

STRATEGIC THINKING

Training for BYU-Idaho Employees

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Strategic Thinking Training

I. Purpose

Teach the concept of STRATEGIC THINKING and how to develop it.

II. Definition

“Strategy is a concept with military roots. The words *strategia* or *strategikè*, meaning the art of skills of the general, are found in Greek antiquities dating from at least the second century CE.” (Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3)

Learning about strategy and applying it to produce desired results is still prevalent, even more in some areas. Strategy does not only apply to military or wars anymore; it is and should be utilized in our everyday lives along with other skills and talents to perform our best.

Google dictionary definitions:

Strategy: A plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim

Thinking: The process of using one's mind to consider or reason about something

STRATEGIC THINKING is a way of thinking that allows people to view the big picture and create alternative ways to proceed. It is the process of using one’s mind to consider or reason a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim.

As stated by Richard Sudweeks, “Just as we have habitual ways of behaving, we also have habitual ways of thinking” (Richard R Sudweeks, “Thinking Habits and Dispositions.” BYU Speeches, 15 July 2003, speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-r-sudweeks_thinking-habits-dispositions)

Thinking strategically is one of these habitual ways of thinking that helps us assess situations from multiple dimensions in order to arrive at effective decisions.

III. Strategic Thinking vs. Strategic Planning

“Modern business literature separates strategy into two concepts: the first, *strategic thinking* – thinking is an innovative, creative, and right-brained process that encourages an open exchange of ideas and solutions to meet the dynamic, often unpredictable challenges faced in today’s economy; the second, *strategic planning*, is the systematic and logical application of strategies.” (Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3)



Strategic planning is not strategic thinking. Indeed, strategic planning often spoils strategic thinking, causing managers to confuse real vision with the manipulation of numbers.

— Henry Mintzberg —

AZ QUOTES

Strategic Thinking	Strategic Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not time-based; it's an ongoing process • A habitual way of thinking • Is a skill • Can be unconscious and/or conscious • Can be incorporated in other ways of thinking and be done constantly • Is more intuitive than analytical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on a defined period • Is a formal laid-out procedure • Is a process • Has to be undertaken consciously • Done periodically at corporate or individual levels at regular intervals • Is more analytical than intuitive

STRATEGIC PLANNING focuses on a defined time period and a formal laid-out procedure that are followed to achieve goals, while STRATEGIC THINKING is not time-based at all. Each of these require a different type of thinking; STRATEGIC PLANNING requires linear, analytical processes, and STRATEGIC THINKING necessitates more intuitive and open-ended cognition. (Ken Haycock et al. "Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature." Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3) It collaborates knowledge and experiences from various sources and organizes it to make important decisions at all levels; individual, family and corporation. At an individual level, it is the unconsciously competent stage of strategic planning.

IV. Strategic Thinking vs. Tactical Thinking

“If you’re always focused on the task in front of you, you may miss the opportunity to get better results by looking at the bigger picture.” (The Business Psychology Company, LLC “Strategic vs. Tactical Thinking.”, 2016, www.businesspsychology.com/strategic-vs-tactical-thinking/)

STRATEGIC THINKING is focused on long-term goals. It takes a more holistic approach and derives information needed to make decisions for the future from past experiences. On the other hand, TACTICAL THINKING focuses on the task at hand and short-term planning. Tactics do play an important role in executing the strategy.

For example, when a doctor diagnoses a patient with particular symptoms and is focused on treating the symptoms, he/she is thinking tactically. On the other hand, when a doctor is focused on finding the cause of the problem and treating the cause by executing a treatment plan, he/she is thinking strategically. Both are important and go hand-in-hand in most cases. A doctor would usually give medications to treat symptoms for a patient’s comfort, even if the real cause hasn’t been treated yet. Some medical problems may not even have a cure and only the symptoms can be cured or relieved. In that case, tactics become more important. TACTICAL THINKING is, in a way, part of effective STRATEGIC THINKING.

