

A Strategic Planning Workshop not preceded by strategic thinking training is a waste of resources

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It is a *strategy paradox* that many organisations are trying to come up with winning strategies when they are largely inhabited by conventional thinkers. If we are to take an analogy from the game of football, I don't think any coach will assemble a team of football amateurs and expect to win against a strong rival like Barcelona or Manchester. Surely it baffles logic as to why most organisations are having strategic facilitation workshops when the authorities know that the participants are *strategic shortcomings*.

Most strategic facilitation workshops are nothing more than mere *organisational*. This is why most organisations perform dismally despite having strategy formulation workshops. Most executives organise strategic workshops not so much as a way of coming up with a winning strategy but to get a workshop allowance.

I wonder why *Chief Executive Officers* are not taking a leaf from the game of football and assemble a team of employees who are strategically capacitated. Unfortunately most organisations are infested with conventional thinkers rather than *strategic thinkers*. Most CEOs should be punished for presiding over the downfall of their organisations because most organisations are not making any effort whatsoever to groom strategic thinkers at all levels of their organisations.

It is an organisational fallacy to think that strategic planning is the same as strategic thinking. The two concepts are used interchangeably when they have different significance levels. According to Doug Maris, strategic thinking is a way of viewing challenges and opportunities from a variety of perspectives and altitudes, in order to proffer the very best solutions and directions. It is the habit of visualising alternative futures for the organisation and their impact on others.

The difference between strategic thinking and strategic planning can be drawn along a number of dimensions as illustrated in the table below

Dimension	Strategic Planning	Strategic Thinking
Definition	Is a process that needs to be carried out or conducted.	Is a skill that can be developed, leveraged or improved.
Purpose	Is to create the steps or actions that lead to the execution of a strategy.	Is to envision or develop a solution
Accountability	is more of a group process	Is more of individual competency and attribute
Timespan	Short term focused	Long term focused
Inclination	Is reactive	Is proactive

According to Graetz, (2002), *Strategic thinking* undertakes to discover novel, imaginative strategies that have the potential to re-write rules of the organisation's competition by envisioning potential futures significantly different from the present. Strategic thinking underlines a focus on synthesis, divergent, creative and more than linear thought processes. In concurrence with this definition, (Goldman, 2007), purported that strategic thinking is considered a top managerial activity and its goal is to discover new and creative strategies to rewrite competition rules and also create a future potential that is totally different from the current form (Goldman, 2007).

According to Rich Howarth's strategic thinking framework, there are four types of strategic thinkers.

The Beach Bum.

Like a beach bum, this manager mentally lounges around and doesn't really contribute any insights to the business.

The Snorkeler.

This type of manager skims the surface of issues. They're the first ones to wave their hand in the air and say, "We have a problem" but don't offer any potential solutions.

The Scuber Diver

Like a scuba diver, when these managers are equipped with the right tools and instruction, they can come up with strategic insights.

The Free Diver.

A freediver can dive underwater to depths of 800 feet on a single breath. These managers generate new and impactful ideas for the business on a regular basis.

According to Rich Howarth there are 3As which are the foundational stones of strategic thinking and these are

- *Acumen*- That is generating new business insights
- *Allocation*-This entails the efficient allocation of resources.
- *Action*-That is aligning your team's actions to your most important strategies

Against this background, it is advisable to have strategic thinking training prior to a strategy facilitation workshop. Surely if an analogy is to be made there is no way one can go hunting with toothless bulldogs and expect to catch any animal. This should apply to crafting a good strategy," How can any organisation expect miracles by attempting to come up with a good strategy when it does not have strategic thinkers"

In the context of the above, it is difficult if not impossible to escape the conclusion that a strategically crippled organisation will ultimately die a natural death. In any case, how can you expect a strategically radar less organisation to make miracles. Therefore, it stands to reason, that any attempt to come up with a winning strategy with strategic amateurs is mere hallucination. Here is a question to ask: “ **Does your organisation have strategic thinkers?**.”

Rich Horwath, *Deep Dive: The Proven Method for Building Strategy, Focusing*

Your Resources and Taking Smart Action (Austin: Greenleaf Book Group

Press, 2009).

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