

Becoming a Strategic Thinker

Raise Your Strategic IQ for 21st Century Success

BACKWARDS THINKING TO THE FUTURE - “Thinking Backwards” from their desired outcomes in order to move forward to grow your career/business is what outstanding Strategic Thinkers do, time after time, day after day. **BY STEPHEN HAINES**

BECOMING A STRATEGIC THINKER

Seventy-five percent of all change efforts fail to achieve their intended results. In today’s dynamic and confusing global environment, the need for leaders and trainers of all types to become and remain strategic thinkers on a daily basis is a necessity for successful change and business growth. It is not enough to build a Strategic Plan or have long-term vision or, conversely, to just give up and muddle through the complexities around us and hope for success. A disciplined way to think, to plan, to act, and to rethink and re-plan all over again on a daily basis is needed to grow your business. It is needed to grow your career as a trainer as well.

Planning and Change are the primary jobs of leaders today, and Strategic Thinking is the way to do this. The lament on many executive’s lips these days is to the effect that, “we need more strategic thinking and strategic thinkers.” However, just what does this popular phrase mean?

STRATEGIC THINKING DEFINED

Strategic Thinking is a broad and innovative way of thinking on a daily basis about the overall goals of your job, team, and organization. It is longer-term oriented with a more systemic and holistic view of your dept/unit in its environment.

It is also disciplined or integrated thinking with a focus first on the desired outcomes of your unit or entire training department as a system. Then it focuses on the relationships between your training components, along with constant feedback about results, to find the leverage points that best achieve your desired outcomes.

The departments and parts of any organization don’t usually work together well – too many silos and political conflicts.

Strategic Thinking is also called systems thinking, critical thinking, future and forward thinking, longer-term thinking, and high-level thinking. It is not analytic thinking, which is tactical, mechanistic, reductionist, either/or thinking. It is not parts oriented, or one best way.

WHY SYSTEMS THINKING?

Systems Thinking also focuses on a daily basis on relationships, multiple outcomes, holism and boundaries, the environment, the larger system, and feedback.

Systems Thinking has a scientific foundation: the way to think is from the Science of Living Systems. It has many universal applications because it is based on “the natural way the world works” and there is over 50 years of scientific research to back it up. (see www.isss.org)

In essence, Strategic and Systems Thinking view organizations within the context of their environments. As such, an organization does not exist as an island unto itself, but as part of a larger network, web, or matrix of systems that all function independently, yet interdependently.

We, at the Haines Centre, like to use the analogy of getting a “helicopter view” of the organization as a system. From a height of 5,000 feet (or more) it is much easier to see the bigger picture, allowing a much broader perspective on achieving purposes and

results that maximize a training department or an organization’s success in the marketplace.

Underlying systems are complexities (represented in our work by the Rubik’s Cube with one trillion moves) that have at their heart, simple, fundamental foundations. By grasping the fundamentals of how an organization works as a system within a set of larger systems, it is possible to work through the complexity and arrive at real, effective solutions to difficult training, business, and organizational problems.

STRATEGIC THINKING: THE SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH

This Strategic Thinking process can sometimes be counter-intuitive to many executives and professionals. We read left to right in English. We also often think about where we are today before thinking about our desired future, again from left to right. Thus, while Strategic and Systems Thinking works backwards from the desired outcomes first, it is not the preferred or dominant way of thinking in western society.

Instead, 50 years of research of the Science of Systems Thinking gives you a new orientation to life, which we use as our Core Technology at the Centre. It defines Strategic Thinking in five specific and simple phases of thought. We call this The ABCs of Strategic and Systems Thinking in order to emphasize how elegantly simple these five phases are in practice. They even come with their own five Strategic Thinking questions:

PHASE A: Where do we want to be? (i.e., our ends, outcomes, purposes, goals, holistic vision)

PHASE B: How will we know when we get there? (i.e., the customers’ needs and wants connected into a quantifiable feedback system)

PHASE C: Where are we now? (i.e., today’s issues and problems)

PHASE D: How do we get there? (i.e., close the gap from C to A in a complete, holistic way)

PHASE E: Ongoing: What will/may change in our environment in the future?

Learn this simple ABCs Model and the five associated questions and “voila,” you are a Strategic Thinker on a daily basis. However, the real key to Strategic Thinking is even simpler than that. The key is the right side of the system – the E (future environment), A (desired outcomes), and B (goals/measures) Phases are the key ones to great Strategic Thinking!

IN SUMMARY:

- We are governed by the natural laws of life as open/living systems on earth, so:
 - A successful participant must learn the new A-B-C rules.
 - Analytical Thinking is old Industrial Thinking.
 - How we think...is how we act...is how we are!
- Stop using “analytic approaches to systems problems.”

Remember, in Systems Thinking, the whole is primary and the parts are secondary, versus Analytic Thinking, where the parts are primary and the whole is secondary.

Note: for those wishing to read even more on E-A-B Phases, please see our free white papers at www.HainesCentre.com.



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