Strategic Thinking	Tactical Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long-term and holistic approach • Can be compared to treating the cause • Is the ‘How’ to achieve a goal • Provides the entire map or directions to achieve a goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the task at hand • Can be compared to treating the symptoms • Is ‘How exactly’ to achieve a goal • Provides the individual steps or tools to achieve a goal

“There is a big difference between “doing things right” and “doing the right things.” The first is tactical thinking, and the second is strategic thinking; the first is management, and the second is leadership. Clearly both are needed to run a successful organization, but it’s important to make sure you are steering your ship where you want it to go rather than clinging desperately to the anchor chain as it drags you through the water. And while we’re on ship metaphors, we shouldn’t leave this topic without paying homage to that old adage about “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic,” which so succinctly and poignantly points out the futility of perfect tactical implementation of a flawed strategic plan” (The Business Psychology Company, LLC “Strategic vs. Tactical Thinking.”, 2016, www.businesspsychology.com/strategic-vs-tactical-thinking/)

V. Why Should You Learn about a Thinking Skill?

QUOTES:

“Thinking is the ultimate human resource.” (Edward De Bono. Six thinking hats. Penguin Life, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2017)

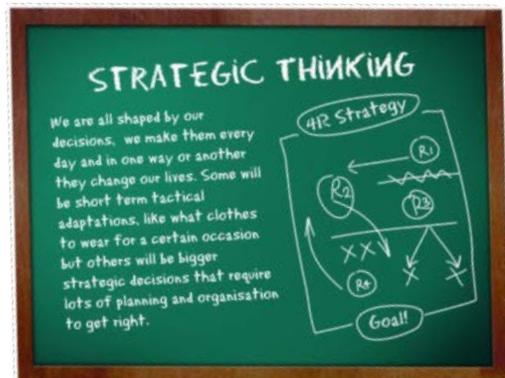
“Mindful people think about their own thinking. They consciously strive to be aware of the thinking strategies and processes that they use when they try to solve a problem or accomplish a cognitively demanding task. In addition, they evaluate the products of their thinking processes. They question their assumptions, check their inferences, and attempt to validate their interpretations and conclusions. They try to distinguish between paths in their thought processes that seem to be leading them toward a successful solution and any that might seem to be leading them in an unsuccessful direction.” (Richard R Sudweeks “Thinking Habits and Dispositions.” BYU Speeches, 15 July 2003, speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-r-sudweeks_thinking-habits-dispositions/)

How you think matters.

VI. Who Should Think Strategically?

“All of us are strategists whether we like it or not. It is better to be a good strategist than a bad one...” (Dixit, Avinash K., and Barry J. Nalebuff. Thinking strategically: the competitive edge in business, politics, and everyday life. W.W. Norton, 1991)

Whatever you want to do in your life, strategic thinking will be a part of it and will help you make more well-informed and wise decisions.



Here are a few examples where strategic thinking can be useful:

A. World History

“I can think of one very important strategic thinker, Mohandas Gandhi. He was very strategic in terms of thinking about a broad campaign and trying to figure out how to get from here to there and using very different methods to achieve than were traditional at the time.”

“One of the best [strategic thinkers] was a man named James Lawson, who helped lead what’s known as the Nashville Civic Movement, a very effective campaign to change the hearts and minds of the people of Nashville about segregation.”

“I think that thinking in a big picture strategic way is a really important skill for navigating life and affecting change and trying to enforce good in the world. Haphazard, periodic and spontaneous actions usually don’t affect much change in the world. If you really want to make a change, you need to go through it very systematically and strategically.”

(Source: David Pulsipher, BYU-Idaho Faculty, Personal Interview with the Author, 20 December 2018)

B. International Relations

“You have to be thinking about the decision-making process and tendencies of other people while you’re making your decisions. If United States does X, how would India react? How would Pakistan react? How would Latin Israel react etc.? That’s kind of the thought process that has to go into it. Being able to think strategically would make you a valuable advisor.”

“And sometimes, when international decision makers are talking to each other, they could talk past each other because thinking strategically or thinking long-term even might mean different things to different people.”

(Source: David Campbell, BYU-Idaho Faculty, Personal Interview with the Author, 20 December 2018)

C. Business

“Great entrepreneurs must have the curiosity to metaphorically see around the corner. What’s coming? What can I anticipate that other people don’t see?”

