

Strategic Thinking — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Strategic Thinking course and gives you a structured space to apply every framework to your own real-world context. Each section mirrors one course module and contains exercises, worksheets, and checklists you can complete during or after each module. Work through it sequentially or use individual sections as standalone tools whenever a strategic decision arises.

What Strategic Thinking Actually Is

Ground your understanding of strategic vs. tactical thinking and map your current decision-making patterns using the OODA Loop and systems thinking vocabulary.

Exercise: Tactical vs. Strategic Audit

Think about the last 10 significant decisions or initiatives you were involved in over the past 6 months. For each, classify it as primarily tactical (how to execute a given task) or strategic (which task or direction to pursue and why). Use the prompts below to deepen your analysis.

- List 5 recent decisions you made or contributed to. For each, write one sentence describing the primary question it was answering.

- Which of those 5 were tactical (how/what to execute) and which were strategic (what to pursue and why)? What is the ratio?

- Identify one situation in the past year where you applied a tactical answer to what was actually a strategic question. What was the cost?

- Write a one-sentence strategic framing question for the most important initiative your team is currently working on.

Worksheet: OODA Loop Personal Diagnostic

Apply the OODA Loop to one current significant decision or challenge. Fill in each phase with specific, concrete content from your actual situation — not generic descriptions.

Decision or challenge being analyzed

Observe: What data and signals are you currently collecting about this situation?

Observe: What data are you NOT currently collecting but should be?

Orient: What mental models or past experiences are shaping how you interpret the signals?

Orient: What assumption are you making that could be wrong?

Decide: What is the option you are currently leaning toward?

Decide: What is the strongest counterargument against that option?

Act: What is your first concrete action and by when?

Feedback loop: How will you know within 30 days if the decision is working?

Checklist: Strategic Thinking Mindset Habits

- Before starting any major initiative, write one sentence answering: what does winning look like in 3 years?
- When presented with a problem, ask 'is this a strategic question or an operational one?' before framing a solution
- Maintain a decision log — note each significant decision, the reasoning, and the expected outcome
- Identify one mental model you rely on heavily and actively seek evidence that challenges it this week
- Schedule a recurring 20-minute 'strategic inbox' time block each week to read outside your industry
- Draw a simple causal loop diagram for one core process in your work — identify at least one reinforcing and one balancing loop

Analyzing the Competitive Landscape

Apply Porter's Five Forces and SWOT to your actual competitive environment and generate concrete strategic options using the TOWS cross-analysis.

Worksheet: Porter's Five Forces Assessment

Rate each of the five forces for your industry or business unit. For each, assign a power level (High / Medium / Low) and write one sentence of specific evidence. Then answer the synthesis questions at the bottom.

Industry or business unit being analyzed

Threat of new entrants — Power level (H/M/L)

Threat of new entrants — Evidence (one sentence)

Bargaining power of suppliers — Power level (H/M/L)

Bargaining power of suppliers — Evidence (one sentence)

Bargaining power of buyers — Power level (H/M/L)

Bargaining power of buyers — Evidence (one sentence)

Threat of substitutes — Power level (H/M/L)

Threat of substitutes — Evidence (one sentence)

Rivalry among competitors — Power level (H/M/L)

Rivalry among competitors — Evidence (one sentence)

Which force is most threatening today?

Which force is changing fastest over the next 3 years?

What one move could reduce the power of the most threatening force?

Exercise: SWOT + TOWS Strategy Generator

Build a focused SWOT for one specific decision (not your whole organization), using a maximum of 5 items per quadrant. Then complete all four TOWS cross-combinations to generate strategic options. Each TOWS cell should contain at least one specific, actionable strategy sentence.

- List your top 4 Strengths relative to competitors on this decision. Each must be specific and evidence-based — not aspirational.
- List your top 4 Weaknesses relative to competitors. Be honest — a weakness you hide from yourself is the most dangerous kind.
- List your top 4 Opportunities in the external environment with a brief note on the evidence for each.
- List your top 4 Threats in the external environment. For each, estimate the probability (High/Medium/Low) that it materializes in 24 months.

Checklist: Competitive Analysis Quality Standards

- Every Strength and Weakness item is relative to a specific competitor — not an absolute self-assessment
- Every Opportunity and Threat item cites an external fact, trend, or data point — not an internal opinion
- The SWOT has been completed by at least 2 people independently before being merged — solo SWOTs are systematically overconfident
- The SWOT is dated and will be reviewed within 12 months
- All four TOWS combinations have been completed and at least one strategy from each has been written down
- One moat source has been identified and assessed as widening or narrowing
- The strategy produced passes the Porter test: it involves genuine trade-offs, not a wish list

Thinking Better: Decisions Under Uncertainty

Apply second-order thinking and pre-mortem analysis to a real current decision, and audit your reasoning for the five high-damage cognitive biases.

Worksheet: Second-Order Thinking Drill

Select one significant decision your team or organization is currently weighing. Walk through the three-question drill for that decision using the fields below. Be specific — generic answers defeat the purpose of the exercise.

Decision being analyzed

First-order effect: What is the direct, immediate outcome if this decision is implemented?

Second-order effect: How will customers, competitors, suppliers, or regulators respond to the first-order

effect?

Third-order effect: What does your position look like 18–36 months out, after those responses have played out?

