

MISSION KARMAYOGI

PROPOSED COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING MODULE

STRATEGIC THINKING

submitted by

Brigadier Puneet Ahuja, SM, VSM

(Roll No 4702)

under the guidance and supervision of

Dr PK Taneja



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Our approach towards development is inclusive and all-round. We believe in Jan Bhagidari. It is the skills and strengths of every Indian that will power India to glory.¹

PM Narendra Modi

INTRODUCTION

Strategic thinking is a process that defines the manner in which people think about, assess, view, and create the future for themselves and others. Strategic thinking is an extremely effective and valuable tool which can be applied to arrive at decisions that can be related to governance, administration, military planning, businesses and even to personal life.

The greatest and most successful organisations in the world over many years and decades, think ahead and encourage great strategic thinking in their governance, administration, policy making and even in their business plans. A sustainable successful future requires much more than simple policy formulation or simplistic planning, no matter how big or small the policy or plan or business model is: and a major requirement for sustained and comprehensive success and growth is strategic thinking.

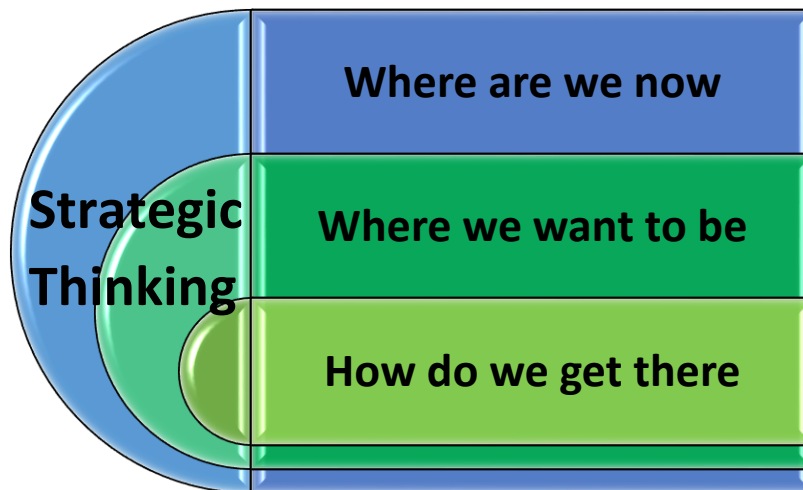
STRATEGIC THINKING AND ITS IMPORTANCE

What is Strategic Thinking

To think strategically means to see and understand the bigger picture of *what the organisation is, where it needs to go, and how it will get there*. It means anticipating opportunities and challenges and utilizing that knowledge

¹ PM Modi address on Civil Services Day, 2018, Vigyan Bhawan.
https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-to-visit-up-on-october-25-and-launch-pradhan-mantri-atmanirbhar-swasth-bharat-yojana-pmasby/?comment=disable

to guide the organisation. An effective leader needs to think strategically and this is valid in all spheres of life - be it a service, civil servant, diplomat, military planner or a corporate businessman. Ideally, the leader will help the team to see and understand the bigger picture even as team members focus on the day-to-day work.



Some of the **key elements of a strategic plan** are:

- (a) Vision.
- (b) Goals and objectives.
- (c) Strengths and weaknesses.
- (d) Key values.
- (e) Actions.
- (f) Future challenges.

Components of Strategic Thinking

In simple terms, strategic thinking consists of three phases that identify and clarify: 1) where we are now; 2) where we want to be; and 3) how we will get there. It has six common components which are given in the succeeding paragraphs.

Tools for Analysis. There are a number of different tools used for analysis in strategic thoughts. The most common is the SWOT analysis

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). A SWOT analysis helps to begin (or continue) on a path and help figure out about what's working and what's not working as also dwell upon issues which need to be considered for future planning.

Vision. Vision identifies the direction of the organisation. Vision creates a picture of the organisation's future. All members of the team are more effective when they know where they are headed—inspired by a clear, challenging, and meaningful vision.

