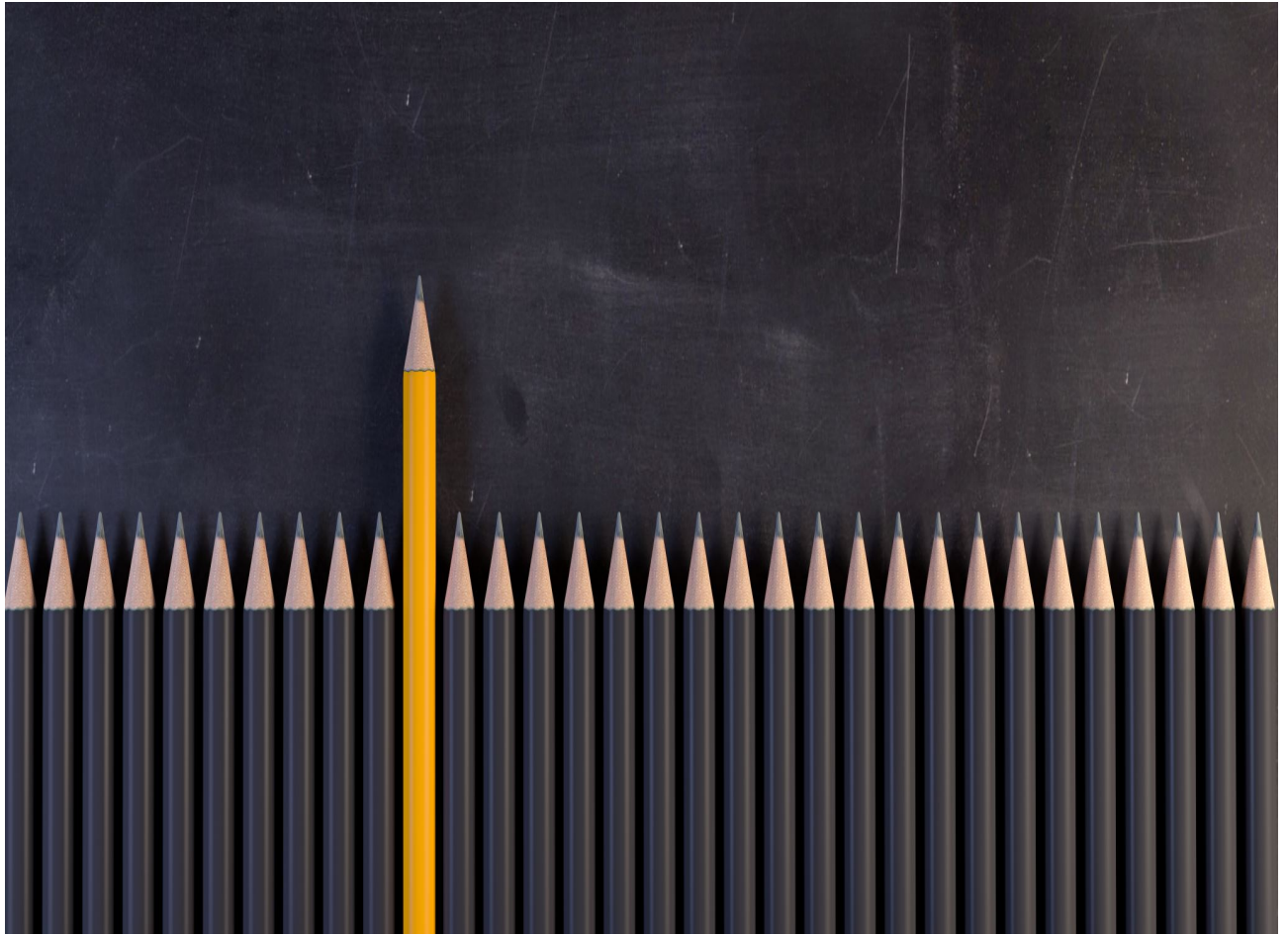




Resilience Building Resource Hub
A Shilp Initiative

TOOLKITS | PROGRAM RESOURCES | ARTICLES | ONLINE LEARNING |

GUIDES | VIDEOS | FRAMEWORKS



Is strategic thinking one of the most important skills for a leader?

Welcome to the Strategic Thinking self-paced module. Strategic thinking is different from strategic planning. In many respects, it is even more important than strategic planning. To think strategically means to see and understand the bigger picture of what the organization is, where it needs to go, and how it will get there. It means anticipating opportunities and challenges and utilizing that knowledge to guide the organization. As you progress in your career and reach management/ leadership levels, strategic thinking becomes a critical skill for you to build and hone.

This section will help you understand:

- the importance of strategic thinking
- ways to build your ability to think strategically
- self-assessment tools to help assess self
- additional resources to help you get to an expert level
- self-reflection and action planning
- some DIY tips to get you started on this journey

So, let's get started!

What is strategic thinking?

Strategic thinking skills are any skills that enable you to use critical thinking to solve complex problems and plan for the future. These skills are essential to accomplish business objectives, overcome obstacles, and address challenges—particularly if they’re projected to take weeks, months, or even years to achieve.

