

## **The Strategic Manager**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Strategic thinking has consistently proven to be a critical determinant in shaping global events and influencing the outcomes of both conflict and peace. Historical precedents, such as the American Civil War and the implementation of the Marshall Plan, vividly illustrate the significant impact of the United States's strategic military and economic planning. In contemporary contexts, the application of strategic thought has expanded considerably, encompassing diverse domains such as sustainability, investment, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and general management. Effective strategists require a robust foundation of knowledge and specialized skills regardless of the specific field. This conceptual paper aims to define the essential attributes of a strategic manager, applicable across various business sectors and domains, and to outline a developmental training pathway program for this role. While managerial abilities, talents, and skills are extensively discussed in academic literature, a notable gap exists in the focused study of strategic managers despite their crucial importance in the business landscape. To enhance clarity and consistency, this paper proposes the adoption of the term "strategic manager" as a unifying concept, replacing the varied use of "managerial skills," "managerial talents," and "managerial abilities." The analysis presented herein is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the strategic triangle (3Cs) model, self-efficacy theory, and the componential theory of creativity.

**Keywords:** Managers, strategists, performance, creativity, self-efficacy, skills.

## INTRODUCTION

The discipline and practice of management and managers as pivotal drivers of organizational success have garnered increasing attention in recent years. This heightened focus is largely attributable to the expanding influence of the private sector within national and global economies. Scholarly research has comprehensively explored diverse facets of management, encompassing managerial talent, organizational structure, core managerial functions, and leadership dynamics (e.g., Holubčík et al., 2025; Nosková et al., 2024; Bischoff et al., 2024; Kapur, 2016). Consequently, many theories and approaches have been formulated to promote firm growth and sustain competitive advantage.

This article, which emphasizes the role of the strategic manager, employs a broad definition of 'manager.' This encompasses individuals from diverse age groups, backgrounds, and professions, including those holding formal managerial positions in private companies and professionals within other organizational structures. Managers are recognized as crucial contributors across various industries and economic sectors, including real estate, retail, manufacturing, banking, mining, communications, and education. Managerial-specific functions are contingent upon the respective economic sector, industry, and organizational hierarchy.

Fundamentally, managers perform key functions and oversee various resources, including personnel, finances, technology, materials, and entire organizations (e.g., Robbins and Coulter, 2014; McKee, 2014; Williams, 2022). Regardless of the resources managed, they are expected to achieve assigned tasks efficiently and within deadlines. These tasks range from customer acquisition and sales force supervision to business plan development, administrative duties, talent recruitment, and financial oversight. More broadly, professionals engage in self-management, making necessary or appropriate choices, suggesting that individuals are capable of managing others and subject to being managed.

Numerous authors examine managers and their associated organizational responsibilities by categorizing them into three distinct levels within a business enterprise: (1) top management, (2) middle management, and (3) first-line management or supervisors (e.g., Kundu et al, 2020; Monang et al, 2022). Each managerial level possesses decision-making authority, with the scope of this authority increasing from first-line to top management.

In the business world, decision-making authority is typically exercised hierarchically, with higher-level managers delegating specific authority to their lower-level counterparts. However, managers who delegate authority remain accountable for the outcomes of their delegation. A common misconception is that higher-level managers can delegate all responsibilities to lower-level ranks. In reality, lower-ranking managers are accountable for their decisions within the scope of their delegated authority.

While many tasks at the first management level are well-defined and often repetitive, such as directing and supervising a small group of subordinates or making routine telephone calls to customers, the roles within the mid-management hierarchy present greater challenges. These positions require careful planning, effective organizing, and leadership qualities. At the top of the managerial hierarchy, executives bear the responsibility for the survival and growth of the business enterprise. They craft the enterprise's strategic plans, establish its vision, define its mission, and steer the organization. These leaders implement differentiation, diversification, integration, and other strategies to ensure the organization's success and profitability.

Regardless of their position, a strategic mind is essential for every manager. It is equally crucial for everyone else outside the corporate or business world, as the advantages of this kind of mindset extend to include the following:

- A strategic mind is intelligent and thinks positively.
- It is sharp, focused, imaginative, and results-driven.
- It demonstrates remarkable vision and a strategic perspective.
- It actively seeks innovative solutions to complex challenges.
- It is analytic and effective in decision-making situations.

## MANAGERIAL ABILITIES, TALENTS, AND SKILLS

Recent years have seen a significant increase in research examining the impact of managerial abilities, talents, and skills on organizational performance, output, and competitive advantage. Studies consistently highlight the importance of effective management. For instance, Kim (2020) found that firms with managers possessing high cognitive abilities (IQ) achieve superior performance. Conversely, Koc et al. (2023), in a hospitality industry study, observed that managers are less likely to invest resources (time, money, and effort) in developing their weaker skills and are more prone to taking risks related to those deficiencies.

