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PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING

COURSE CURRICULUM

8	4 hrs	Instructor-Led	None
MODULES	TOTAL HOURS	DELIVERY METHOD	PREREQUISITES

PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING CURRICULUM — **MODULES 1 – 3**

MODULE 1 — Welcome & Mindset Warm-up

00:00 – 00:15 · 15 min

Objective: Prime lateral and divergent thinking

- Session objectives
- Hidden assumptions
- Lateral thinking
- **HANDS-ON:** Puzzle Round: 3 short riddles / lateral-thinking puzzles (e.g. nine-dot problem) in teams, then reflect on 'what assumption did we make?'
- **TAKEAWAY:** Awareness of hidden assumptions

MODULE 2 — Defining the Problem

00:15 – 00:45 · 30 min

Objective: Convert a vague complaint into a clear, measurable problem statement

- Symptom vs problem
- Problem statement formula (Who / What / Where / How much / Since when)
- Measurable problem definition
- **HANDS-ON:** Rewrite Challenge: 5 vague statements (e.g. 'Clients are unhappy') are rewritten into precise problem statements in pairs, then compared across the room
- **TAKEAWAY:** Library of well-formed problem statements

MODULE 3 — Root Cause Analysis: 5 Whys & Fishbone

00:45 – 01:20 · 35 min

Objective: Trace a problem to its likely root cause

- 5 Whys
- Ishikawa (Fishbone) diagram
- Cause categories: People, Process, Tools, Policy, Environment, Data
- **HANDS-ON:** Fishbone Workshop: teams analyse 'Customer escalations rose 30% in a quarter' using a Fishbone (People, Process, Tools, Policy, Environment, Data), then dig deeper on top 2 causes with 5 Whys
- **TAKEAWAY:** Completed Fishbone + root cause hypothesis

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PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING CURRICULUM — MODULES 4 – 8

MODULE 4 — Critical Thinking: Assumptions, Biases & Fallacies

01:30 – 02:05 · 35 min

Objective: Challenge own reasoning and spot flawed arguments

- Ladder of Inference
- Cognitive biases (confirmation, anchoring, sunk cost, groupthink)
- Logical fallacies
- Devil's advocate
- **HANDS-ON:** Spot the Bias: 10 short workplace statements; teams identify the bias/fallacy and rewrite a better reasoned version. Includes a 'Devil's Advocate' round where one member argues against the team's view
- **TAKEAWAY:** Personal bias watch-list

MODULE 5 — Generating & Evaluating Options

02:05 – 02:40 · 35 min

Objective: Produce diverse options and choose using objective criteria

- Brainstorming rules
- SCAMPER prompts
- Weighted decision matrix
- **HANDS-ON:** Option Matrix: teams brainstorm 8+ options for a given problem, shortlist 3, score them against weighted criteria (cost, speed, risk, impact) and justify the choice
- **TAKEAWAY:** Scored decision matrix

MODULE 6 — Using Data to Decide

02:40 – 03:05 · 25 min

Objective: Read simple data, separate signal from noise and avoid misleading conclusions

- Reading trends, averages and outliers
- Correlation vs causation
- Evidence-backed insights
- **HANDS-ON:** Data Detective: teams get a small table (e.g. delivery delays by team/month/client) and answer 3 questions; one question contains a misleading trap
- **TAKEAWAY:** 3 evidence-backed insights

MODULE 7 — Capstone: Business Case Challenge

03:05 – 03:45 · 40 min

Objective: Solve a realistic problem end-to-end and present a recommendation

- End-to-end problem solving: definition, root cause, options, recommendation
- Pitch and challenge Q&A
- **HANDS-ON:** Teams deliver: problem statement, root cause, 3 options with scoring, recommendation and risks. Panel challenges assumptions during Q&A
- **TAKEAWAY:** Structured recommendation pitch

MODULE 8 — Reflection & Close

03:45 – 04:00 · 15 min

Objective: Plan how to apply the toolkit at work

- Key takeaways
- Apply-It plan for a live work problem
- 30-day follow-up plan
- **HANDS-ON:** Apply-It Plan: pick one live work problem, write its problem statement and first 2 analysis steps, share with a buddy

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MODULE
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Reflection & Close (cont.)
03:45 – 04:00 · 15 min

- **TAKEAWAY:** One real problem with a clear next step

COURSE DETAILS

Learning Outcomes	• Define a problem precisely before jumping to solutions • Apply root cause tools (5 Whys, Fishbone) to a real situation • Recognise own cognitive biases, assumptions and logical fallacies • Generate, compare and select options using a weighted decision matrix • Present a structured recommendation backed by evidence
Signature Hands-on Activities	• Fishbone workshop • Spot-the-Bias • Weighted option matrix • Data Detective • Business Case pitch
Target Audience	Lateral hires (typically 3-15 years of experience) joining from other organisations. Cohort size 15-25, in groups of 4-5.
Delivery Method	Facilitator-led workshop, in-person or live virtual; approx. 30% input and 70% hands-on practice
Course Duration	4 hrs
Prerequisites	None
Recommended Training	Batch size: 15-25 participants 1 facilitator + 1 co-facilitator/observer for role-play-heavy modules
Core Frameworks / Tools	5 Whys, Fishbone, Ladder of Inference, SCAMPER, decision matrix
Assessment & Reinforcement	**Pre-work:** Submit one real, recent problem from past/current role (2-3 lines) to use as optional case material **In-session assessment:** Capstone panel scoring on definition, root cause, option analysis and clarity of recommendation **Post-session (Day 30):** Participant submits one-page problem-solving write-up from a real work issue; manager review
Facilitator Tips	• Anonymise real cases from the client or previous employers • Encourage 'slow thinking'. Laterals often default to the solution that worked in their last role • Keep tools minimal (4-5). Depth of practice beats breadth