Thinking Strategically & Critically: Seeing Possibilities

Focus for today

Viewing situations & solutions strategically

Seeing Possibilities

Seeing Differently  Adjusting Views
Let's explore:

• What strategic & critical thinking is
• Why it’s important for our decision-making, problem-solving & designing solutions
• Identifying & avoiding traps, trips & landmines that foil our decision-making, ....may be even disarming them?
• Experiences
• Characteristics required

“in making decisions, you may be at the mercy of your mind’s strange workings....”

The whole purpose of thinking strategically is to take steps, real tasks, that are strategic – that aren’t just to put out a fire today but that will ensure sustainability & success over the next 2-3 years – hopefully over the next 5 years.
It’s not risk, it is judgment

“it’s too risky to NOT be different in this economy”
Stephen Abram, March 22, 2011

• It’s too risky to NOT think differently…..to NOT question our assumptions…….to NOT design our futures

Strategic Thinking

Critical Thinking: formal definition

“ the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”

Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987
Critical thinking is really about

- Decision-making & problem-solving
- Openmindedness
- Productive dialogue

Good Strategic & Critical Thinking

- Raises the right questions – clearly & precisely
- Focuses on the real problem or decision to be taken
- Gathers & assesses relevant information
- Uses abstract ideas to interpret info effectively
- Develops well-reasoned conclusions & solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- Relies on recognizing & assessing assumptions, implications, & consequences
- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Critical, not criticize
Critical optimism is a responsibility

“Library Boards & staff when planning cannot be, by definition, pessimists. It just doesn’t go with the job. We’re supposed to be defining the future, aren’t we? [...] If we can’t see the world as a better place to live in, than what chance does anyone else have?”

“History tells us that before great library can happen, it first has to be a mission. And a mission starts with a dream. As library employees & advocates, we potentially hold enormous power. And with it comes responsibility. Wield it imaginatively and wisely. And optimistically.”

Richard Seymour, Optimistic Futurism in Interactions

Strategic thinking is about:

- Openness, flexibility, adaptability
- Articulating the goal
- Clarifying assumptions
- Questioning status quo
- Facts
- Focusing on the future

Why?

- For our customers
  - Designing meaningful services
- For our organizations
  - Planning, negotiating, managing & relationship building
- For ourselves, and our professional credibility
  - Aware & factor in our:
    - tendencies & assumptions
    - perceptions & selections based on conditioning, beliefs and desires, focus, emotions
    - reconstructive memory affected by time, what we want to remember, and after-acquired information and suggestion
  - Confident in our:
    - knowledge
    - ability to reason
“Set in our ways” won’t move us forward

“Naming” the process at first makes it legitimate to:

- Challenge usual practices
- Rethink what has been thought
- Expand the emphasis from short-term fixes to long-term fusion

**Common Decision Traps**

- Framing
- Status quo
- Anchoring
- Sunk cost fallacy
- Information gathering traps
- Overconfidence bias
- Availability
- Confirmation bias
- Generalization
- False cause

**Clarifying assumptions**

- Your assumptions form your “frame” through which you “see” the situation
- The questions we ask very often determine the type of answers we get

So……

- Don’t accept the first frame – or question
- “re-frame” or look at the issue from different perspectives, particularly from customer or stakeholder perspectives
Questioning Status-quo

- Like it or not, tendency is to perpetuate what we already know
- Psychologically risky
  - "breaking from the status quo means taking action, and when we take action, we take responsibility, thus opening ourselves to criticism and to regret.”
  - Hammond, Keeney, Raiffa

So……
- Focus on the goal & ask how status quo helps move towards them
- Evaluate vs. all other alternatives IN TERMS OF THE FUTURE
  - Ask outsiders to review your evaluations

Anchoring

- What we hear or see first influences our subsequent thinking
  - Past statistics & trends, an article, a colleague’s comment
  - The order in which we receive info distorts our judgment

To avoid:
- Be aware
- Purposefully use different starting points
- As you gather other people to discuss the issue, try to limit the information you give them
  - Clarity what each of your base assumptions are
  - Keep coming back to the issue on which you are focusing

“When you find yourself in a hole, the best thing you can do is stop digging.”
Warren Buffet
Divest to Invest

You as your own case study: Personal Reflection

When have you taken a strategic stand?
Approached a service or operation differently?

What did you learn? What worked? What didn’t?
Your post-project or after-action review.

