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2025

STRATEGY HQ

the cooper group

Strategic Thinking Is Your Secret Sauce

NEW MENTALITY EDITION





Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to part two in our series of articles on the types of strategic thinking and actions that today's organizations need to survive and thrive. In case you missed it, here's a link to the [first issue of our Strategy series](#). It explores the pitfalls of mistaking tactical actions for strategic initiatives, and the anatomy of a true business strategy.

In this issue, we're drilling deeper. You'll learn about best practices for creating a company-wide strategic mindset and executing a new or refined business strategy. Mastering both is essential to effectively transforming grand plans from a vision into a prosperous reality.

**It's time to
put on new
thinking caps.
Get one for every
member of your
organization.**

We're seeing a dramatic uptick this year in bolder initiatives among organizations across industries. New revenue and business models are emerging. Artificial intelligence and machine learning are becoming mainstream. Stronger sustainability and customer experience programs are in the works. Supply chain resilience is getting beefed up, and there's so much more. It's only the first quarter, and 2025 is already pivotal in reshaping the way companies conduct business.

Flip the page to discover why, from here on out, every business success will begin and live on through a forward-thinking mentality and smart execution.

Here's to bringing your vision to fruition in 2025 and beyond!



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by David Cooper

How to Master the Art of Strategic Thinking: Grow a Strategic Mindset

Strategic thinking is what creates the secret sauce that makes a business unbeatable in the minds and hearts of its people and customers.

It's that thing atop the daily menu of every successful business leader, professional, and organization. Strategic thinking is created by blending business strategy, data, analytics, and solid assumptions into informed decisions that drive positive short- and long-term business outcomes. And because strategic thinking is future-focused and based on factual data, it reveals the best courses of action to create sustainable success. Mastering the art of strategic thinking sets you and your teams up to seize and maintain a competitive edge:

- You gain newfound acumen to analyze complicated, many-sided situations.
- You develop the vision to see beyond challenges, identify opportunities and risks, and anticipate trends.

- Your sharpened insights and analysis lead you to wiser business decisions.
- Perhaps best of all, you can foresee the effects of your smartly calculated actions, with sufficient time to adjust in response to changing market dynamics.

What goes into that secret sauce is a combination of creative and critical thinking, supercharged problem-solving skills, and actions that lead to innovative and effective strategies.

In a nutshell, strategic thinking is a mindset.



What's the first step in growing a strategic mindset?

Developing a strategic mindset starts by assessing the things that are unique and compelling about your organization. Here are some examples that you can capitalize on – or manifest into reality:

- A product or service that solves problems or fills a market need as well or better than anybody else
- A strong brand image that touches customers and prospects on an emotional level
- Superior customer service that sustains and builds loyalty and advocacy
- Operational efficiencies that keep costs down while you scale the business
- Customized or proprietary technologies that competitors cannot replicate
- A spirited company culture and talented teams that drive innovation
- Strong, personalized, and consistent customer

engagement through marketing and communications

These or any other distinguishing characteristics are the ingredients of your secret sauce that make you stand out and succeed in the marketplace.

3 proven initiatives to develop strategic thinking in leaders and teams

1. CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO: ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING AND INNOVATION

Who and what your organization is at this moment is merely your existing state, a finite condition. There's no future in staying glued to this picture, where the future is out of sight and out of mind. This makes strategic thinking and breaking away from the status quo impossible.

The status quo is challenged by committing to cultivating a culture of innovation, critical thinking, and continuous improvement. Challenging the status quo is not a one-time, temporary, or casual undertaking. Actions like those outlined below must be

ongoing and intentional for your organization to become and remain responsive, proactive, and competitive in the market for years to come.

■ Go above and beyond:

Today's senior management and team leaders must make a habit of questioning current assumptions and embracing change. This goes for team members, too. It involves encouraging and supporting everyone to think, experiment, and find ways to take business to the next level.

This is accomplished by creating an environment in which all team members feel comfortable in questioning existing processes, operating procedures, and development efforts. There are always better ways to do things! Ask teams (and yourself) why things are done in certain ways. Discuss those processes. Debate them. If the reasons for their existence are insufficient or outdated, explore something different.

To foster such an environment, devise incentives for team members who contest antiquated practices. Recognize those who contribute, vet, and test new ideas. Constructive debate, strategic thinking, and experimentation are ground zero for generating real and continuous improvement.

■ Get your best minds involved in shaking up the status quo:

Time and resources must be invested in exploring new ideas. Consider creating internal think tanks comprised of people in different roles in your organization and different professional backgrounds, skill

Time and resources must be invested in exploring new ideas. Consider creating internal think tanks comprised of people in different roles in your organization and different professional backgrounds, skill sets, perspectives, and approaches to solving problems.

sets, perspectives, and approaches to solving problems. You could take this further by introducing an innovation lab, an initiative known to accelerate progress through strategic vetting and testing of new concepts and ideas.

