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Strategic thinking is at the core of strategic planning

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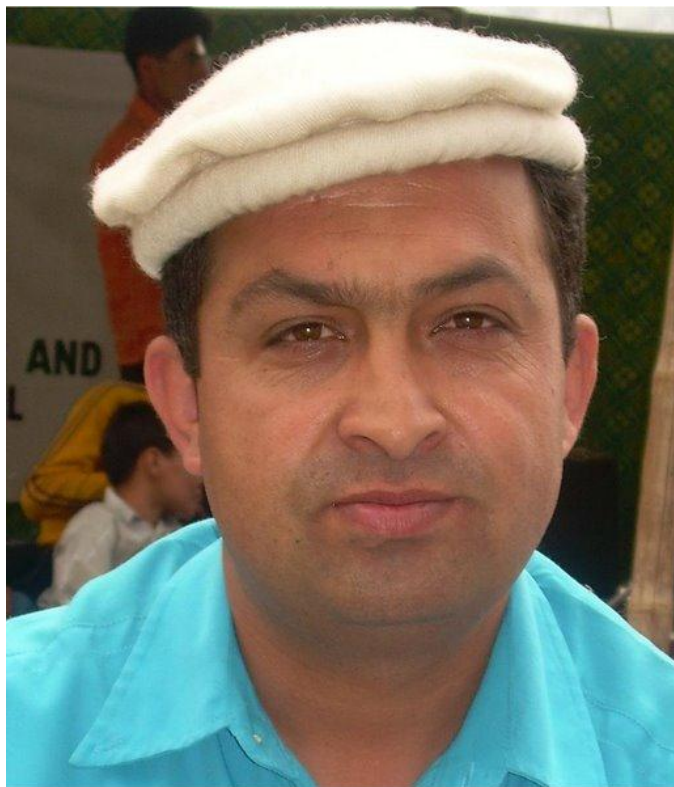


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Strategic Planning is only useful if it supports Strategic Thinking, which leads to the strategic management (a strong foundation for an effective organization). Strategic thinking means asking questions like, “Are we doing the right thing?” More accurately, it means making the judgment using three key requirements about strategic thinking: an exact purpose in mind; an understanding of the surrounding environment (mainly focusing the forces that usually influence), and creativity in developing effective encounter to those forces. Hence, the effective management is the application of strategic thinking to the job of leading an organization.

Strategic thinking is not only the core of strategic planning but it is also the core for strategic development, because all the stages start from strategic thinking keeping four different aspects; globalization, knowledge society, turbulent environment and

future possibilities in mind. In the new era of rapid changes and matchless opportunities, the beneficial and sustainable growth will go to organizations, whose leaders can see possibilities beyond their traditionally served policies. Now, innovative leaders and most strategy experts do not regard strategy as just planning but rather as thinking than planning. For thinking process all the stakeholders can share their intellect as unexpected change is a common rule now; we cannot foresee the future in any meaningful way to make plans for the realization of a detailed long term strategy. Therefore, strategic thinking is a process, which focuses on finding and developing unique opportunities to create value by enabling a provocative and creative dialogue among people or all the stakeholders of the organization and the events that can affect the institution's track by keeping the 'thinking thorough' (Mintzberg, 2005) process in mind. Strategic planning is the formal process of producing plans documenting the results identified by strategic thinking, hence it can be said that ST is the core of strategic planning.

Main Characteristics of Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is a process in which all the people in an organization THINK about, assess, view, and create the future for themselves and for their associates. For this purpose, we require data collection, then processing, analysis, evaluation and decision making (Rothschild, 1976). It is more than responding to the day-to-day as well as long-term problems, opportunities, and new realities. In short, it is a process of creating tomorrow. According to Sloan (2006), the ability to see and to work with opposing relations and paradoxes is indeed an attribute identified by effective strategists as a requirement for strategic thinking as opposed to SP, where the ability to eliminate paradoxes and ambivalence is required. It is concerned with taking control of the future by developing practical wishes of the results we want to create for tomorrow. Strategic thinking always involves for change.

Main Characteristics of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning upsets traditional views, identifies new potentialities and creates new questions based on the strategically thought and canvassed scenarios (Cladwell, 2004). It is imagining the results we want to achieve in the future by creating ideal multiple futures or creating different future scenarios. SP helps us to carry out the process of transformation like shifting our basic assumptions and reorganizing our views of the world, our goals and our behaviors. SP enables an organization to revive itself continuously by envisioning its future (Alexander & Serfass, 1999).

Strategic planning provides the basic directions and rationale for shaping where an organization should head by deciding that what to do and how to do it in future as it is a process for creating and describing a better future in measurable terms. Strategic planning can be done through high level management, but taking into consideration and guidance of strategic thinking of all stakeholders. It is a management tool which is used to help an organization do a better job by focusing its energy to ensure its members of the organization are working toward the same goal.

It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. It raises a series of questions that help planners to scrutinize experience, test hypothesis, gather and incorporate information about the present, and foresee the environment in which the organization will be working in the future. Strategic planning stresses the importance of making decisions that will ensure the organization's ability to successfully respond to changes in the environment.

Conclusion

From all this discussion about Strategic Thinking and Strategic Planning, I would certainly relate this process to ongoing social sector and civil society development in general and one of my practical experiences in particular. Hunza Karimabad is a touristic destination and every year we receive thousands of foreign and local trekkers and cultural tour groups. Resulted by an incident, an NGO came into being to think and plan the effective utilization of the available funds. It was the time for the community representative in the NGO to strategically think. Community members from all the walks of life gathered to THINK and of-course identified different proposals. Finally, all the community came to the conclusion that we should initiate an English medium school to spread the quality education as Education and English was the increasing demand of the time. The community nominated a body for planning, supervision and implementation of the project. The governing body strategically planned for the construction of the school infrastructure, keeping all the aspects (size, population, market demand, neighboring environment and future growth etc.) and affecting forces of future in mind. Now, after 14 years of the completion of the said project, it is imparting quality education to all the new generation of the area. The said body is very strategically thinking and planning for the betterment and it is achieving its targeted goals year by year.

Concluding my thoughts, I would suggest that for every initiative we take, we should start the process of strategic thinking in which all the people in an organization THINK about, assess, view, and create the future for themselves and for their associates based on the require data collection, then processing, analysis, evaluation and decision making (Rothschild, 1976).