

Museum Essentials: Ethical Practice - Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is an important part of your professional toolkit.

As a museum professional it is important that you think about the impact of your decisions or professional practice. Your ability to review complex situations, detailed data or specific problems is part and parcel of working life. Applying critical thinking to situations, whether they have an ethical component or not, is an important skill set to have.

Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following:

- understand the logical connections between ideas
- identify, construct and evaluate arguments
- detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning
- solve problems systematically
- identify the relevance and importance of ideas
- reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values - in a professional context it would be the values, standards or associated codes.

Developing Critical Thinking and Ethical Practice

- Seek out notional ethical dilemmas or situations being experienced by other organisations.
- Think about how you would approach them and discuss them with a colleague – to develop your abilities.
- Challenge yourself to 'side' with a different viewpoint to develop your thinking.
- Review case-studies and assess your response to the agreed response.
- Speak to someone you feel excels in this area – what do they do? how can you learn from them?

In relation to the **Code of Ethics** you need to be able to:

- Identify whether there is an ethical component to a situation or issue.
- Identify which principles or points in the Code of Ethics most apply – there may be a number.
- Think about the rationale behind each of these – there may sometimes be tension.
- Develop your thinking in terms of what you feel would be a good course of action, or indeed whether you need more information.
- Discuss your thinking with others to ensure you are integrating varied views from different specialisms and ways of working.
- Look at any precedents within your organisation or the sector; and refer to any case studies that might expand your thinking.
- Where appropriate make a recommendation for action and ensure you have recorded your thinking, engagement and options.

Always remember:

- you need to have a 360-degree view.
- there will be different views and opinions – we need to respect difference.
- that being a professional is thinking on behalf of the profession rather than from a personal perspective.
- that the decision you make today may not be the decision you make tomorrow.