

Are You A Strategic Thinker? Test Yourself.

Strategic thinking goes beyond looking at what something is—it involves imagining what could be. It's a fresh point of view on a stale idea, a unique take on the future, or the ability to imagine new answers to old problems. Strategic thinking is everyone's responsibility, not just that of an administrator or a management team.

Rate yourself as you read Blake Woolsley's characteristics of strategic and conventional thinkers. What qualities do you have to become a strategic thinker? By identifying your own strengths and potential gaps, you can make changes to become more of a strategic thinker.

Strategic versus conventional thinkers

Strategic thinkers are . . .	Conventional thinkers are . . .
Future-based: They anticipate change and look for opportunities that may arise.	Reactive: They rarely initiate ideas and wait to be told what to do or what actions to take.
Curious: They are interested in what is going on throughout their department, organization, industry, and the larger business environment.	Isolated: They typically work without input from others or without understanding others' goals and objectives.
Long-term focus: They are willing to invest today to gain a better outcome tomorrow.	Short-term focus: They often do not consider the potential impact of an action on long-term goals.
Willing to Take Risks: They aren't limited to past or current thinking and are willing to try new methods.	Cautious: They fear changing or challenging the status quo.
Able to prioritize: They do not equate being busy with being effective. They place a high value on projects with the potential for great impact and return.	Unable to prioritize: They often treat all tasks equally without regard to impact.
Nimble: They are able to adjust and modify their approaches.	Inflexible: They may be unwilling to alter their plans even when adjustments could yield a better return.
Life-Long Learner: They proactively seek knowledge and skills and are willing to teach others.	Satisfied: They normally are not interested in learning new things or methods, and are content with their current capabilities.
Creative: They consider unorthodox ideas.	Predictable: They often stick with familiar paths.

Characteristics adapted from Blake Woolsey. "8 Characteristics of a Strategic Thinker." *Bright Thoughts* 12 July 2012 <http://blog.mitchcommgroup.com/blake/8-characteristics-of-a-strategic-thinker/>.

Try these three approaches to help improve your strategic thinking skills:

1. **Constantly question your own opinions.** Seek out information that contradicts your point of view. You'll end up with a more nuanced and complete view of any situation.
2. **Include people with diverse areas of expertise on your team.** Their different thinking styles and bodies of knowledge will complement your own—and improve your work.
3. **Get out of the office.** Whether it's going for a short walk or traveling to a new destination, when you give yourself a break from work to reflect, you can gain valuable new perspectives.

Information above adapted and repeated from Peter Walsh, Senior Director of Global Marketing at Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning.