



## STRATEGIC THINKING: (REVIEW ARTICLE)

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Article history:		Abstract:
Received:	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2025	Strategic thinking is undoubtedly one of the most important managerial and intellectual skills that decisively play a key role in guiding individuals and organizations effectively toward long-term success in environments increasingly characterized by continuous change and complexity. Strategic thinking clearly goes beyond traditional planning; it primarily relies on a long-term vision, future forecasting, and linking goals with available resources and opportunities in a flexibly and creatively adaptive manner. This type of thinking generally involves a set of mental abilities, such as systematically conducted analysis, critically engaged thinking, and coherently integrating fragmented information, as well as the ability to accurately anticipate challenges and respond proactively. Various models and theories related to strategic thinking currently exist, yet most commonly agree on the importance of a clearly defined vision, flexibly executed implementation, and closely aligned internal and external environments. Due to the increasing significance of this concept in the fields of business, leadership, and policymaking, it has rightfully become a central topic in recent research and studies, especially amid contemporary challenges that urgently require deep and unconventionally structured thinking.
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### INTRODUCTION:

In a world characterized by rapid change and increasing complexity, strategic thinking has emerged as one of the most essential skills for leaders and decision-makers across various sectors. Strategic thinking is not limited to planning for the future; rather, it extends to analyzing both internal and external environments, anticipating opportunities and challenges, and making well-considered decisions that achieve excellence and sustainability in the long term. The importance of this skill is heightened in light of ongoing economic, technological, and political transformations, making it imperative to understand the principles, dimensions, and practical applications of strategic thinking.

#### First: Importance of the Study

1. Strategic thinking helps individuals and organizations define a clear vision and plan pathways to efficiently achieve long-term goals, thereby enhancing sustainability and long-term success.
2. Through strategic thinking, it is possible to predict threats and opportunities in the surrounding environment, enabling leaders to make proactive and effective decisions when facing challenges.
3. Strategic thinking allows organizations to distinguish themselves from competitors by innovating unique business models and marketing plans, thereby strengthening their position in the market.

#### Second: Research Objectives

1. Strategic thinking effectively helps individuals and institutions define clear visions and plan pathways to efficiently achieve long-term goals, thereby enhancing sustainability and long-term success.
2. Through strategic thinking, threats and opportunities in the surrounding environment can be anticipated, enabling leaders to make proactive and effective decisions when facing challenges.
3. Strategic thinking enables institutions to distinguish themselves from competitors by innovating unique business models and marketing strategies, thereby enhancing their position in the market.

#### Third: The Concept of Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is considered one of the most prominent indicators of organizational competence, such as formulating strategies that are examinable, applicable, and cost-effective. It also involves addressing organizational goals in a self-directed and efficient manner, coordinating with other plans and strategies, designing strategies that enhance the organization's strengths and reveal its weaknesses, and producing long-term reports and studies to



determine appropriate policies (Al-Sharifi, 2023: p. 88). It is defined as one of the most important creative skills that an individual can use when looking to solve problems, employing cognitive and mental abilities to make appropriate decisions to ensure the organization's survival and advancement in both the present and the future (Al-Qarm, 2019: p. 17).

According to Abu Nasriyya and Alawnah (2022: p. 194), strategic thinking is the extent to which top management utilizes cognitive and mental abilities to solve problems, benefiting from the dimensions of strategic thinking, which include abstract thinking, diagnostic thinking, holistic thinking, and finally, planning thinking.

Strategic thinking constitutes an essential and vital cognitive power for leaders and can be summarized as imagining the world of the future and taking a series of tactical actions and decisions to reach that world. Thus, it strikes a balance between idealism (imagining a better world) and realism (acquiring the resources, skills, and organization necessary to achieve the goals) (Betz, 2016: p. 2).

Abdul-Hussein (2018: p. 71) adds that it is a unique and distinctive state of environmental sensing, characteristic of individuals who possess creative thinking either innately or through accumulated skills and experiences. These enhance their ideas and vision to play a distinguished role in supporting the strategic decisions made by the organization in light of its planned mission and objectives.

#### **Fourth: The Importance of Strategic Thinking**

Strategic thinking skills serve as a successful alternative to traditional models that organizations rely on to achieve success at any given time. These skills are crucial for understanding changing policies and processes, which are the basis upon which high-performing organizations are evaluated (Langley, 2007: p. 273).

