



Strategic Thinking

Struggling to figure out your next move?

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“A vision without strategy remains an illusion.”

– Lee Bolman

In today’s fast-paced, ever-changing environment, the ability to think strategically is one of the most important skills a leader can possess.

It is not just a skill reserved for senior executives or owners, it is a mindset and ability that can help drive success for any individual.

Strategic thinking is a cognitive process that involves analyzing a variety of data points to develop the most effective path forward.

This can involve industry trends, potential threats, understanding inherent strengths, and developing long-term plans that align with an individual or organization’s goals and values.

In this article, we will explore key components of strategic thinking, ways to enhance your abilities, and why this is essential to achieving excellence in an increasingly complex world.

Let us first start by understanding the nature of this important ability. Unlike decision-making which can often be reactive and judicious, strategic thinking is proactive and focused on the long-term.

It is about seeing the big picture while also paying attention to trends, patterns, and underlying issues that have a considerable influence on outcomes.

Because of this, it requires three specific elements.

1. Anticipation – Strategic thinkers are forward-looking, and they anticipate

future obstacles and opportunities by studying existing patterns within the team, trends in the market, expected headwinds, and evolving team and client needs.

This allows them to develop strategies that will help position their organizations for success in the long run.

2. Analysis – Individuals who are effective in this area can break down complex problems into smaller more manageable parts.

They ask questions to gather relevant information and context around a situation before arriving at a decision.

They use analytical skills to help them understand internal and external forces that could potentially impact their proposed path forward.

3. Action – Having a strategic mindset is not just about understanding complex situations and developing ideas. It is about turning those ideas into actionable plans that include setting objectives, prioritizing initiatives, and producing a roadmap to execute.

“See things in the present, even if they are in the future.” – Larry Ellison

Strategic thinking also involves the ability to recognize the importance of consistently evaluating decisions after implementation.

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This allows individuals to then repeat the process of anticipating a new set of potential impacts, evolving inputs, and potentially producing adjustments to augment the actions required to achieve the desired results.

“Always start at the end before you start.”
– **Robert Kiyosaki**

So, why is this so important in today’s world?

Simply put, the pace of change in the economy, along with lightning speed advances in technology, and a constantly changing workforce, demands that organizations and leaders be prepared for the future.

There will be uncertainty to navigate and the ability to make informed decisions despite these unforeseen variables can often be the separator between good and great. Between average and exceptional. And will certainly contribute to an organization’s ability to stand the test of time.

Below are specific reasons why strategic thinking is important for you to consider:

1. Navigating Uncertainty

The business environment is more volatile and unpredictable than ever before. There are swift economic shifts, geopolitical influences, technological disruptions, and changing customer behaviors that will impact a company’s success.

Strategic thinking allows leaders to understand and anticipate the impacts of these changes and

helps them prepare for the unknown. By thinking ahead, they can capitalize on opportunities and help safeguard against potential risks by creating contingency plans.

2. Creating Competitive Advantages

Leaders that can prepare and position their organizations for the long-term can differentiate themselves from the competition.

By identifying emerging trends and underlying customer demands, they can stay ahead of the curve by creating value that other companies might not have considered. Strategic thinking allows companies to discover more effective ways to improve efficiency and service to both their employees and clients.

“When everyone is moving forward together, success takes care of itself.” – **Henry Ford**

3. Aligning Resources with Goals

Effective strategic thinking ensures that company resources are used in ways that maximize their impact. Decisions about people, money, and initiatives are all pointed towards the same long-term vision for success.

This alignment allows decision-making at all levels within the organization to support the broader vision and direction for the company. It will reduce wasteful decisions with both time, capital, and talent.

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4. Promoting a Culture of Innovation

Strategic thinkers challenge the status quo and consistently avoid the most dangerous phrase in business: “We’ve always done it this way.”

They are open-minded to new ideas and have a willingness to accept that today’s approach will not prepare us for tomorrow’s way of doing business.

More importantly, they encourage others within the organization to think critically about existing methodology and foster an environment of continuous improvement that helps drive even greater results.

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.” – Peter Drucker

So, how do you develop these skills?

Make no mistake about it. While some people may seem naturally inclined toward strategic thinking, it is a skill that can strengthen with practice and intentionality. Here are several ways to cultivate your strategic thinking abilities:

1. Expand Your Knowledge Base

Stay up to date with industry trends, including different disciplines and a wide range of perspectives. Discover publications and podcasts that highlight experts within your field.

And in the age of social media, you now have access to following organizations and thought

leaders on the forefront of innovation for every business sector.

By exposing yourself to ongoing learning, you will be improving your ability to identify opportunities and better understand how your current organization can grow to meet those.

2. Learn to Model Scenarios

Modeling out scenarios can be a powerful tool to enhance strategic thinking. It unlocks an ability to imagine specific scenarios ‘playing out’ within your organization and the world.

This will help you explore the potential benefits and risks associated with moving forward with a new strategy and will develop your ability to consider multiple outcomes.

It is also a valuable tool to ensure alignment with internal capabilities and resources, while helping to identify what is needed to achieve a desired outcome.

“Visionary decision-making happens at the intersection of intuition and logic.” – Paul O’Brien

3. Practice Reflective Thinking

Reflection is a process that forces you to take a step away from the day-to-day tasks to consider your progress towards a bigger picture or goal.

It gives you time to consider where you were, where you are now, and re-address the steps necessary to move closer towards your ideal objective.

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By examining your past decisions, you will be gaining valuable insights into strengths being used, and lessons gained to support stronger action going forward.

“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.” – Margaret Wheatley

4. Collaborate and Discuss

Strategic thinkers do not operate in silos, so it is important to talk through potential blind spots, considerations, and potential iterations that will come from introducing a fresh concept.

This is an opportunity for you to engage with an executive coach or mentor, including trusted advisors with different perspectives and experiences.

By doing this, you will be refining your initial ideas to improve the probabilities of finding success.

5. Prioritize for the Long-term

Adopting a long-term mindset means that you are looking beyond the immediate gains and considering the broader implications of your decisions.

Asking yourself how your choices today will affect your organization or career in the next five to 10 years is a simple litmus test for your strategies. This focus on the future will help ensure that your approach today aligns with the organization’s long-term goals.

On a final note, strategic thinking is more than just a skillset. It is a mindset that allows leaders and organizations to navigate uncertain and complex environments to achieve optimal results.

By anticipating future trends, analyzing strengths and opportunities, and developing long-range plans, strategic thinkers can help position themselves and their organizations for remarkable performance in an unpredictable world.

Practicing this skill will require dedicating time, intentional practice, having a willingness to learn and committing to the bigger picture.

Mastering these behaviors consistently will unlock an even more effective way to lead your teams through an ever-evolving world.

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” – Yogi Berra