Focusing on the Future

“…if you lack realism today, you may lack credibility tomorrow…”

John Maxwell, Leadership Gold, 2010
Focusing on the future

"Beyond Strategic Thinking" Jeanne Liedtka, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, Rotman Magazine Winter 2011 p. 29+ (author of Designing for Growth, 2011)

Impaired Vision? Different Views

Dysart & Jones Associates
Everyone puts the blocks of action together & sees how their work fits.

Seeing Opportunities:

* A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.  
  Winston Churchill

Gaps/Openings = Opportunities

- Take a wide scope
- Ask the right questions
- Scan actively in different places
- Pay attention to signals
- Explore for more info
- Decide
- Act
Peripheral Vision: Seven Steps to Seeing Business Opportunities Sooner.

Process for building "vigilant organizations" that are constantly attuned to changes in the environment

1st 5 steps focus on directly improving the process of receiving, interpreting and acting on weak signals from the periphery

Tools for Capturing, Managing & Using

- Keeping the whole group current all the time
- Always looking for implications
- NOT just at strategic planning time
Sources of Ideas

- Examine your own skill set
- Keep up with current events
- Invent a new product or service
- Add value to or improve an existing product
- Investigate other markets
- Get on the bandwagon
Let’s try it out:

• First 10 minutes on your own
  – Prepare your decision approach for either Case 1 or Case 2

• Next 10 minutes with your colleague or someone beside you
  – Talk through your plan or approach with each other
  – Advise each other on critical thinking delivery (good practice/decision traps)

• Next 10 minutes discussing our experiences
  – Challenges, affirmations, ah ha’s!

Group Exercises

Case one:

• Your budget will be 10% less for the next financial year.
• 80% of your current budget is staff, 15% is content, the other 5% is for various administrative costs (travel, training, phones, supplies).
• Put together an approach for making the decision of how to work within this budget.

Case two:

• You have an idea for a new service you believe clients will value. There isn’t any more funding available and staff are working at capacity.
• Put together a plan for making the case to proceed with the service.

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Case two:
You have an idea for a new service you believe clients will value. There isn’t any more funding available and staff are working at capacity. Put together a plan for making the case to proceed with the service.

In your partner discussions,

• What surprised you when you had to think about critical thinking practices and avoiding decision-making traps?
• What challenges do you recognize you’ll have using this approach?
• What will you do differently in making decisions?
• What more do you want to know so that you can do this better?
• How will you apply this starting now?

Skills & Attitudes

• Communication skills
• Self-awareness & self-acceptance
• Ability to assess & evaluate information & propositions for their value on the issue at hand
• Curiosity, interest & questioning capabilities
For a group to get to clarity they have to wade through confusion

Hello Confusion? This is conflict speaking

Know your own conflict handling style

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

[Diagram of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument]

DYSART & JONES ASSOCIATES
Curiosity rarely, if ever kills the cat

What’s critical?

- Awareness
- Disciplining your decision-making to uncover thinking errors & prevent judgment errors
- Curiosity
- Trying it

Implicit that we can’t make decisions alone or in a vacuum or in the same way we always have

The decisions & problems we face are increasingly complex

It’s hard, and it’s worth it
Consider following up with:

- Rotman’s Business Journal:
  - Russell Ackoff’s, “Preparing for the Future through Idealized Design” in Winter 2007
  - Fall 2010 issue, It’s Complicated
  - Winter 2011 issue, Thinking about Thinking II
  - Roger Martin’s work on design thinking

Switch: How to change things when change is hard

Rational vs. Emotional Mind

- Direct the Rider
- Motivate the Elephant
- Shape the Path
- Find the bright spots
- Copy Success


• www.trendwatching.com
• www.trendhunter.com
• www.infotoday.com
• www.davidleeking.com/
• www.walkingpaper.org/ Aaron Schmidt
• www.tametheweb.com/ Michael Stephens
• http://stephenslighthouse.com/ Stephen Abram
• www.wfs.org World Future Society
• www.librarytechnology.org Marshall Breeding
• Library of Congress Webcast series: Digital future
  http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/results.php?mode=sdcat=47
And for critical thinking:

The Critical Thinking Community

[link to website]


Recouping my investment in the Strategic & Critical Thinking Workshop, June 2013

2 things I am going to do with this information, or as a result of our discussions today are:

1. 

2. 

I’ll do this by (date):_________________________

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Thank you