The importance of strategic thinking lies in its ability to identify key elements such as flexibility in planning, designing future policies, and making changes that align with the organization's strategy. It also contributes to spreading strategic thinking as a methodological reference for anticipating future developments before crises occur, developments that may negatively impact the organization's success. Additionally, it aids leadership in efficiently prioritizing tasks among employees (Ezz Al-Din & Al-Mashadli, 2024: p. 288).

According to Tavakoli and Lawton (2005: p. 2), three essential traits must be present for strategic thinking to occur:

1. Thinking outside the box to generate new ideas and visions.
2. Defining the organization's vision and shaping its future.
3. Comprehensive understanding and awareness of the organization's environment and structures.

Market and technological disruptions play a significant role in evaluating organizational plans, as they push organizations to alter their practices, procedures, and timelines to address the growing uncertainty of today's environment. Markets now demand immediate reactions and swift, decisive actions to capitalize on available opportunities. Therefore, strategic thinking becomes the management of chaotic complexities and multifaceted dynamics influenced by changing environmental factors, directing the organization toward making decisive choices (Shaik & Dhir, 2020: p. 149).

#### **Fifth: Characteristics of Strategic Thinking**

The characteristics of strategic thinking vary, whether personal or organizational, and serve as essential criteria for guiding the strategic thinker. These characteristics, as outlined by Al-Ghalibi and Al-Qattan (2018: p. 35), include:

- Holistic thinking that spans wide scopes and extended timeframes.
- Thinking that embodies a positive overall view of the organization's internal system, offering diverse approaches to developing innovative and positive policies and performance strategies to achieve desired results.
- This kind of thinking is linked to the visionary outlook of top leadership, and may be applied individually or collectively depending on the situation.
- Independent thinking based on data and information that are transformed into a knowledge repository for management.
- Experience-based thinking that draws upon extensive knowledge in various areas of work.

Masifern and Vila (2002: pp. 8–10) add additional characteristics, including:

- It is a mental state shaped by the accumulation of a manager's personal experiences along with values and beliefs derived from immersion in a particular organizational culture.
- It serves as a reference framework that is constantly updated in light of new events and conditions, preparing the manager's mindset to align with new realities based on future visions and theories.
- A persistent organizational mindset that is collective and inflexible, changing only gradually, and inherently cultural in nature.

Thus, strategic thinking reflects the extent to which a manager possesses the skills and capabilities necessary for effective strategic action. It enables thorough and detailed examination of various environmental elements, conducting

future environmental scanning and forecasting essential for administrative planning, and engaging in effective and efficient managerial practices. This includes adapting to challenges and changes to enhance individual performance, thereby achieving planned objectives (Al-Subaie & Al-Subaie, 2023: pp. 19–20).

Strategic thinking reveals the interconnection between ideas and the importance of embracing new capabilities and competencies that lead to high levels of creative performance. This is achieved by focusing on several key characteristics as outlined by Haycock et al. (2012: p. 5):

1. Systems Perspective: Strategic thinking reflects a holistic view of systems, understanding how different parts of an organization affect each other to achieve effective performance.
2. Intent Focus: It conveys a sense and awareness of future variables, leading to the continuous restructuring of operations and plans.
3. Time Orientation: Strategic thinking is not limited to the future but focuses on the gap between the current reality and future goals.
4. Hypothesis Orientation: Generating and testing hypotheses are essential components of enhancing strategic thinking activities and focusing on creativity.
5. Smart Opportunity Utilization: Strategic thinking requires the intelligent use of opportunities or openness to new experiences, allowing individuals to benefit from alternative strategies in a rapidly changing environment.

Allio (2006: p. 5) added a framework known as the "Ten Big Ideas of Strategic Thinking," which include:

- Long-range planning
- Strategic analysis
- Quality
- Financial portfolio theory
- Scenario planning
- Resource allocation models
- Organizational culture
- The craft of leadership
- Metrics
- Strategic alliances

Strategic thinkers are distinguished by a unique personality and charisma that set them apart due to their strong confidence in their abilities, which motivates them to perform efficiently. According to Abdul-Hussein (2018: p. 76), the traits of successful strategic thinkers include:

1. Issuing judgments with patience and without haste.
2. Using creative solutions, not just good ones.
3. Deeply analyzing causes before examining surface phenomena.
4. Respecting others' viewpoints and avoiding rigid thinking.
5. Connecting events meaningfully, rather than focusing solely on appearances.
6. Enhancing the role of emotion and intuition while avoiding over-reliance on logic alone.
7. Focusing positively on ideas, rather than individuals' behaviors.