How to be more strategic?

Take chances. Don’t just always do the same things, the same way. Status quo won’t get you to the next level.

Think outside of the box. It’s pretty cliché, but try to think differently. Turn things upside down. Consider all the angles.

Always add value. Strategic thinkers are always looking for ways to improve a process, make more money, etc.

Look for ways to beat the competition. How can you be better than everyone else?

Consider the big picture. Don’t work in a silo. Having a broader vision will help you and your company.

Find answers. Seek out explanations and solutions. Just because they are not right in front of you doesn’t mean you shouldn’t make the effort.

Try not to get stuck in a rut. It can be hard not to get caught up in the daily grind. Look for ways to take on new projects and expand your horizons.

Surround yourself with great thinkers. Talk to other strategic, innovative thinkers. It can help your own thought process.

Constantly question things. Get comfortable asking “Why?” Challenge how things are done.

Listen to others. Evaluate the opinions of others. You can’t solve everything on your own.

Strategic thinking skills include:

- **Analytical skills:** To ideate a strategy that helps your organization reach its objectives, you must be capable of analyzing a variety of inputs—from financial statements and KPIs, to market conditions, emerging business trends, and internal resource allocation. This initial analysis is crucial to creating a strategy that aligns with the current reality facing your organization.
- **Communication skills:** Putting a strategy into place for your company, regardless of its size, requires solid communication skills. The ability to communicate complex ideas, collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, build consensus, and ensure everyone is aligned and working toward shared goals are all central to strategic thinking.
- **Problem-solving skills:** Strategic planning is often used to solve problems or address challenges, such as missed financial targets, inefficient workflows, or an emerging competitor. Implementing a strategy that addresses the central challenge you face requires

you to first understand the problem and its potential solutions. From there, you can craft a strategy that solves it.

- Planning and management skills: Strategy isn't just about thinking of a solution—it involves implementation, too. Once data has been analyzed, the problem is understood, and a solution has been identified, you need strong planning and management skills to bring everything together.

Develop strategic thinking within your team:

As a leader, it may be hugely beneficial to develop a leadership practice that exemplifies the skills required for strategic thinking and setting in place processes that will help nurture a work culture where those skills are celebrated. Some tips for developing a team of strategic thinkers:

- Always explain the why. For many managers, the focus is on training employees on what to do or how to do it. Oftentimes the why is forgotten, even though it's absolutely crucial to strategic thinking. The explanation of why helps remind employees of the big picture and aligns your decision making with your strategic plan and vision.
- Challenge assumptions and encourage others to do the same. Good strategic thinking requires good critical thinking: constantly asking questions, defining the problem, and exploring ideas and solutions. If you've been good at explaining the why to your employees, chance are you'll get some employees responding back, but what if? These are the moments that can often spark creativity and innovation.
- Regularly bring different teams together to share diverse perspectives. Your front-line employees have the best knowledge of on-the-ground issues, whereas middle management may have the best insights on process efficiencies. Marketing may bring great research about industry competitors, while your service team may bring great feedback about customer satisfaction. Great strategic thinking doesn't happen by keeping this information siloed. The more opportunities for sharing knowledge internally, the better the chance for creative ideas and solutions to emerge.
- Prioritize and learn to say no. The ability to prioritize is what separates creative thinking from strategic thinking. Strategic leaders know how to evaluate ideas to determine which ones will have the most potential positive impact, and they also understand that knowing when to say "no" is just as important as knowing when to say "yes." Making this process as transparent as possible to your team will help better align them to your overall vision and plan.
- Integrate strategic thinking into your company values. If you want to make strategic thinking a part of your work culture, then you'll need to make it a part of your values. That means recruiting for and rewarding the traits that one needs to be a good strategic thinker, such as curiosity, the ability to quickly learn and adapt, creative problem solving, and strong emotional intelligence. Publicly praise the employees who used strategic thinking to solve a particular problem or achieve a company goal, and promote your best strategic leaders to management positions.

Self-assessment and Practice tools

1. Strategic Thinking Self-Assessment

This simple tool from Harvard Business School Publications helps you understand your strategic thinking ability.

Duration: 20 mins

Additional Resources

What is Strategic Thinking? The Deep Dive Strategic Thinking Framework

Rich Horwath, CEO of the Strategic Thinking Institute, introduces the Deep Dive strategic thinking framework to help managers think, plan and act strategically on a daily basis. Discover which of the four types of strategic thinkers you are and three key questions to help you think strategically to realize your leadership potential.

Duration: 9 mins
Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2NYJJ7XTrc>

The Lost Art of Thinking in Large Organizations

Many executives in big companies attained their positions by excelling at getting things done. Unfortunately, a bias for doing rather than thinking can leave these executives ill-equipped for their new roles. Read this article to learn more about the importance of building strategic insights

Duration: 5 mins
Article

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-lost-art-of-thinking-in-large-organizations/>

Three Lessons From Adrienne Maree Brown's 'Emergent Strategy'

“Emergent Strategy” is a lyrical, explorative, non-linear journey of the book’s title, a concept she defines as “how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.” She explains at the outset that the book is meant to be perused, returned to, and jumped around in more than once. There are essays, poems, exercises, dialogues, assessments, facilitations—even a playlist. It’s a book for people interested in radical social change, who are willing to think expansively about what the future could look like, or are in need of help doing that kind of thinking.