Maghsudlo et al. (2025) demonstrated an inverse relationship between managerial ability and overproduction, indicating that higher managerial ability correlates with reduced overproduction. Furthermore, Simamora (2023) showed that enhanced managerial ability strengthens the positive relationship between risk-taking and firm performance. Popoola (2024) identified a positive correlation between managers' problem-solving abilities and self-efficacy.

In the context of international marketing, Griffith and Hoppner (2013) emphasized the crucial role of soft skills—including domain knowledge, experience, learning agility, intuition, self-confidence, flexibility, and ambiguity tolerance—in enabling global marketing managers to drive organizational performance. Fu et al. (2023) suggest that managerial ability can mitigate strategic inertia and facilitate digital transformation.

Modric et al. (2024) established a significant correlation between the development of managers' interpersonal skills and the achievement of strategic business goals and performance outcomes, underscoring the contribution of enhanced interpersonal skills to improved leadership effectiveness and organizational cohesion. Pasko et al. (2024) further asserted a strong positive correlation between managerial ability and firm value. Van Zyl et al. (2017) outlined a talent management framework for the private sector, encompassing: (1) attraction, (2) sourcing and recruitment, (3) deployment and transitioning, (4) growth and development, (5) performance management, (6) talent reviews, rewarding and recognizing, (7) engagement, and (8) retention.

Sheenan (2012) indicated a positive association between investment in line manager talent and the performance of multinational corporation subsidiaries. In a study of public hospitals, Jinjing and Karia (2024) found a strong correlation between talent management, knowledge management, and hospital performance. Smit et al. (2021) concluded that talent management and work engagement are positively related. Finally, Islam et al. (2024) point out the growing worldwide importance of artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool to recruit talent.

## WHO IS THE STRATEGIC MANAGER?

Academic literature often uses the terms 'managerial skills,' 'managerial abilities,' and 'managerial talents' interchangeably to refer to the competencies necessary for effective management. We propose adopting the term 'strategic managers' to mitigate potential ambiguity from this semantic overlap.

The definition of a 'strategic' necessitates a synthesis of diverse perspectives. While dictionaries provide succinct definitions, for example, the Cambridge Dictionary emphasizes skill and experience, particularly within military, political, or business contexts, and the Britannica Dictionary highlights the capacity to formulate goal-oriented plans, a more nuanced understanding is achieved through examining the core attributes that characterize a strategist.

Based on the following attributes, we offer the following definition: A strategic manager combines deep domain expertise with strong strategic thinking, enabling them to develop and implement effective strategies through thorough analysis and evaluation.

Fundamentally, a strategic manager could be defined by the following key competencies:

- Domain expertise: Demonstrated proficiency within a specific operational area, such as customer acquisition.
- Action-oriented resource management: Efficient allocation of resources coupled with a strong bias for action.
- Long-term strategic business acumen: A focused business perspective with a clear long-term orientation.
- Strategic analytical thinking: The ability to analyze complex situations, anticipate future trends, and develop effective strategic plans.
- Strategic formulation and implementation: Capacity to contribute to the creation and execution of successful strategic initiatives.
- Strategic evaluation: ability to assess the viability and effectiveness of strategies based on relevant performance criteria.
- Team leadership and performance: Proven capability to lead and drive high-performing teams.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Employee effectiveness, a key driver of company performance, is significantly shaped by managerial activities, including planning, feedback, and leadership. Furthermore, strategic managers with specialized expertise, business acumen, and strategic thinking capabilities demonstrably enhance productivity and positively influence overall company performance more than their counterparts.

Numerous strategic analytical tools have been developed to guide businesses, and other organizations to formulate effective strategies by focusing on key factors. While these tools may present distinct investigative approaches, many, such as Kenichi Ohmae's strategic triangle model (Ohmae, 1982), can be considered specialized frameworks within the broader strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. Ohmae's model centers on three core elements: the company, customers, and competitors (3Cs).

Strategic managers can leverage this model to gain insights into internal organizational factors, including structure, strategy, culture, communication systems, technology, and policies. In this context, "customers" represent the target employees or teams being managed. Critical areas for strategic consideration include employee expertise, performance, education, interaction patterns, and potential. A thorough assessment of these factors enables strategists to understand the key attributes of their teams and determine the most effective managerial style.

Furthermore, the "competitors" within this model refer to other managers who vie for resources, performance recognition, and positions of authority. By utilizing Ohmae's model, strategic managers can better position themselves and their teams for success and the organization for sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC MANAGERS

Strategic managers typically possess a growth mindset. As demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Soemer et al., 2024; Harré & El-Tarifi, 2024; Hochnadel & Dora, 2015), a growth mindset is associated with several advantageous attributes, including the development of leadership qualities, a positive reception to professional challenges, a clear vision for the future, the cultivation of social networks, and a strong belief in personal development.