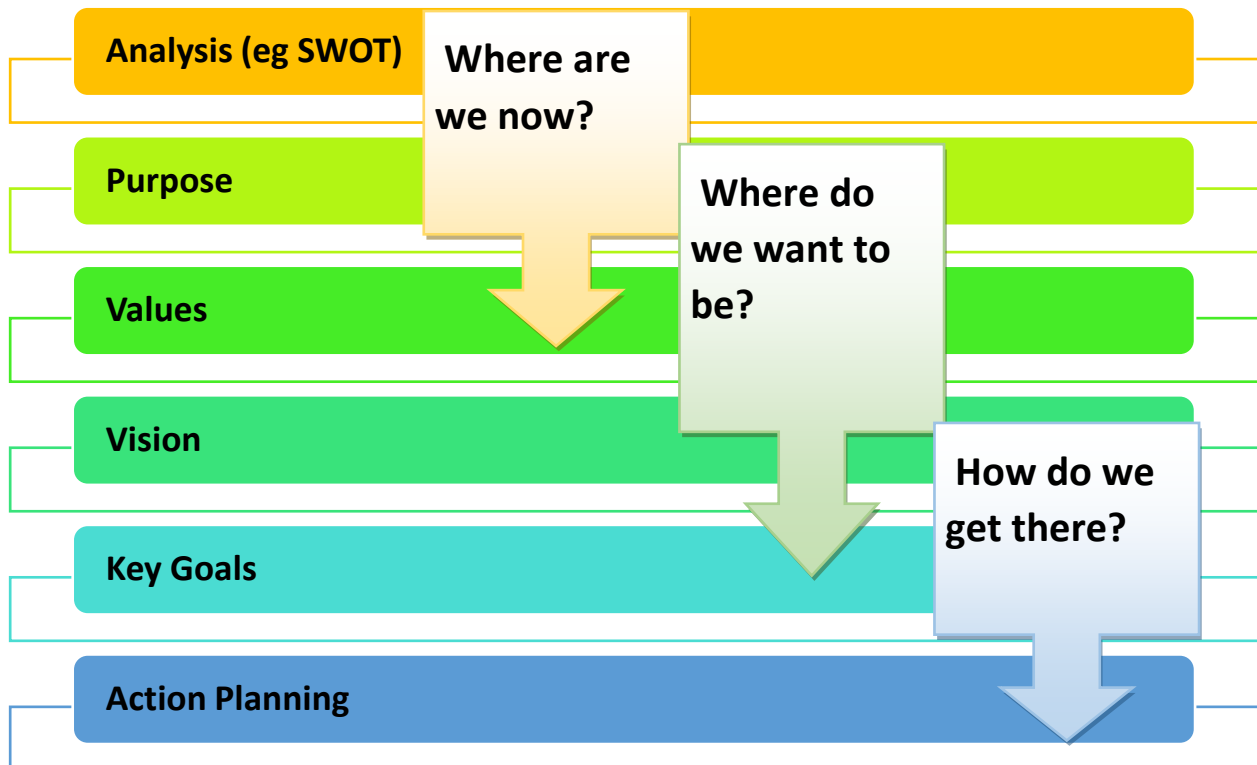
Values. Values reflect the culture of an organisation. If the culture doesn't work, your strategy can't work. More importantly, clarity regarding values allows the organisation to tap into those values to foster a culture that supports its purpose and vision, rather than one that undermines them.

Strategic Purpose/Mission. Strategic purpose can be described as the heart of blueprints for the future. Strategic purpose offers a clear understanding of what is needed to be done. When everyone on a team or in an organization understands the essential reason for existence, the hundreds of daily decisions about work to be done—that must be made in a complex organization—are informed and guided by that common purpose.

Key Goals. A fundamental component of any strategic process is to identify those priorities that will move the team forward. Key goals play the vital role of connecting the team's ongoing work with the broader purpose and vision because they help define where the team is going in specific, actionable ways. These can be deemed as signposts towards achieving the strategic mission.

Action Planning. A great strategy alone does not ensure success—but the effective implementation of a good strategy does. At times, strategic thinking and planning processes fail because a well laid out action plan is not

worked out. Action planning clarifies the ways in which our daily work will help move the goals forward. In his book, Collaborative Strategic Planning, Patrick Sanaghan provides some helpful prompts to frame the action planning.²



Importance of Strategic Thinking

Strategic Thinking can change the future of any organisation from the national level to an individual level. It offers clarity of purpose, overall direction, and priority goals or objectives which are often cited characteristic of teams and organisations. The ability to see and articulate the bigger picture (Who are we? Where are we headed? What do we hope to accomplish and how will we accomplish it?) is a fundamental expectation of leadership. Many experts opine that this skill lies at the heart of effective leadership at all levels.

