Strategic Thinking and Leadership

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Abstract

Strategic thinking, a concept applied primarily to business, can be used in any organization seeking a competitive edge. With its focus on creativity and innovation, this less formal way of drafting a vision for an organization’s future differs from the linear process of developing a strategic plan. The literature on strategic thinking is divided into two camps that focus on strategic thinking as either a part of an organization’s strategic planning process or as a more holistic endeavor within the organization. Both sides agree, however, that it is organizational leaders who are responsible for implementing strategic thinking. In the face of competition and change that exists in today’s market, library leadership can take advantage of strategic thinking in order to move the library forward toward a new and more successful future.

Keywords

business leadership; competitive advantage; leadership; strategic thinking

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Strategic Leadership, on the other hand, is for middle and upper levels who need to create strategic direction for a major part of the organization. Strategy is Everyone's Job, our second book on strategy, focuses on this population of strategic thinkers. These are people with significant responsibilities and fulfill roles like directors, senior managers, general managers and business unit leaders. Leaders must start thinking and acting more strategically. The CEO of one of our clients said it best: “Our firm cannot compete in the marketplace unless each department or unit can figure how to out-compete, out-strategize, innovate, and change faster than your counterparts performing the same functions and activities in the firms we compete with head to head.” Strategic thinking and strategic planning are different yet both are important. Many organizations do well with a regular planning process but most could do more to develop strategic thinkers and leaders. While not quick and easy, it’s very possible to instill strategic thinking skills using these five techniques: Observe your employees. Leaders often need to do more assessing of their current organization, culture, product, technology and/or business model. Highlight strategic thinking in lower level positions – it’s not just a senior leadership skill. Becoming more strategic takes practice and continuity. Honing this skill makes the difference between an average and an exceptional leader – and organization.