On the other hand, organizational learning principles emphasize that effective learning and teaching methodologies encompass structured training programs and knowledge-sharing among employees. Consequently, managers at all levels are expected to pursue continuous personal growth, contribute their professional expertise, and guide their teams. The fundamental purpose of training is to enhance managers' self-innovation, self-efficacy, and self-determination in their professional development, thereby facilitating the achievement of the organization's strategic goals. The following training program is specifically tailored for first and middle management tiers.

Self-innovation refers to the deliberate process of personal innovation. This involves developing or revitalizing one's skills, knowledge, and attributes to adapt to changing circumstances and facilitate personal growth. Self-innovation underscores the importance of individuals proactively investing their time and energy in their development and adaptability to initiate and guide change within their professional endeavors and personal lives. It encompasses the innovation of capabilities, talent enhancement, and strategic thinking to improve navigation and impact within their environment (e.g., Manacha, 2023; Jason, 2024). The concept of self-determination emphasizes three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are crucial for fostering personal development and psychological well-being. When these basic needs are satisfied, individuals are more inclined to pursue growth and realize their full potential (e.g., Gagné Deci, 2005; Pitchary, et al. (2022).

Furthermore, the social cognition approach offers a valuable framework for understanding how individuals learn from others and their external environment by emphasizing their belief in their own capabilities and talents for success. This framework is built upon several key pillars: reciprocal determinism, which examines the bidirectional influence between individuals and their environment; self-efficacy, referring to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve specific tasks; modeling, the process of learning through the observation of others as role models; and reinforcement, encompassing internal and external responses that determine the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. This approach underscores the critical roles of attention, retention, and motivation in learning (e.g., Ratten and Ratten, 2007; Mazahem, 2022).

## A TRAINING PROGRAM

A comprehensive management training program with an emphasis on first-line managers could underscore developing the following crucial skills (e.g., Morten et al., 2024; Ohlsson, 2023; Franz, 2024; Jackson et al., 2006; Newton and Wilkinson, 1993).

- Understanding the multifaceted nature of management: Comprehending management as a profession, a practical application, and an academic discipline.
- Recognizing the manager's role: Understanding managerial responsibilities within the workplace as leaders and effective communicators who provide constructive feedback and guidance, fostering trust and credibility for both their position and the organization.
- Cultivating leadership skills: Developing effective leadership skills and adopting appropriate leadership styles.
- Organizational knowledge: Gaining familiarity with the organization's business operations, industry landscape, target market, core values, strategic direction, relevant policies, and organizational structure.
- Enhancing problem-solving and decision-making capabilities: Developing proficiency in problem analysis and effective decision-making processes.
- Demonstrating interpersonal effectiveness: Exhibiting empathy and applying positive reinforcement as warranted.
- Performance management: Establishing clear goals and objectives for subordinates and implementing effective performance assessment methods in accordance with the organization's standards.
- Navigating challenges: Developing the capability for conflict resolution and effectively managing resistance to change.
- Team building and management: Building and managing high-productivity teams to execute the organization's strategic initiatives effectively.
- Designing a mentorship program: Implementing a mentorship program for first-line managers to observe and learn from successful middle- and top-management personnel.
- Customer focus: Cultivating skills in observation, active listening, and appreciation of customer needs.
- Growth mindset transformation: Fostering a willingness to take initiative, accept constructive criticism, and embrace calculated risk-taking.

## CONCLUSION

Research overwhelmingly confirms the critical impact of managerial abilities, talents, and skills on organizational success. Effective managers possessing strong cognitive, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills can improve performance, reduce inefficiencies, and enhance strategic outcomes. The importance of soft skills like domain knowledge and adaptability is also highlighted. Consequently, developing these managerial capabilities is essential for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage and attaining business goals.

To clarify the interchangeable use of terms like 'managerial skills', 'abilities,' and 'talents', the concept of 'strategic managers' is suggested. These individuals are defined by domain expertise, strategic thinking, resourcefulness, and analytical capabilities, enabling them to

formulate, implement, and evaluate effective strategies. Their core competencies include a deep understanding of their operational area, the ability to analyze complex situations, and the capacity to lead high-performing teams.

The development of strategic managers is viewed as a process of a growth mindset and supported by organizational learning principles. Cultivating self-innovation, self-efficacy, and self-determination is crucial for fostering productive managers. The theoretical basis emphasizes the necessity of training programs that impart essential skills and foster the mindset and behaviors characteristic of winning organizations. A comprehensive training program for first-line managers, encompassing a broad understanding of management, leadership and communication skills, problem-solving, team building, mentorship, customer focus, and growth mindset transformation, is proposed as a means to develop a cadre of leaders capable of driving performance and ensuring sustained organizational prosperity.

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