Effective strategic planning as a result of strategic thinking, can help give focus to organisations and departments in the civil service, preparing them for changes in society and the economy, and helping them to become

² Sanaghan, Patrick. 2009. Collaborative Strategic Planning in Higher Education. Washington, D.C.: NACUBO

proactive rather than reactive. Civil servants and bureaucrats should implement strategic planning within their organisations to help prepare for the unexpected as best they can.

Similar to the facets of governance and administration, strategic thinking is required to be nurtured in every organisation. It is a universally acknowledged fact that the most successful enterprises today, are the ones that have fostered a strategic thinking culture. It brings about **several advantages**, some of which are enumerated below.

Clear Vision. A good strategic plan helps ensure that everyone within an organisation is reading from the same page and working towards the same vision.

More Proactive. Discussing and planning for changes and challenges that the organisation may face in the future, prepares the organisation to a large extent and make the future less uncertain. Resultantly, decision makers at all levels do not end up reacting to situations but will be one step ahead as they would have already proactively considered various contingencies and options.

Improved Efficiency. Being prepared for future developments enables everyone to react to change quicker to improve the organisation's efficiency. Having clearly defined goals and objectives to work towards also helps teams and individuals to align and focus their day-to-day work with the organisation's overriding objectives.

DEVELOPING THE ART OF STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic planning is one of the most important factors that drive superlative results. The most successful enterprises today are the ones that have fostered a strategic thinking culture. There was a time when the onus of driving change in an organisation was solely the responsibility of the CEO. In

today's dynamic and competitive world, the entire organisation from the soldier to the general is responsible for driving change. Employees across the organisation are expected to pitch in with ideas, think out-of-the-box, look beyond short-term goals and focus on innovation.

This brings up the moot question i.e. Is it easy to develop a strategic thinking organisation? The answer is a definite No! And yet, as discussed above, it is absolutely necessary. There are several methods suggested by various academicians as routes to develop strategic thinking. One of the simplest is a nine step route also called the 9s steps given by Simon Woodton and Terry Horne in their book 'A Nine Step Approach to Strategy and Leadership'³



Figure 0.2 Strategic thinking – The Nine Steps

³ Wootton Simon, and Horne Terry (2009) A Nine Step Approach to Strategy and Leadership for Managers',

Some other practical and easily implementable measures which can be undertaken to help develop a strategic thinking organisation are given below.

Laying Down a Concrete Vision and Mission Statement. This is the first building block in creating a strategic thinking organization. A well-defined strategic plan, which includes the national / ministerial or organisation's vision, mission and core values, helps provide a clear direction and focus for the entire organisation. Once the plan is defined, it needs to be executed throughout the organisation by linking to tactical actions with resource assignments and timelines. When everyone knows what is expected of them and how they can align their day to day activities to meet greater organisational goals, the operational actions of an organisation becomes more streamlined and efficient.

Encourage Proactive Problem-Solving Behavior. As Assegid Habtewold wrote, 'Rather than micro-managing to resolve every problem, create the right atmosphere, process, and system that facilitate effective problem solving'⁴. In other words, strategic thinking has to become a way of life for the ministry / organisation/ department. If activities that require strategic thinking are a regular part of a bureaucrat/ administrator/ employees' day, over time, it will become a positive habit. An organisation needs to encourage proactive problem-solving behavior to help civil servants/ military planners and managers develop the habit of thinking strategically. One way to encourage such behavior is to provide them with the necessary feedback and progress on strategic actions regularly, thus empowering them to make better decisions.

Use of Technology. Cloud-based technologies like innovative strategy execution software, make it easy to implement and communicate strategic

⁴ Habtewold Assegid, *The 9 Cardinal Building Blocks: For Continued Success in Leadership*. Success Pathways Press; 1st edition (February 4, 2014). ISBN-10 : 0615965458

plans throughout the organisation and provide insight into the health and progress of the strategic plan.

Fostering a Collaborative Culture. In many organisations, it is only the leadership team who are well-versed with the issues being faced by the organisation. This effectively reduces the options which can be generated to solve problems and an inadequate tapping of the collective experience of the organisation. An organisation thus needs to create a collaborative culture where there exists a strong sense of community, relatively low barriers to participation, informal mentorship structures and support for creating and sharing one's ideas. Solutions come from knowledge. When employees have access to information relating to the organisation's goals, results and challenges, they will be better placed to offer relevant solutions. Employees flourish when they feel they have a voice and they can see their work as part of the bigger picture. Regular interactions between the various tiers of the ministry/ organisation facilitate such resource tapping and communications.