(Source: Howard Schultz, American Businessman, executive chairman of Starbucks and a former owner of Seattle Supersonics)

D. Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

“The Church does work strategically. It is big picture doctrine; for example, BYU is not a university to the Church, since that is what it operates as. It is an asset in the Kingdom of God used to bring people to Christ and salvation. That should dictate how it operates”

(Source: Jack Fuller, BYU-Idaho Faculty, Personal Interview with the Author, 20 December 2018)



“Every decision that they [the Church] make, comes down to trying to look at the big picture and decide what is the best move in trying to accomplish what the Church needs to accomplish. The recent changes in the age of missionaries is a strategic choice, I think, largely driven by a desire to not lose some of the young people that they were losing between graduating from high school and going on their mission, and that was usually a year or two or three.”

(Source: David Pulsipher, BYU-Idaho Faculty, Personal Interview with the Author, 20 December 2018)

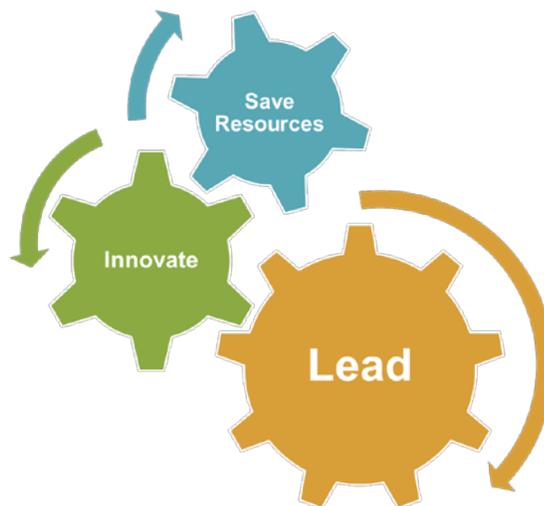
“In the top councils of the Church, there’d be some strategic thinking but also in the more nuts and bolts; accounting and building programs for new meeting houses and all those kinds of things. They’d also have to do some planning ahead and then look at the big picture and where they think that the make-up of the Church and the growth of the Church is going to occur. The Church could definitely use strategic thinking, I think.”

(Source: David Campbell, BYU-Idaho Faculty, Personal Interview with the Author, 20 December 2018)

VII. Why Should You Learn about Strategic Thinking?

A. It Will Help Save Important Resources (Time and Money)

“‘Provident living’ ... implies the [conserving] of our resources, the wise planning of financial matters, full provision for personal health, and adequate preparation for education and career development, giving appropriate attention to home production and storage as well as the development of emotional resiliency. ... If we live wisely



and providently, we will be as safe as in the palm of His hand.” (“Managing Resources Wisely and Staying Out of Debt.” Liahona, Feb. 2010, www.lds.org/liahona/2010/02/managing-resources-wisely-and-staying-out-of-debt?lang=eng)

Strategic thinking is one of the skills that can help you budget better, adequately prepare for education and career development, and help conserve important resources. It will help you do more using less time at less cost.

“Dealing with limited resources of money, people and time is a fact of life for all businesses, even giant corporations. Strategic thinking enables a business owner to determine how to use these resources most effectively and advance the company toward its objectives. Strategic thinking focuses the management team on markets that are most likely to succeed. Strategic thinking helps the company avoid costly mistakes...” (Brian Hill. “Why Is Strategic Thinking Important to the Success of Business?” Chron.com, smallbusiness.chron.com/strategic-thinking-important-success-business-4661.html)

“I spent 12 years doing corporate turnarounds, and more often than not the companies were not taking the time to think strategically. These companies were failing — losing millions of cash per month — and the people were trapped in day-to-day survival mode.