Taking such initiatives will engage and inspire teams to reach for the stars. Your efforts will encourage cross-functional collaboration, eliminate departmental silos, and bring inventive ideas to the table. Cross-training employees in other areas of your operation is also advantageous, exposing them to new perspectives and fostering continuous learning, development, and contributions to innovation.

■ Act on team feedback and measure progress:

Engaging employees to help fulfill your company's mission and strategy is a two-way street. Leadership must also be engaged and responsive. Therefore, the initiatives you pursue to challenge the status quo need built-in feedback loops – a way for employees to share ideas and suggestions for improvement, voice concerns, and stay engaged.

Leadership must respond in kind by expressing thanks for employee participation, assessing and implementing workable ideas, resolving

concerns, and sharing reasons and timelines if ideas or problem resolutions need further consideration.

Leadership, team leaders, and assigned team members need to be accountable for tracking metrics and sharing progress on implemented changes and resulting improvements or advancements. Without these measures, attempts to move beyond the status quo will fail.

2. BUILD INTERNAL SYSTEMIC THINKING: BOND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF EVERY BUSINESS UNIT

Within a business, systemic thinking concentrates on how the many areas of the organization interact with each other and especially in how they influence each other's productivity. This naturally leads to better problem-solving and decision-making, with company-wide awareness of how the organization achieves effective and sustainable solutions, adapts to change, and achieves growth.


In a word, systemic thinking is holistic. It is the exact opposite of focusing on issues in seclusion, with no regard for how those issues are interconnected with the operations of other business units. This can't happen anymore, not in today's rapidly evolving business environment.

Senior management, business unit leaders, and team leaders can avoid disruptive, short-sighted decisions and internal chaos by building systemic thinking into an organizational mentality. This mentality can simultaneously identify new opportunities, as well as make the organization more resilient in managing difficult challenges and business disruptions.

Here's how to build systemic thinking:

■ Turn your operation into a dynamic, interdependent system that represents all departments, stakeholders, and processes. Finding success should never be





a competition between different divisions and business units. Encourage departments to work together rather than in silos. Instill the understanding that when each vessel respects the whole, your rising success will float all boats!

- Promote learning through collaboration and awareness. Ensure all stakeholders understand how actions taken in one area may impact other areas of operation – before those actions are taken. Collaboration through systemic thinking allows stakeholders to see beyond isolated results, anticipate potential for broader consequences, and ensure any ripple effects are positive and sustainable.

- If any area of your business suffers from recurring issues, it's likely that those issues impact other areas of operation – or your customers. Use systemic thinking to identify and resolve issues instead of repeatedly putting band-aids on symptoms.

3. ADOPT FUTURE-FOCUSED THINKING: ANTICIPATE FUTURE TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Businesses shepherded by leaders and teams who embrace future-focused thinking are the winners in today's volatile business environment. Organizations grounded in future-focused thinking have an internal discipline that's trained to anticipate market trends and shifts, gird for possible disruptions to business continuity, and continually adjust strategies to lead organizations into the future.

Future-focused thinking means being prepared for a crisis instead of reacting to it. It means creating

innovative solutions before the market beats you to it. It means staying relevant and competitive in a constantly changing industry and

Future-focused thinking means being prepared for a crisis instead of reacting to it. It means creating innovative solutions before the market beats you to it.

demonstrating resilience in the face of disruptive external factors.

Here's how leaders and teams thrive by adopting future-focused thinking:

- Establish crystal clear goals that align with your business strategy – and ensure your strategy places a major focus on where future opportunities are likely to arise and how to attract and seize them.

- Keep a solid pulse on industry shifts and trends, emerging technologies that can strengthen your operations, and ever-changing consumer behaviors with potential to impact your bottom line.

- Identify many different situations or scenarios with strong potential to create uncertainty. Set down plans that will help your organization stay resilient no matter what the future may bring.

- Build an internal culture in which employees are comfortable in experiencing and taking command of change. This is essential for continuous improvement, innovation, and staying relevant.

- Maximize the productivity and success of your workforce by aggressively investing in training, upskilling, professional development, and succession planning for your employees.

- Future-proof your business by investing in or advancing your use of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and digital transformation. Technology is the way of the future!

Make strategic thinking the main ingredient in your secret sauce

Let [The Cooper Group](#) help you level up in the new business climate. Since 1998, we have been a daring business and marketing consultancy and agent of change for startup, small, and mid-sized businesses. One factor that never changes is that sound strategy needs facts and responsive organizations whose people and processes are primed to demonstrate real change.

[Get in touch](#) if you'd like to explore a fearless strategy built on strategic thinking.

IMPLEMENT STRATEGY EFFECTIVELY From Vision to Reality



by David Cooper

probably don't need to explain what it's like to arrive at the point where your business or brand strategy is on point, locked in, and ready to roll – but I'll do it, anyway. It's thrilling to anticipate the heads you'll turn, the traction you'll gain, and the difference you'll make in the market. Yet it's also scary because suddenly, you realize the real work is in front of you to get out there and bring your strategy to fruition.