Mentor the Managers. Organisations can't afford *not* to have a mentorship program. It is but obvious that the skills of an organisation's human resources are the most valuable asset be it bureaucrats, diplomats, generals or corporate heads. Mentoring programs provide a means of cultivating those skills throughout the organisation. To be the best, the civil servants and officers will have to learn from the best. By connecting the officers with mentors who have a highly strategic way of thinking, the organisation will be able to foster strategically-thinking personnel who further in turn will be able to mentor juniors within the organisation.

Recognize and Reward. Recognition serves as a tool for reinforcing the behaviour that drive an organisation to excellence and gives a vital boost to employees' performance which has a ripple effect that reaches beyond the recipient thus benefitting the entire organisation. Humans, regardless of their

level in the bureaucratic or administrative hierarchy, who are appreciated, show greater job satisfaction and drive to improve. Through recognition, strategic thinking behaviour can be positively reinforced increasing the likeliness of reoccurrence.

Incorporating Strategic Thinking into Training and Development Programs. There is a need to openly encourage strategic thinking among the workforce. For doing so, conducting training programs, orientations or seminars etc play an important role wherein the concept of strategic thinking is deliberated upon and tools to enhance individual capability of strategic thinking can be discussed and even practiced. Case studies on how such thinking has been applied in other countries and even organisations can prove to be an effective tool.

Exposure to Diversity. Another means to help develop strategic thinking is to expose the personnel to as many of these different methods, which will help them learn more and develop their own independent thinking method. One way to do that is to allow the officers (say bureaucrats) to collaborate, interact and spend time with professionals from other fields, such as computer experts, artists, designers, and the like, instead of limiting their exposure to fellow bureaucrats. Being exposed to different types of people will open up worlds previously unknown to them.

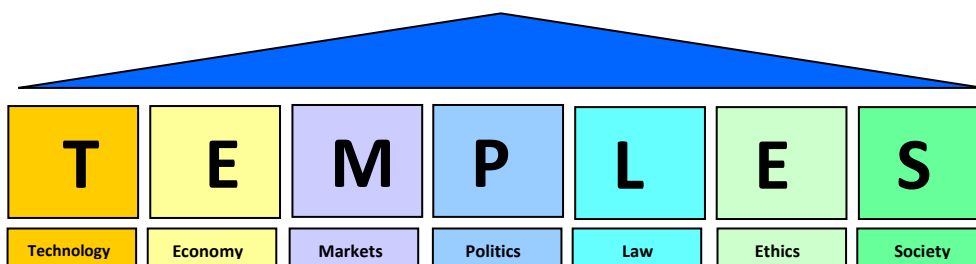
STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Historically, we are a nation with kings who displayed great strategic thinking. Chanakya espoused strategic thinking in statehood. However, post independence, our nation has become infamous for its lack of strategic culture. Releasing over 90,000 prisoners of war after they surrendered in

1971 without securing commensurate returns, is a cruel reminder of our naivety. An old joke goes that the government is so disjointed that often the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, implying that the various ministries work in isolation and without considering the impact of their actions/ rules or policies on the other organs of the government. Fortunately, owing to a strong dispensation in the Union Government, a definitive change has come about in the strategic culture. Yet, we have a long way to go in the process of strategic culture, all of which commences with strategic thinking.

As India gains its rightful place in the world order, it faces complex, diverse and unpredictable domestic and global challenges. To address these multifarious challenges, there is a need for a well thought out strategy. The process by which we tackle these challenges, and by which policy government expenditure is made and its decisions are aligned with the nation's long term interests, is the process of 'strategy' which in turn is discerned from the policy choices and decisions that the Government makes. For these policies to be effective, coherent and well rounded, duly aligned with the long term national interests, there is a need to carefully evaluate the policies and set course on a strategy to achieve desired aims.

For the civil servants, the impact on proposed policy should be weighed on issues under the acronym of TEMPLES⁵. The impact of a policy on the seven aspects enumerated below will offer a good filter and guide to formulating strategy.