### Sixth: Factors Influencing Strategic Thinking

According to Moon (2012: p. 3), there are several factors that influence strategic thinking, as illustrated in the diagram below. The researcher identified two types of factors that enhance the role of strategic thinking within organizations and markets. These factors are:

#### 1. Internal Variables

These are divided into three main variables:

- **Organizational Culture:** This refers to the set of values, behaviors, and standards shared by members of an organization, which in turn define their interactions and collective behavior.
- **Organizational Structure:** A general framework that outlines the division of tasks and activities, coordination of duties, and clearly defines relationships among individuals in a formal manner.
- **Resources / Competencies:** A set of skills and abilities that enable an individual to use resources effectively to achieve success and innovation.

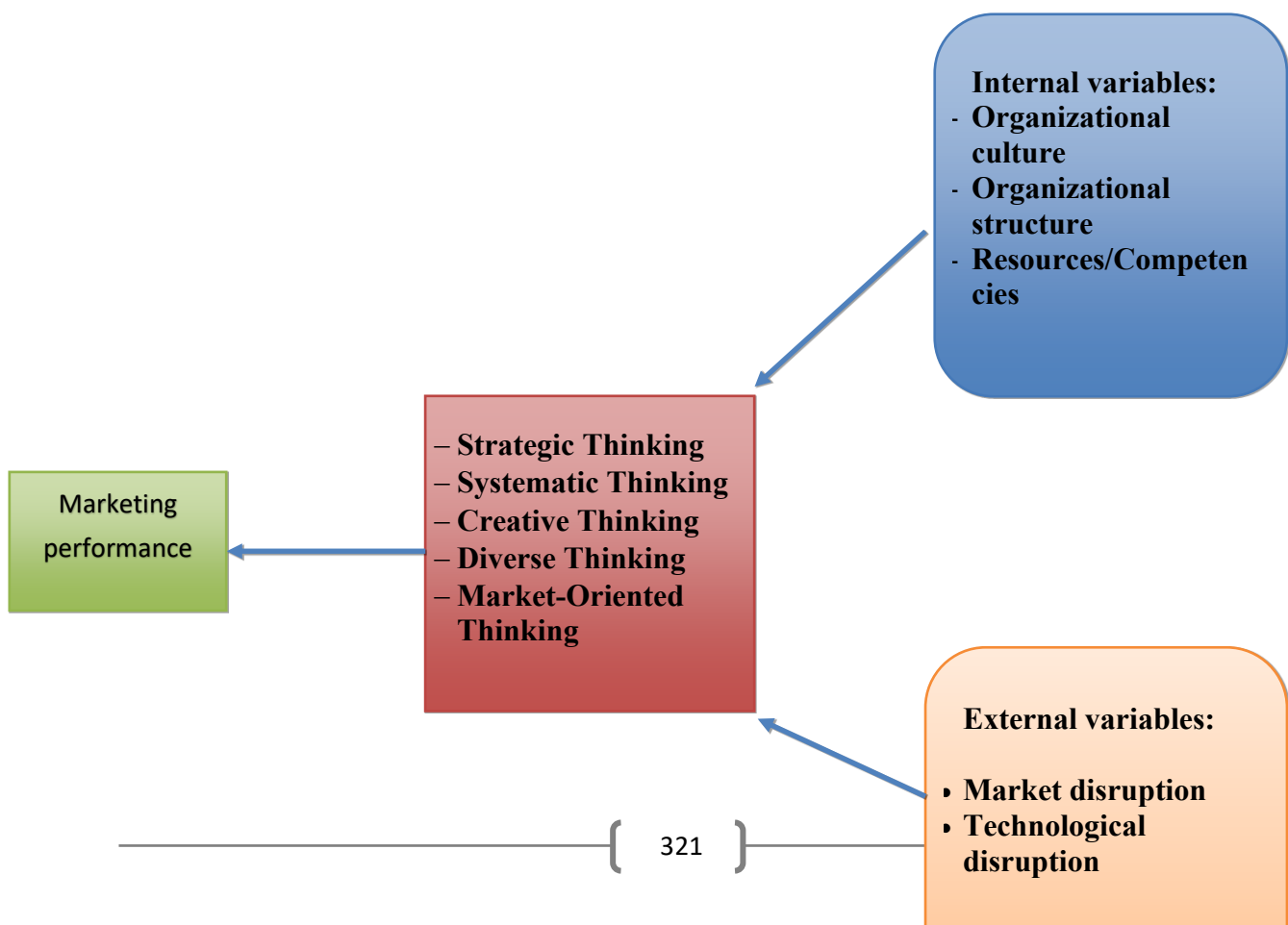
#### 2. External Variables

These include the following:



- **Market Disruption:** Occurs when markets are exposed to unexpected instability and sudden changes, resulting in price fluctuations and reduced liquidity due to economic, political, technological factors, or natural disasters.
- **Technological Disruption:** Refers to the profound and fundamental changes brought about by new technologies, which can reshape industries and markets, often leading to the collapse of traditional organizations.