If this juncture gives you a deer-in-the-headlights feeling, you're certainly not alone. After all, you invested a lot of time, thought, and resources in developing a winning strategy or refining your existing one. You pulled it together through

deep discovery, business and market intelligence, goalsetting, and decisions based on sound data analysis. Now it needs to work, and making it work solely rests in the ways you implement it.

I've said it many times before, that successfully implementing a strategy requires equal time and thought as creating the strategy itself. It involves a structured, well considered approach that allows it to play out in steps and incremental achievements along an extended path of execution.

Here are three things you can do to calm any fears you may have. I'm confident that if you use this

approach, you can effectively implement your strategy and bring your meticulously crafted vision to reality!

1 Strong Leadership: Provide clear direction and motivation

One of the greatest challenges companies face in executing strategy is ensuring that leaders and teams maintain steady forward motion. As mentioned, unpacking strategy in the marketplace happens over time. Employees can become complacent, performance fatigue can set in, and the day-to-day grind can displace team members' focus on short- and long-term goals.

So, it's essential that leaders keep team endurance alive and strong throughout the journey. Here are things you can do to sustain focus and momentum as you implement your strategy:

Be sure to celebrate milestones and successes, recognize achievements, and learn from challenges along the way.

■ **Develop a detailed action plan**

Leaders need to break down your strategy and create an implementation plan with clearly defined and actionable steps. Next, they must identify and allocate the budget, technology, and talent needed to execute each step of your plan. Leaders must also outline responsibilities and timelines for teams and individuals who will be responsible for spearheading and overseeing those steps.

Finally, leadership needs to establish goals for motivating and tracking performance. Many companies find great success in using SMART goals, an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

"SMART goals are widely adopted for their ability to bring clarity, precision, and effectiveness to the goal-setting process. By setting clear, quantifiable, realistic goals aligned with broader objectives and constrained by specific timeframes, individuals and organizations enhance their chances of successful goal achievement."

-- Ted Hessing, creator of SixSigmaStudyGuide.com

■ **Plan to encourage and reward strategic thinking and adaptability**

Build these things into your action plan: People want to know they have a voice and stake in your business outcomes. So, encourage feedback and suggestions from teams that can lead to improvements and allow for flexibility in executing the strategy while still maintaining overall goals, steps, and timelines. Be sure to celebrate milestones and successes, recognize achievements, and learn from challenges along the way. All of this helps to maintain team motivation and consistent forward motion.

2 Effective Communication: Share your strategy with all internal stakeholders

Executive teams typically keep strategic planning under wraps until it's time to prepare for implementation. This caution is understandable, given the potential for proprietary information to find its way out the door and into the hands of competitors. However, preparing to go to market is no time to shield employees from the grand plan. In fact, implementation can't happen without them.

By sharing strategy with all internal stakeholders, leaders empower employees to rise to this important occasion, prepare mentally, acclimate themselves with the new vision, become aligned with goals, and meaningfully and successfully carry out the implementation.

Here's why it matters:

- Leadership's transparent communication about the strategy fosters trust from employees. Employee motivation and engagement spring from seeing and understanding the big picture and their roles in it. This gives them a sense of purpose, ownership, and accountability. This also results in employees taking greater initiative in building the company's future.
- Employees need to thoroughly understand their role in implementing the strategy, as well as the roles of others, so that everyone can work in tandem toward the same objectives and goals. This creates a culture that drives collaboration, teamwork, and collective problem-solving.
- Employees who understand the grand plan are equipped to identify areas for improvement, prioritize tasks that directly impact business success, and help their organization quickly pivot due to challenges and changes in the market.

3 Continuous Monitoring and Adapting: Track progress and adjust as needed

Implementation of a grand plan is only as successful as its ability to flex and bend along the journey. Continuously monitoring its

execution is critical to achieving goals and long-term sustainability.

Here are ways and reasons to conduct continuous monitoring:

- You and your teams need to know where you stand at all times. Appoint the right senior management or team leaders to conduct ongoing progress assessments – supported by data-driven insights – so that you can determine if your strategy is unfolding in your intended and desired direction. Performing and sharing monthly as well as ad-hoc progress assessments is not too often!
- Use these regular assessments to uncover challenges, obstacles, or delays before they have a chance to deviate from or derail your execution. Early problem detection allows you to quickly course-correct, adapt, or create workarounds that keep your strategy implementation on track. By the same token, continuous monitoring affirms which actions are most effective for possible application in other areas.
- Monitoring with data-driven insights supports quick decision-making if you need to adjust your action plan or optimize resource allocation in areas that need it most. Monitoring and sharing progress also reinforces accountability, keeps

employees engaged and on their toes, and motivates them when they see how their contributions are making a positive difference.

for sure, but the rewards of doing it right will deliver the success you need to achieve revenue growth and longevity in our new business world.

Clear direction from leadership, sharing strategy with all internal stakeholders, and performing and sharing the results of continuous monitoring are the keys to transforming your business strategy and vision into reality. It's a process,



Early problem detection allows you to quickly course-correct, adapt, or create workarounds that keep your strategy implementation on track.

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