They didn't have the best strategic plans, if they had them at all. If there were 10,000 people in the organization, it wasn't enough for the five people in the executive suite thinking strategically to move the company forward. It was the 10,000 individuals all doing their job a little bit differently that was going to get us there. And it did — several times.” (Council, Forbes Coaches. “The Value of Strategic Thinking.” Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 26 Apr. 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/04/26/the-value-of-strategic-thinking)

B. It Drives Innovation

“The ultimate advantage of synthesis (strategic thinking) over analysis (planning) is that it is synthesis that actually makes innovation possible. “Strategy making needs to function beyond the boxes, to encourage the informal learning that produces new perspectives and new combinations...” (Harold Henkel, “Can Strategic Thinking Be Taught?” Journal of Strategic Leadership, vol. 3, no. 1, 2011, p.3. www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jsl/vol3iss1/)

Strategic thinking is open-ended thinking and offers the opportunity to imagine and innovate. There are no rules and creativity at its best is encouraged when you think strategically. Strategic thinking is not about facts and information as much as it is about how to utilize those ideas and information to create innovative solutions to problems. Strategic thinking and innovation go hand-in-hand. Strategic thinking is a constant approach to innovation.

C. Quality of a Good Leader

“The Strategic Thinking Institute highlights strategic thinking as “the #1 ranked most important leadership competency.”

“Strategic thinking should be viewed as “central to creating and sustaining competitive advantage” and is the tool to get done what most leadership competencies seek to do – move an

organization forward, innovate, streamline, and evoke greater productivity.” (Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” *Library Leadership & Management*, vol. 26, no. 3)

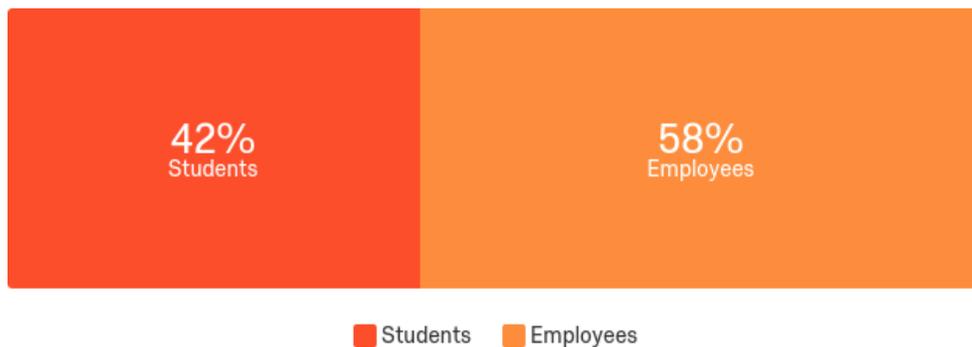
“One of the main differences between leadership and management is the ability to have a strategic perspective and think strategically. This is universally expected of leaders, almost never taught to anyone formally, and therefore often marks one of the tougher transitions for very successful managers in becoming effective leaders.” (John Helen “Are you a strategic thinker or just a planner?” *Washington Technology*, 16 Aug. 2016, washingtontechnology.com/articles/2016/08/16/insights-hillen-think-strategically.aspx)

“It’s worth remembering that the real value in strategic thinking isn’t just in generating ideas or in making better decisions: it’s about building a framework that future-proofs your business, makes you a better manager and leader and gives you the best chance of achieving long-term success.” (Macquarie Expertise Hub “6 ways you can improve your strategic thinking.” 12 Dec. 2016, www.macquarie.com/au/advisers/expertise/smart-practice/6-ways-you-can-improve-your-strategic-thinking)

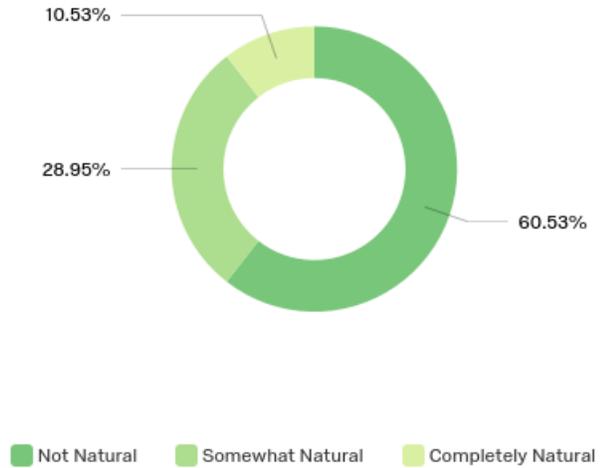
VIII. Can Strategic Thinking Be Learned?

