical thinking as a disciplined process of evaluating information and its relevance to decision-making.
      ii) Key definitions from philosophers and psychologists, including the work of Daniel Kahneman and Tom Chatfield.
   b) Application in Workers' Compensation
      i) Critical thinking helps professionals make timely, fair decisions for injured workers and other stakeholders.
      ii) It requires considering diverse perspectives and using a systematic approach to question and analyze data.

2) Elements of Critical Thinking
   a) Fast vs. Slow Thinking
      i) Fast thinking (automatic, intuitive) and its limitations in complex decisions.
      ii) Slow thinking (deliberate, effortful) as the foundation of critical thinking.
   b) Recognizing and Managing Biases
      i) Availability heuristic, confirmation bias, and the affect heuristic commonly influence decision-making in workers' compensation.
      ii) Techniques for mitigating bias, including decision hygiene practices.
   c) Managing Communication Noise
      i) Different types of noise (physical, psychological, semantic) can distort information.
      ii) Critical thinkers must sift through noise to ensure decisions are based on accurate, reliable, and relevant data.

NOTE: Artificial Intelligence was used in the creation of this document.