⁵ Wootton Simon, and Horne Terry (2009), A Nine Step Approach to Strategy and Leadership for Managers'

Strategic Thinking at the National Level

National Strategy cannot be expressed in a deterministic plan as 'Strategy': an approach which would be futile in a complex and uncertain world. Instead, National Strategy must be a set of strategic aims which are subject to constant development in a context which is also changing all the time. It must acknowledge that there is no one set view of our national interests or values, or of how they should be advanced. National Strategy must also address more than just foreign policy, military and security concerns. It must encompass economic and domestic factors, given the growing awareness about the critical importance of a solid economic base and performance and discussions on our nations strength, prosperity, well being and place in the world.

Such strategic thinking by the leadership and civil services, is central to the process of National Strategy, or the emergent strategy will be incoherent and chaotic. When there is strategic thinking by the leadership, it can establish a virtuous circle, as strategic thinking helps develop effective policies and positive outcomes, which reinforce the public's values and aspirations and which in turn can inspire that leadership. Alternatively, the absence of strategic leadership or weak leadership will result in a vicious circle in which bad policy and failure in outcomes undermine the values and aspirations of the public and faith in their leaders. In the past, there was little confidence that Government policies are informed by a clear, coherent strategic approach, itself informed by a coherent assessment of the public's aspirations and their perceptions of the national interest.

Recent Display of Strategic Thinking

In a reflection of its glorious past in terms of strategic thinking in policy formulation, the Government of India has worked in unison, possibly due to a

strong Union Government which has crafted policy through the complex labyrinth of politics. One such example which stands out is briefly discussed below and throws light on the way, the process of strategic thinking is being driven from the very top.

Prime Minister Modi enunciated the Government aim of growth, seek to achieve a \$ 5 Trillion economy by 2025⁶. A very difficult objective, this announcement was with due consideration. A Working Group was tasked to develop a roadmap towards achieving a 5 trillion dollar economy by 2025 prepared its report which was circulated to the stakeholders for further suggestions. The Working Group was constituted by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry with participation from government and industry.⁷ The Prime Ministers vision was vigorously followed up with clearly defined goals and objectives by the various ministries in the government. Each Vertical in NITI Aayog had in-depth consultations with all three groups of stakeholders: business persons, academics, and government officials. This was followed by consultations at the level of the Vice Chairman with a diverse group of eminent persons from seven sets of stakeholders that included scientists and innovators, farmers, civil society organizations, think tanks, labour representatives and trade unions, and industry representatives⁸. A SWOT analysis was carried out in each ministry and measures worked out of how to contribute to the objective. The key drivers to achieve the objective were identified and all ministries undertook deliberations on how they could contribute. The impacts were far and overarching to include, budgetary allocations, stress on Make in India

⁶ PM addressed the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 73rd Independence Day. 15 Aug, 2019
https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-addressed-the-nation-from-the-ramparts-of-the-red-fort-on-the-73rd-independence-day/?comment=disable accessed on 21 Oct 21

⁷ Vision of a USD 5 Trillion Indian Economy, Press Information Bureau Government of India, 11 OCT 2018.
<https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1549454> Accessed on 20 Oct 21

⁸ Kant Amitabh Niti Aayog Report on Challenging Conventions To Build A New India
<https://www.niti.gov.in/the-strategy-for-new-india> accessed on 24 Oct 21

programme, push and support of Innovation & Technology, production linked incentives, Infrastructure Developments to include road, rail, air and ports, simplification of rules and the removal of over 15000 unnecessary/ redundant laws, push to availability of power specially green energy etc.

Even the Ministry of Defence, undertook several measures, with quantifiable steps at various levels in the armed forces along with the MoD. Commenting upon the MoD initiatives to work towards a USD 5 Trillion economy, the Raksha Mantri said that a slew of structural reforms had been taken by the Government to create increased synergy between the industry and the public sector. Several steps were taken under the 'Make in India' initiative, including greater scope for domestic industry in defence tenders, simplification of the industrial licensing process, hike in FDI cap, making defence export less stringent, streamlining the defence offset policy, opening the government-owned trial and testing facilities for the private sector; setting up of two defence industrial corridors and promotion of innovation through participation of start-ups and small and medium enterprises.⁹

Competency Building for Strategic Thinking in Civil Services

Knowledge and skills are common means of matching jobs with people. The uniqueness of the Indian Civil Services is the flexibility expected to be displayed by the officers in terms of knowledge and abilities by contributing to varied assignments in varied ministries. And hence competency building becomes an essential tool to empower the officers to perform optimally.

