

Being a strategic business leader: top advice for SBMs

Strategic vs operational

1. Strategic thinking focuses on the what and why. Operational thinking focuses on the how. Think postcard (the place we want to be) vs roadmap (how to get there).
2. Both are needed! Too much emphasis on the vision and your plans don't tell colleagues what to do. Too much focus on the operational and you can find yourself uncertain of where to go.
3. Be your organisation's sat nav, deciding where to go and what route to take. Break down objectives into instructions and workable tasks that can be shared with your team.
4. Avoid short-term, fire-fighting solutions. Negotiate for time to put a better solution in place.

Think and plan ahead

5. Make SWOT analysis a regular discipline: use the grid before starting to plan any project.
6. What are your key variables? Be aware of what you do and don't have control over. For example, you can't control the national funding formula, but you do have control of overall spend and where you allocate money. Don't lose sleep over things it's not in your power to resolve.

Ask questions

7. Strategic planning isn't always about doing something new. What's working well in your organisation – and why? Auditing your current position is vital.
8. Be analytical. How deeply can you drill down into your data? For example, what can you learn from your canteen uptake figures?
9. Be curious. Question everything. Talk to the people who are new in your organisation and find out what they see that everyone else has gone blind to.
10. Use the 'five whys' tool to investigate issues. You get very different answers when you drill down.

Be kind to yourself

11. When it comes to strategic planning, we are all learning as we go along. Mistakes will be made: don't beat yourself up about it!
12. Give yourself the space to move into extroverted, strategic thinking mode. Accept that some things aren't going to get done.
13. You won't secure buy-in for everything you propose. Be prepared to compromise: you may need to lose the battle in order to win the war.
14. Take time to re-charge. Avoid interruptions. Don't work from your emails: plan your time and work from your calendar (and sometimes from home if you can).

Don't go it alone

15. You can't get fresh input if you work in a silo. Network and find the people who are interested in sharing ideas. Volunteer to lead project teams and interact with other colleagues.

Join **Matthew Clements-Wheeler @MidlandsSBM** for more insights into the changing role of the SBM in our webinar: 'From firefighter to strategic planner' – also available as a [podcast](#).

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