We conducted a research to try to find what people on the BYU-Idaho campus think about the nature of Strategic Thinking and if it can be developed over a short or long period of time.

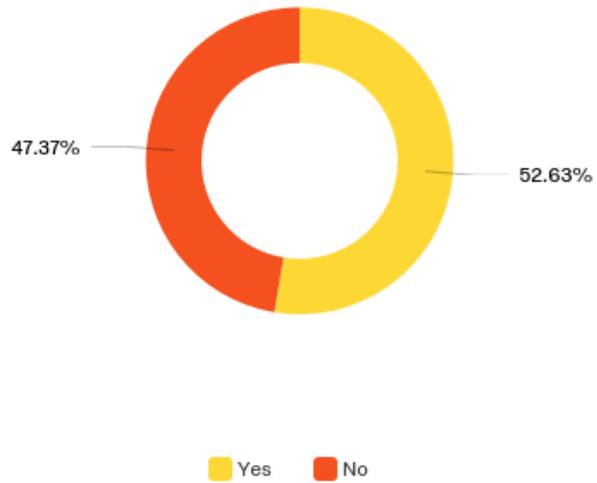
The sample size of study was 38 BYU-Idaho students and employees of which 42% were students and 58% were employees.



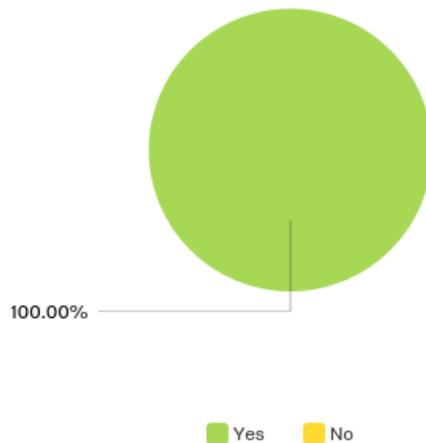
To the question, “In your opinion, is strategic thinking natural or not?” 10.5% of the respondents said that it is completely natural, 29% said that it is somewhat natural and 60.5% said that it is completely natural.



When asked, “In your opinion, can strategic thinking be developed over a short period of time (i.e., a week long seminar)”, almost half of the respondents said “Yes” and the other half said “No”.



100% of the respondents believe that Strategic Thinking can be developed over a long period of time (2-3 years of practice or longer).



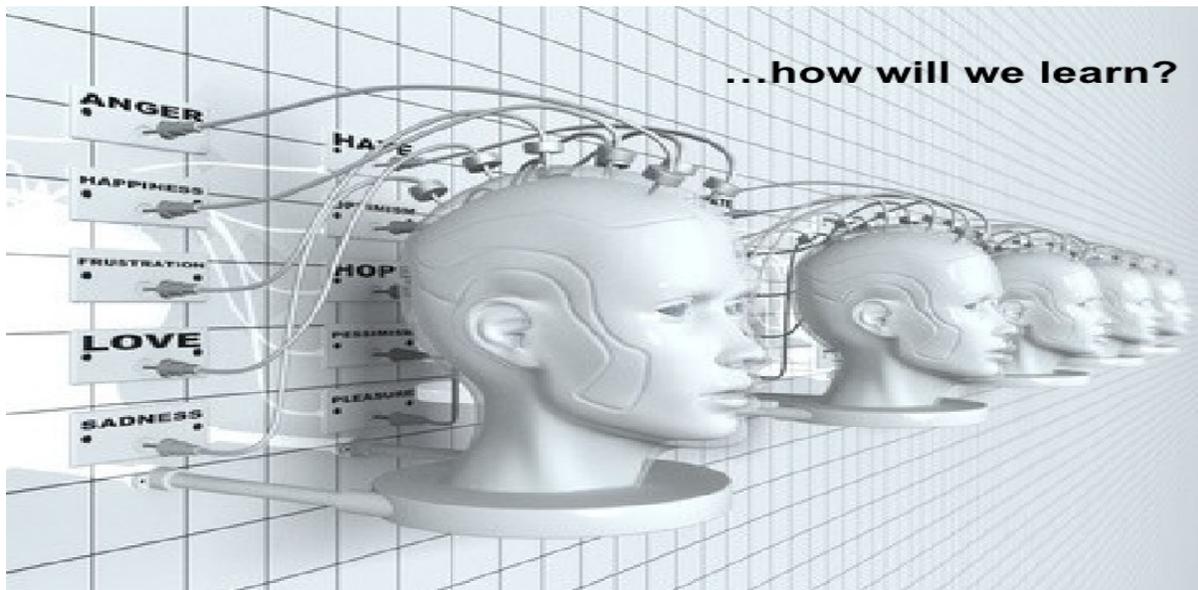
“There is general consensus in the literature that strategic thinking is a learnable skill benefitting from diverse experiences and open dialog, requiring persistent practice to develop, and demanding cyclic iteration to improve. (Clayton) Christensen believes thinking strategically can become an ingrained skill by its continuous application and repetition over time that “actively cultivates a deep competence in strategic thinking.””

