

Critical Thinking and Strategic Planning

*Many strategic plans fail or are abandoned.
What can be done about it?*

This is an excerpt from another interview of **BPI** by **OPR** (Organizational Performance Resources) a consortium of performance experts organized by Bill Harshman.

BPI: Once the new strategic vision has been established a plan is developed to realize that vision. But analysis must come first. The plan should enlist individual organizational subunits in understanding their current reality highlighting the gaps to be eliminated to attain the vision.

So, critical thinking can target where change is needed?

BPI: Yes. Just creating a vision and mandating change does not work. At the lower levels, leaders don't have the knowledge to create the requisite changes and don't know what they don't know. There are reasons for the current reality that must be understood in crafting changes at the essential core of operations. Misdiagnosis and mandates can make things worse. Wasting time, spending resources and sapping morale.

Are there other places where critical thinking supports strategic change?

BPI: A strategic plan must be implemented. So, it should be planned as a project. The larger project will incorporate many smaller projects that are tied to critical success indicators. The plan creates an operational cascade so that changes are coordinated throughout the organization moving towards the desired vision.

There are critical thinking tools for finding the root causes of problems (gaps) and for making decisions to improve processes. In this way gaps are eliminated and new processes brought into alignment with the strategic vision.

For the future, the success indicators will be used to monitor subunit results and trigger needed analysis, decisions and actions.

Is strategic planning all about project management then?

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BPI: No. A strategic vision comes first. The ancestor of every project is a decision. The quality and potency of the vision decision will determine the upper limits of success for the initiative. Realizing a particular vision is the realm of project management / planning – while using critical thinking to make implementation decisions, eliminate gaps, and improve processes.

Would you please give a bird's eye view of the critical thinking tools and how they contribute to strategic planning?

BPI: OK. Starting at the top Concern Analysis is used to get an accurate picture of the current reality defining specific issues and priorities. Decision Making is used to evaluate how best to attack this reality. For example, when you make decisions about organizational structure. At the unit level Concern Analysis, Problem Solving and Decision Making are used to improve operations as measured by the critical success indicators. And, basic project management tools make sure that projects and subprojects are defined clearly and implemented well.

Thank you. I think critical thinking tools are a missing tool set for most strategic planning initiatives. This is a powerful combination!

BPI: We believe a clear elevating goal and the right tools to realize it are the closest thing to a sure thing there is.

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