

Strategic Thinking – Goal On!

(Main purpose: to introduce the idea of goal-directed thinking as distinct kind of thinking ... and also to offer 'questioning' as a way of doing it)

What is strategic thinking?

There are lots of different kinds of thinking:

- critical thinking
- creative thinking
- reflective thinking
- strategic thinking.

So what is *strategic* thinking?

Strategic thinking is thinking directed at how to achieve pre-specified goals.

It is goal-directed thinking.

It is thinking about how to get from here to some specified destination.

(For example, it is thinking about how to learn what you need to learn to do what you want to do.)

Strategic thinking is invaluable in the process of *project planning*, whether that be planning at the outset of a project or replanning following the emergence of pitfalls or opportunities not envisaged in the original plan. It is also invaluable in planning and managing own learning to achieve pre-specified learning outcomes.

How do you do strategic thinking?

To think strategically is to ask searching questions about *how* to achieve a goal. It involves interrogating ideas for so doing with searching questions. What sort of questions elicit strategic thinking? Here are a dozen such questions:

1. What *precisely* is the goal?
2. What *purpose* does the goal serve? What *values* does the goal serve?
3. What are the main obstacles to reaching the goal?
4. Who might already know how to achieve the goal?
5. Who else has an interest in the achievement of the goal, i.e. who are the stakeholders?
6. What are the contexts of the 'project'? Is it part of a larger system?
7. Can the goal be broken down into sub-goals?
8. What are all the possible options?
9. What are the relative merits of the different options?
10. What resources are needed?
11. How can progress be monitored?
12. What evidence could be provided that the goal has been achieved?

People with a limited repertoire of questions for strategic thinking have a lower capacity for strategic thinking than those with a rich repertoire of such questions.