“Research by Goldman et al also found that strategic thinking is not the product of innate ability and serendipity; rather, it arises from specific experiences (personal, interpersonal, organizational and external) that occur over 10 or more years”

(Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3)

“Personality is not an indicator of successful strategic capabilities. Out of Jung’s four types of thinking (sensation-feeling/sensation-logic/intuitive-feeling/intuitive-logic) none have proven to be more likely to be effective strategic thinkers. This indicates that there is not a “type” of individual per se who demonstrates strategic thinking. Anyone can be a strategic thinker.”

IX. How to Develop Strategic Thinking?



A. Be Willing to Invest Time and Effort

The skill to think strategically may come easier to some people than others, but just like any other skill, time and effort needs to be put in, in order to learn or develop it, even for those who might have a natural tendency for it. Some efforts may be more conscious than others and some people may need more time, but with the adequate time and effort spent, anyone can develop this important skill of thinking strategically.



“Scholars who have tried to create programs designed to teach people to think better have discovered that many people already possess the skill needed to think effectively. What they lacked was not necessary abilities but the commitment and the willingness to invest their time and effort in using the thinking skills they had already acquired.” (Richard R Sudweeks, “Thinking Habits and Dispositions.” BYU Speeches, 15 July 2003, speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-r-sudweeks_thinking-habits-dispositions/)

B. Ask Good Questions – to Yourself and to Others

Ask “What if?” followed by “If... then.”

Gallup StrengthsFinder 2.0 says the following of the strategic theme –



“This perspective allows you to see patterns where others see complexity. Mindful of these patterns, you play out alternative scenarios, always asking, and ‘What if this happened? Okay, well what if this happened?’ These recurring questions help you see around the next corner. There you can evaluate accurately the potential obstacles. Guided by where you see each path leading, you start to make selections. You discard the paths that lead nowhere. You discard the paths that lead straight into resistance. You discard the paths that lead into a fog of confusion. You cull and make selections until you arrive at the chosen path – strategy. Armed with your strategy you strike forward. This is your strategic theme at work: ‘What if?’ Select. Strike.” (Tom Rath, Strengthsfinder 2.0. Gallup Press, 2007)

“Capacity for hypothesis generation and testing incorporates both creative and critical thinking into their processes.” (Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3)

“The key is to ask questions with an open mind and without any preconceptions. Preconceptions lead to fear and clouded thinking. Open-minded thinking allows for creative problem solving and opportunities.” (Brendon P Keegan, “The Value of Strategic Thinking.” Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 26 Apr. 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/04/26/the-value-of-strategic-thinking/)

In a council setting, members of the group can discuss and prepare for situations that may arise using this technique consciously.

C. Seek Different Experiences and Perceptions (Interdependence)

Open mind...



“Another key to starting to think more strategically is to discuss your ideas with different people. And this becomes exponentially more valuable when you discuss your ideas with people who think differently than you. That’s because you won’t just be increasing the pool of ideas and points of view on a topic, you’ll also be given the chance to look at problems in a different way.” (Macquarie Expertise Hub “6 ways you can improve your strategic thinking.” 12 Dec. 2016, www.macquarie.com/au/advisers/expertise/smart-practice/6-ways-you-can-improve-your-strategic-thinking)

Constantly seeking different experiences and perceptions can broaden your horizon and offer valuable learning. Teaching one another and learning from each other plays a huge role in becoming aware of yourself and those around you. It leads to peace and interdependence and

will help you see the big picture, from different dimensions, and help you make more well-informed decisions.

