



Executive Certificate in Management
McIntire School of Commerce
University of Virginia

Critical Thinking and Ethics

Faculty Information

Professor: Tom Package, Ph.D.

Course Description & Learning Objectives

Clear thinking, that is, a good argument leading to a conclusion you know is free from errors, is a prize worth working for all on its own. In a global business environment, critical thinking is the most powerful tool at your disposal as new and difficult situations present themselves to us nearly every day. Novel and difficult problems arise not just within the context of pure business decisions, but often confront us as a clash of moral values, whether we consider this clash between cultures, rival organizations, within our own organizations, or even with our own considered opinion. Systematic and trained critical thinking is the best way to surmount these challenges.

The primary objective of this course is to provide the blend of theoretical knowledge and practical acumen necessary to improve each participant's skills in critical thinking and ethical reasoning. We will cover the areas of common logical fallacies, identification and avoidance of fallacious reasoning, philosophical approaches to morality and ethics, virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontology, and stakeholder theory in organizational ethics.

By the end of the course, the student should be able to:

- 1) Identify and avoid common fallacies in reasoning, - e.g. "denying the antecedent", "affirming the consequent", & "the motivational fallacy."
- 2) Identify, evaluate, criticize and choose the three main forms of moral reasoning - virtue ethics, utilitarianism, & deontology.
- 3) Identify, evaluate, criticize, and choose a position in normative business ethics - stockholder theory, stakeholder theory, or the nexus of contracts (hyper-norms).
- 4) Apply these new skills in practical situations regarding bribery, lying in business, duties to non-owners, and ethics in international organizations.

The instructor encourages participants to engage in the discussion forums, wherein participants will be expected to apply the concepts presented in various weeks to their individual work environments,

draw parallels between their work and the online presentations and discuss the application of course materials to issues and challenges in their workplaces. Using the course's Web-based message board, participants are encouraged to submit questions to the instructor, who will respond in a comprehensive and timely manner.

Course Materials

Supplied and available to all participants via Internet online sources

Discussion Forums and Assessments

Discussion Forums. Participants are encouraged to assemble in informal virtual teams to share the application of the course learnings to current issues and challenges in their workplaces and as a requirement, must post a minimum of 4 perspectives on the Discussion Forum during the course.

Weekly Assessments. We provide weekly practice assessments at the completion of each week's on-line class (e.g., lectures, slides, and other materials). The practice assessments consist of 19 multiple choice questions and one essay (minimum 500 words). The purpose of the assessments is to determine whether the participant has sufficient command of the materials and has met the learning objectives. Participants may attempt the weekly assessments as often as they choose during the course.

Week 4 is designed to provide a review of all the materials from the previous three weeks. The audio-video review presentation will connect the theory, instruction, and the learning objectives to the questions participants have posed.

Final Assessment. The final assessment consists of 25 multiple-choice questions. Participants will have 45 minutes to complete the final assessment. Participants have 3 chances to receive a passing score on the final assessment. In order to receive the program completion certificate, participants must pass the final assessment.

Course Outline

Session 1: Introduction to Critical Thinking & Informal Reasoning

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand “Critical Thinking” & how it is useful in practice & harmful to ignore.
- Identify & employ forms of arguments in informal reasoning.
- Prepared & ready to use these skills to remove fallacious reasoning & other barriers to being a good critical thinker.

Session 2: Trips and Traps in Arguments

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand “Critical Thinking” & how it is useful in practice & harmful to ignore.
- Identify & employ forms of arguments in informal reasoning.
- Prepared & ready to use these skills to remove fallacious reasoning & other barriers to being a good critical thinker.

Session 3: Introduction to Moral Theory & Against Relativism

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand some language & terminology of moral philosophy.
- Articulate forms of moral relativism, specifically cultural relativism & the associated logical problems.
- Decide if the moral point of view is best characterized as objectively real or relative.

Session 4: Against Virtue Ethics

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate Aristotle’s aretaic moral theory, or his virtue & human excellence stance on morality.
- Understand why even Aristotle believes right conduct is prior to a good character.
- Decide for themselves if virtue ethics can survive the deficit re: conduct in the theory.

Session 5: Against Utilitarianism

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify Utilitarian arguments.
- Articulate significant, perhaps lethal, flaws in Utilitarian reasoning.

- Describe why a Theory of Right Conduct is logically necessary for an understanding of the Moral Point of View

Session 6: Defending Deontology

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate Kant's derivation & justification of the Categorical Imperatives as Supreme Principle of Morality.
- Understand why Deontology is foundational to the Moral Point of View.
- Construct a Theory of Right Conduct suitable for Business Ethics.

Session 7: Property Rights & Profits

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate & criticize historical & contemporary philosophical theories of private property.
- Understand the relevance of property rights to ethics in business.
- Decide which theory best justifies & supports the idea that profits are rightfully the property of a company.

Session 8: Stockholders vs. Stakeholders

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate & criticize stockholder & stakeholder theories & decision procedures in business ethics.
- Demonstrate how managers & employees will evaluate actions differently under each theory.
- Decide which theory, including old & new candidates, best directs people while providing practical wisdom in business ethics.

Session 9: Global Business Ethics: Principles & Practice Across Borders

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate & criticize definitions of lying & bribery.
- Articulate & criticize theories of international business ethics that purport to hold across international borders.
- Decide if morality really does reach across borders or if some form of moral relativism is warranted.

Session 10: Review and Assessment