Duration: 15 mins
Article

<https://www.colorlines.com/articles/three-lessons-adrienne-maree-browns-emergent-strategy>

Strategic Thinking - Rick Horwath

Rick Horwath speaks about 3As that are important in strategic thinking. Rick talks about bringing in strategic thinking in day to day life rather than a once a year activity.

Duration: 12 mins
Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVs43Pgp9F4&list=PLZoCxV45n5rOttIALzWd6S7-d-m03E61x&index=4>

Strategic Leadership: The 10 Characteristics Of A Good Leader

Strategic leadership is learned—it does not come naturally. Therefore, educating yourself about the characteristics you want to embody will help you become a better leader. We've done some deep thinking around strategic leadership here at ClearPoint, and these are the top ten characteristics we believe are critical to develop.

Duration: 15 mins

Article

<https://www.clearpointstrategy.com/strategic-leadership-characteristics/>

Six Steps to Communicating Strategic Priorities Effectively

Leaders can signal their commitment to a strategy by clearly communicating their strategic priorities to external stakeholders.

Duration: 5 mins

Article

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/six-steps-to-communicating-strategic-priorities-effectively/>

Strategy Checklist

Wherever you are in the strategic planning process, it is worthwhile to run a check to ensure you have done everything you need to do. Strategic planning is not complex. Implementing a strategy might be, but the strategic planning process is quite straightforward. Click here to read more.

Duration: 10 mins

Checklist

<https://www.intrafocus.com/strategic-planning-checklist/>

5 ways to lead in the era of constant change

Organizational change expert Jim Hemerling thinks adapting your business in today's constantly-evolving world can be invigorating instead of exhausting. He outlines five imperatives, centered around putting people first, for turning company reorganization into an empowering, energizing task for all.

Duration: 12 mins

Video

https://www.ted.com/talks/jim_hemerling_5_ways_to_lead_in_an_era_of_constant_change?

Building a Strategic Thinking Organization

Building a Strategic Thinking Organizations is designed specifically for Non Profit Organizations by Strategies for Social Change. This simple and well explained toolkit makes it easy to think strategically for managers and leaders in the organization

Duration: 60 mins

Toolkit

<https://strategiesforsocialchange.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SSC-Toolkit2-FINAL-Email-11.20.15.pdf>

Entrepreneurship and strategic thinking in business ecosystems

Strategic thinking and the entrepreneurial activities in an ecosystem influence one another in a cycle that perpetuates and even sparks innovation. These interactions vary significantly across four types of business ecosystems—Orchestra, Creative Bazaar, Jam Central, and MOD Station—and determine the success and failures of new ventures and established companies. The nature and effect of the dynamic interactions in a business ecosystem

Duration: 50 mins

Article

<https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/6804939/entrepreneurship.pdf>

The 7 Critical Skills Of Successful Strategic Thinkers

In a study conducted by Harvard Business Review, 97% of the 10,000 senior executives chose strategy as the most critical leadership behavior to their organizations' future success. Strategic thinkers are able to imagine the big picture, identify the possible impact of their decisions and project the way to get there. Read this article to understand 7 critical skills of successful strategic thinkers.

Duration: 10 mins

Article

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewsolender/2021/01/05/georgia-exit-polls-reveal-staggering-partisan-divide-in-election-confidence/?sh=5d77f6826306>

How to Develop Yourself as a Nonprofit Leader

Six senior nonprofit leaders who have spent their entire careers in the nonprofit sector offer advice to mid-level nonprofit managers looking to move into senior nonprofit leadership roles.

Duration: 25 mins

Article

<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/careers/how-to-develop-yourself-nonprofit-leader>

Strategic Thinking and Planning Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to provide an outline of how to facilitate strategic thinking and planning including the development of goals and objectives. My Guide to Strategic Thinking provides the detail steps in the process and takes you through the process of asking questions, using the outlines, and checklists.

Duration: 90 mins

Toolkit

https://www.northrupcpa.com/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2016/12/Strategic-Thinking-Toolkit_2016_F.pdf

The Strategic Thinking Manifesto

Great strategy doesn't magically emerge from Excel spreadsheets or elaborate PowerPoint decks. It comes from managers who can think strategically. It inspires confidence, sets direction and creates competitive advantage. Most important, great strategy is developed by great strategists. Read this well written to learn more about strategic thinking.

Duration: 20 mins

Article

<https://www.strategyskills.com/pdf/The-Strategic-Thinking-Manifesto.pdf?gclid=ClAV2fG0v88CFcVlfgodSBUM8A>

Ten Keys to Successful Strategic Planning

Ten keys to successful strategic planning and non-profit foundation leaders share the ten components of an effective strategic plan. There are a few resources listed at the end of the page for further reading

Duration: 40 mins

Resource guide

<https://www.tccgrp.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Ten-Keys-to-Successful-Strategic-Planning-for-Nonprofit-and-Foundation-Leaders.pdf>