Most dangerous second-order effect (the one most likely to undermine the decision)

Most valuable second-order effect (the one most likely to amplify the upside)

What change to the decision would reduce the dangerous second-order effect?

Confidence level in this analysis (1–10) and the key assumption that, if wrong, would change everything

Exercise: Pre-Mortem Session Plan

Prepare and run a pre-mortem for your most important upcoming initiative. Use the prompts below to prepare, then facilitate the session with your team using the 6-step process from the course.

- State the initiative in one sentence: what are you building, launching, or deciding, and by when?
 - Write three failure scenarios in first person from 12 months in the future: 'We failed because...' Do this before talking to anyone else.
 - After running the team session, list the top 5 failure causes by frequency of mention across participants.
 - For the top 3 causes, write one specific mitigation action and one named person responsible for executing it.
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Checklist: Cognitive Bias Audit for Major Decisions

- Confirmation bias check: Have you actively sought evidence against your preferred option? (Yes = assign a red-team role)
- Availability heuristic check: Are you weighting a recent or vivid event more than base-rate data? (Yes = look up historical base rates)
- Recency bias check: Are you extrapolating current trends without modelling a historical reversal scenario? (Yes = model 3 historical analogues)
- Sunk cost check: If you had not already invested in this path, would you start today? (No = surface for explicit discussion)
- Planning fallacy check: Have you found 10+ comparable completed projects and used their actual cost/time distribution? (No = do reference class forecasting before finalizing estimates)
- The decision has been reviewed by at least one person who was not involved in making it
- A bias journal entry has been written after the decision documenting which bias was most present

Building and Sustaining a Strategic Practice

Build your personal strategy map, run a scenario planning exercise, and commit to a 90-day strategic thinking practice with calendar blocks and an accountability partner.

Worksheet: One-Page Strategy Map

Build a strategy map for your team or business unit using the four-layer Balanced Scorecard structure. Work bottom-up when filling it in, but read it top-down. Each layer should contain 2–4 items. Draw causal arrows between related items after completing all four layers.

Team or business unit name and time horizon (e.g., 12 months)

Financial / Mission layer — Outcome 1 (what ultimate result must be achieved?)

Financial / Mission layer — Outcome 2

Customer layer — Value proposition 1 (what must customers experience for outcome 1 to happen?)

Customer layer — Value proposition 2

Internal Processes layer — Key process 1 (what internal operation, done excellently, produces value proposition 1?)

Internal Processes layer — Key process 2

Learning and Growth layer — Capability 1 (what skill, system, or culture must exist for process 1 to work?)

Learning and Growth layer — Capability 2

Causal chain check: Starting from the base, can you read a logical 'in order to' sentence all the way to the top outcome?

Which team initiative is NOT visible on this map? What does that tell you?

Exercise: Scenario Planning: Four Futures

Run a four-quadrant scenario exercise for one major decision you or your organization faces in the next 12–24 months. Complete each step in sequence before moving to the next.

- Focal question: Write the specific decision in one sentence. Then identify the two external forces that are both most uncertain AND most impactful for that decision.
- Name your four scenarios by placing one force on each axis (high/low). Give each scenario a vivid, memorable name that captures its character (e.g., 'Rough Seas', 'Tailwind', 'The Squeeze', 'Wide Open').
- For each of the four scenarios, write 3–5 bullet points describing what your market, customers, and key competitors look like in that world.
- Assess your current strategy against each scenario: mark it as 'Strong', 'Adequate', or 'Fragile' for each future. Identify your 'no-regrets moves' — investments that hold up across all four.

Checklist: 90-Day Strategic Thinking Sprint Launch

- Monday strategic inbox block (20 min) is in my calendar as a recurring weekly appointment
- Wednesday framework drill block (30 min) is in my calendar as a recurring weekly appointment
- Friday decision log review (15 min) is in my calendar as a recurring weekly appointment
- Monthly strategy review (90 min) is booked for the first Monday of each of the next 3 months
- An accountability partner has been identified and agreed to exchange Wednesday framework drills by email
- A strategic thinking journal has been started (physical or digital) with today's date and one open strategic question

- [] The strategy map completed in this workbook has been shared with at least one team member for feedback
- [] The top 3 pre-mortem risk mitigations from this workbook have been assigned owners and added to the project plan
- [] The 90-day retrospective date (last week of week 13) is blocked in my calendar
- [] One framework from this course has been selected as the focus for deep mastery in months 2 and 3

Your Action Plan

1. Complete the Tactical vs. Strategic Audit this week — classify your last 10 decisions and calculate your tactical/strategic ratio
2. Apply the OODA Loop worksheet to the most important decision you are currently facing before the end of this week
3. Run a Porter's Five Forces assessment for your industry or business unit; share it with one peer for a reality check
4. Complete a full SWOT + TOWS cross-analysis for one specific current decision; generate at least one strategy from each TOWS quadrant
5. Select one upcoming initiative and schedule a pre-mortem session with your team before the project kicks off
6. Audit your next major decision against all five cognitive biases using the checklist; write a bias journal entry after
7. Draft a one-page strategy map for your team and verify every current initiative is visible on it
8. Build a four-quadrant scenario plan for one key decision; identify your no-regrets moves and schedule them
9. Block all five recurring practice appointments in your calendar (Monday/Wednesday/Friday weekly + monthly + quarterly)
10. Identify your accountability partner and send them this workbook's framework drill prompt for this Wednesday