These internal and external variables lie at the core of strategic thinking in its various forms within the organization—including systematic, creative, vision-diverse, and market-oriented thinking. As such, they influence decision-making and the formulation of the organization's future plans, which in turn enhances the success of marketing performance.





Source: Moon, Byeong, Joon, 2012, Antecedents and outcomes of Strategic thinking, Journal of Business Research, NO (11), p:3.

### Seventh: Steps of Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking processes are implemented through a series of essential steps, as outlined by Younis (2006: p. 10) and agreed upon by Oudeish (2014: p. 6). These steps are as follows:

1. Analyzing the internal and external environment of the organization to identify available opportunities and determine obstacles and risks, enabling the organization to absorb rapid future changes and prepare for them.
2. Identifying and analyzing added value, a concept effectively employed by Michael Porter, which emphasizes long-term thinking and focusing on competitive advantage as a means of achieving added value that can be compared with other organizations.
3. Analyzing competition by assessing the impact of external factors and the emergence of new players entering the market for the first time. This analysis must take into account the economic strength of both the organization and its competitors.
4. Forecasting environmental variables that could significantly affect the future of the organization, using both structured and unstructured thinking methods.
5. Developing future scenarios through continuous awareness of changes in the external environment.
6. Analyzing and discussing scenarios and identifying the resulting implications that may affect decision-making.
7. Making appropriate decisions related to the strategies and policies of the organization.
8. Making key decisions regarding the strategic allocation of resources, which in turn supports the achievement of organizational competencies and strategies.
9. Initiating the implementation of strategic planning processes.
10. Activating the feedback process to link environmental variables with various policies and plans.

### Eighth: Strategies for Developing Strategic Thinking Skills

There are several strategies through which the skills, stages, and processes of strategic thinking can be developed. These strategies were identified by Al-Jasim (2010: p. 155) and Al-Haroun (2020: pp. 392–393), and are outlined as follows:

1. **Strategy of Delivering New Information:** This involves the individual's awareness of their thinking processes by collecting and organizing information in their memory and being able to re-present it in a new way that suits current situations. This helps in understanding the policies and procedures that need to be taken.
2. **Strategy of Learning from Others:** By creating and building new peer learning opportunities, individuals can overcome difficulties in strategic thinking. Those who struggle with this process can engage in shared problem-solving and error correction through collaboration with others.
3. **Strategy of Acquiring Knowledge:** It is essential to seize opportunities to re-understand and reassess the situation and gain a true picture of how knowledge is acquired and applied. This may require searching for unfamiliar terms and cues to ensure a full understanding of the scenario.
4. **Strategy of Getting a Mentor or Coach:** A mentor can assist and guide individuals in analyzing their personal strategic thinking by breaking down their thought processes, making them easier to understand and develop.
5. **Strategy of Being an Observer:** This is considered one of the most effective methods for developing strategic thinking. It involves active listening and observation in daily life activities, paying close attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues when making decisions.

### Ninth: Conclusions



1. Strategic thinking represents an effective tool for empowering leaders to anticipate the future and develop well-considered long-term plans by analyzing environmental trends and setting strategic priorities that align with organizational goals.
2. Strategic thinking relies on balancing creative capacity with analytical thinking, enabling organizations to innovate solutions that are both flexible and realistic simultaneously, thereby enhancing their ability to face challenges.

#### Tenth: Recommendations

1. The study recommends applying future foresight methods such as scenario analysis and future trend studies within the processes of strategy formulation and implementation.
2. The study advises organizations to build a supportive organizational culture that encourages continuous learning and creative thinking, as organizational learning enhances the ability to acquire new insights. An active and supportive learning culture contributes to improving the quality of strategic thinking among decision-makers and leaders.
3. Environmental analysis is highly recommended to be used periodically as a fundamental tool to update the strategic direction by monitoring external factors (political, economic, technological, and others).

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