“The best strategic thinkers are not just those who seek different opinions when they are faced with a decision or a problem, but they are the ones who are constantly immersing themselves in other peoples’ thoughts and opinions. These individuals are more likely to see new and unique ideas come ‘out of nowhere,’ as the saying goes. However, those thoughts and ideas will not be coming ‘out of nowhere,’ they’ll be coming out of the exposure the brain has had to so many diverse thoughts and ideas in the past.”

“For this reason, to develop your strategic thinking skills, you need to spend time engaged in genuine conversation with others. Ask others to explain their thought processes. According to Forbes, part of this process is surrounding yourself with people who think differently than you do.” (“Strategic Thinking: A Problem-Solving, Decision-Making Skill.” Interpersonal Skills, interpersonalskillsonline.com/strategic-thinking)



“Not all new experiences need to be physical ones: reading about new places, new ideas and new opinions can help our strategic thinking too.”(Macquarie Expertise Hub “6 ways you can improve your strategic thinking.” 12 Dec. 2016, www.macquarie.com/au/advisers/expertise/smart-practice/6-ways-you-can-improve-your-strategic-thinking)

“Strategic thinking invokes the capacity to be intelligently opportunistic, or open to new experience, allowing one to take advantage of alternative strategies that may emerge in a rapidly changing environment.” Whole (holistic) system perspective enables an organization to redesign its processes for greater efficiency and effectiveness. (Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” *Library Leadership & Management*, vol. 26, no. 3)

D. Be Adaptable

“A skilled strategic thinker recognizes that a successful strategy today may not work well tomorrow, thus these individuals are continuously scanning the environment for signs that indicate the adjustment may be required.”



“Strategic thinking conveys a sense of direction and is driven by the continuous shaping and re-shaping of intent.”

(Ken Haycock et al. “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” *Library Leadership & Management*, vol. 26, no. 3)

“Strategic thinkers make plans and set goals, but they are also flexible. If plans need changing, they will revise them. They do not get stuck in rigid patterns of operating that limit their ability to see new opportunities and new directions.” (“Your Strategic Thinking Is Above Average If You Can Relate to These 7 Things.” *Learning Mind*, 30 May 2017, www.learning-mind.com/strategic-thinking)

E. Practice

“Continuous learning is a key component of improving as a strategic thinker. Learning has value because the increase in knowledge allows individuals to make more informed decisions and to more accurately judge between several available options. Constant learning can mean a variety of different things, from attending seminars, hiring experts, learning from past mistakes or the mistakes of others, commissioning industry research, and networking with others in the same or related industries.” (Author Unknown) Just like any other skill, the efforts to develop strategic thinking must include continual practice.



X. Conclusion



Strategic thinking is an important skill that can be utilized by individuals to make more effective decisions and become better leaders. Whatever your role may be, you can always utilize the ability to think strategically to make more well-informed wise decisions. Developing good strategic thinking can take a long time, but it is an attainable goal as long as you are willing to invest the time and effort required.

To develop strategic thinking as a skill, you need to actively and consciously seek to learn. Openness is a very important state when trying to learn any new skill. “Activities that spark strategic thinking are open-ended, free-formed with focus on emerging propositions, different perspectives and suspended convergence.”(Ken Haycock et al, “Strategic Thinking - Lessons for Leadership from the Literature.” Library Leadership & Management, vol. 26, no. 3.) Being open to different experiences and perceptions can help induce creative thoughts and ideas that will help you understand connections between everything around you and ultimately anticipate possibilities. Throughout this process, you must ask questions – to yourself and to others. Curiosity can go a long way. You must be adaptable, flexible and willing to change according to the situation. And last, but not the least, practice. Practice in your everyday decision making or in your teams at work or school or even in your family councils. As you practice, your strategic thinking skills will develop over time and you’ll be able to use it more efficiently whenever required.