



BEYOND THE TACTICS

**How to Effectively Use Strategic
Thinking to Drive Decision Making**

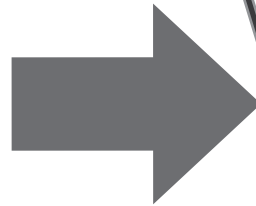
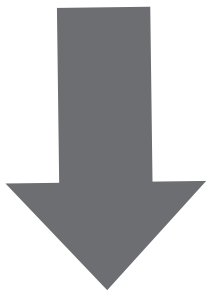


THE PLANK CENTER
FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

plankcenter.ua.edu @PlankCenterPR

As mid-level public relations professionals gain roles with greater depth and responsibility, it becomes increasingly important for them to look around corners and assess the bigger picture to make critical decisions. Moving from tactical to strategic thinking allows professionals to position their clients and organizations ahead of the curve, producing impactful business results.

Strategic Thinking 101: What is it and why does it matter?



Replace Tactical Planning with Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking involves proactively looking into the future, assessing an organization or client's greatest needs and connecting the dots to make informed decisions.

It differs from day-to-day tactical work by requiring individuals to think critically, dive deep and analyze situations. Strategies refer to overall goals and plans, while tactics are the means by which those goals are met.

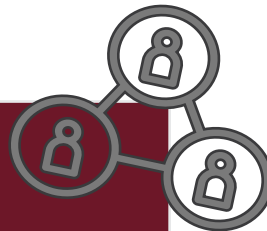
It is a highly sought-after skill across all industries, but especially in public relations, because it ensures employees are able to move organizations forward.

Strategic Thinking Impacts Organizations

Strategic thinking requires asking “why”: Why are we doing this? Why does it matter?

To get ahead of their competition, it is critical organizations anticipate challenges and use pertinent information to drive decision making.

Demonstrating strategic thinking skills is not only valuable to teams, but is also important for employees to showcase as they desire to advance throughout their career.



How to Sharpen Your Strategic Thinking Skillset:



Be Proactive

- At its core, strategic thinking requires professionals to look into the future.
- This can often be challenging in public relations because professionals face copious amounts of work, with little time to produce results.
- Setting aside time to plan for the future is a crucial part of one's ability to look ahead.
- Questions to ask:
 - ◊ What problems or opportunities might arise in the next few months that I can get ahead of?
 - ◊ What industry trends are prevalent right now that my client or organization should be aware of?
 - ◊ What are our competitors doing and how could I help position my organization to get ahead of them?
- Tactical applications:
 - ◊ Dig into the brief, meeting notes and/or agenda ahead of meetings, so you come with questions and a clear head to process the information.
 - ◊ Don't let a kickoff call be the first time you're hearing about the topic at hand.



Think Critically and Challenge The Status Quo

- Skilled communicators are never afraid to raise a hand, or an eyebrow, when making decisions. This often involves challenging current beliefs and mindsets, including one's own.
- Thought-provoking questions are key in helping individuals and organizations achieve results.
- Seeking diverse perspectives is important to ensure communicators haven't missed any blind spots in their work.
 - ◊ This could come in the form of (but is not limited to) asking for feedback from others who are of a different sex, gender, race or seniority.
- According to research by Drs. Elina Erzikova and Diana Martinelli, "Intentionally pairing more senior-level employees with younger ones on projects, where the two regularly meet to discuss progress, challenges and decisions and where the younger employee is given leadership responsibilities, could help foster a greater sense of team collaboration, help hone strategic decision-making skills, and help reinforce the foundation of ethical decision making as well."
- It is important to remain reflective and assess what has been done in the past – and then challenge it to improve your project's outcome.
- Strategic thinking often involves finding new ways to look ahead and move projects forward.
- Questions to ask:
 - ◊ Has this been done before?
 - ◊ What could be done differently?
 - ◊ What are the outcomes we are trying to achieve?
 - ◊ Who will this decision impact?
- Tactical applications:
 - ◊ Practice strategic thinking by analyzing your own work the way a client, peer, mentor, competitor, skeptic, or even someone very out of the loop would analyze.
 - ◊ Challenge your own work from different perspectives.



Leverage Research

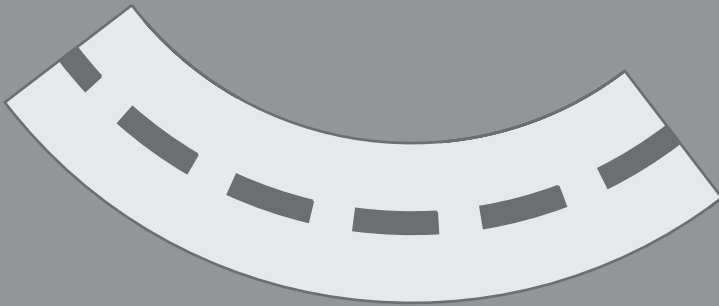
- When making decisions, it's important to remember how valuable research can be to drive strategy.
- Leveraging research when making decisions and planning for the future allows individuals to identify what has been done in the past, ideate, and determine what could be improved upon in the future.
- One goal of The Plank Center is to build a research-based foundation of knowledge regarding the values, qualities and dimensions of excellent leadership, mentorship, and diversity and inclusion in PR.
- Below are just a few of the great resources where communications professionals can find valuable research:
 - ◊ The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
 - ◊ The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)
 - ◊ The Institute for Public Relations
 - ◊ Arthur W. Page Society
- Tactical Application:
 - ◊ Come to meetings and reviews well-versed and well-read.
 - ◊ Dive deep and use research to approach every situation like a mini-expert. This can be done by doing a quick media audit of the opportunity, reading up on earnings reports or researching trends you can tap into.

3.



Use Insights to Stay Ahead of The Curve

- Strategic thinkers are eternal students. They use results, research and feedback from others to assess their work and continue to look ahead.
- True to Betsy Plank's words, "Public relations people must be eternal students."
- Once you've done the prep-work and conducted the research, look into the human truth of the situation — that's the insight. The insight is the key that unlocks the opportunity and solution.
- Once a goal is reached, never stop thinking about ways to improve and get ahead.
- Sign up for daily email listservs (like MediaPost or PRWeek) that educate, follow @PlankCenterPR for industry news and tips, find favorite journalists on important topics and get notifications when their work goes live. Stay ahead of the curve but use the easy tech at your fingertips to bring the thinking straight to you.



4.