Competency building for strategic thinking is an imperative as it emerges. Various processes need to be inculcated and desired qualities developed in officers at various levels of decision making. The officers need to be able to see the Big Picture Seeing the big picture is about having an in-

⁹ 5 trillion economy target can be achieved through increased private sector participation in defence manufacturing, says Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh. Posted On: 07 Mar 2020 7:11PM by PIB Delhi <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1605684> accessed on 24 Oct 21

depth understanding and knowledge of how the officers role fits with and supports organisational objectives and the wider public needs. For the staff, it is about focusing their contribution on the activities which will meet Civil Service goals and deliver the greatest value. For leaders, it is about scanning the political context and taking account of wider impacts to develop long term implementation strategies that maximise opportunities to add value to the citizen and support economic, sustainable growth. Some qualities / desirable qualities for strategic thinking in the civil services, drawing inspiration for the UK Civil Services Competency Framework¹⁰ are enumerated as under.

Level	Designation	Effective Behaviour
5	Secy/ Addl Secy	Develop an in-depth insight into the dynamics and issues surrounding the Department and Government.
		Clarify and shape the Department's role and purpose in delivering Civil Service priorities for the national interest.
		Articulate the Department's business model and help people see their role within it
		Create clear long-term strategies focused on adding value and making real, lasting change beyond the Civil Service
		Fully engage with JS/Dir, wider experience and knowledge to support strategic decision making
4	Joint Secy	Anticipate and predict the long term impact of national and international developments
		Identify and shape how own area fits within and supports the work of the Department and priorities for the national interest,
		Develop an in-depth insight into citizens, services, communities and markets affected by their area and the wider public sector context
		Create coherent strategies and plans that have

¹⁰ Civil Services Competency Framework 2012-17, Civil Services Reform report Update Nov 2018.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-competency-framework> assessed on 20 Oct 21

		positive impact and add value for stakeholders, citizens and communities
		Shape strategies and plans which help put into practice and support the Department's vision and long-term direction, including those shared with other departments
3	Director / Joint Director	Anticipate economic, social, political, environmental and technological developments to keep activity relevant and focussed
		Identify implications of Departmental and political priorities and strategy on own area to ensure plans and activities reflect these
		Create policies, plans and service provision to meet citizens' diverse needs based on an up-to-date knowledge of needs, issues and relevant good practice
		Ensures relevant issues relating to their activity/policy area are effectively fed into strategy and big picture.
		Adopt a Government-wide perspective to ensure alignment of activity and policy
		Bring together views and perspectives of stakeholders to gain a wider picture of the landscape surrounding activities and policies
2	Under Secy	Be alert to emerging issues and trends which might impact or benefit own and team's work
		Develop an understanding of own area's strategy and how this contributes to Departmental priorities
		Ensure own area/team activities are aligned to Departmental priorities
		Actively seek out and share experience to develop understanding and knowledge of own work and of team's responsibilities
		Seek to understand how the services, activities and strategies in the area work together to create value for the citizens/end user
1	Assistant	Keep up to date with a broad set of issues relating to the work of the Department

	Secy/ DM/ SDM	Develop understanding of how own and team's work supports achievement of Departmental priorities and delivery to the citizen
		Focus on the overall goal and intent of what they are trying to achieve, not just the task
		Take an active interest in expanding their knowledge of areas related to own role
		Understand what is required of them in their role and how this contributes to team and Departmental priorities
		Consider how their own task links with and impacts on populace and other organisations

CONCLUSION

Strategy which is based on a true sense of national identity then leads into successful policies which can then reinforce national identity and values. It is imperative for the civil services to deliberately build upon this habit amongst its cadre. This paper sets out by identifying what exactly strategic thinking construes and how it can be developed at an individual and organisational level.

It is essential to overcome the barriers to working strategically in Government. The strategic aims of the Government, informed by public opinion, should drive individual policy decisions and align with financial decisions. The Budget process should provide clearer links between long-term objectives and specific budgetary measures. A focus on working strategically across departmental silos, driven by a strong centre of Government, will provide the Government with the capacity to deal with current issues, and the resilience and adaptability to react to the unknown and unpredictable problems of the future.

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