

# Are You a "Stractical" Project Manager?

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Gone are the days when the project manager's role was only to tactically execute and deliver the project. If you are thinking that it is not your job to worry about a project's strategic aspects, think again. More and more project managers are expected and challenged to think strategically and deliver their projects in alignment with the organizational goals.

Strategic and tactical are often overused and misunderstood terms. In the project management context, tactical refers to the detailed planning and execution of the tasks, while strategic deals with the purpose and business reasons for doing this project. Strategic focuses on the why and the what, while tactical focuses on the how, when, where and who.

The difference between the strategic and tactical dimension is the difference between the doers and thinkers; content and context; short-term and long-term; and detail and big-picture

Tactical and strategic realms have traditionally been separated, and the doers and thinkers have been deliberately kept apart. More and more, though, there is a realization that they are like the two sides of the same coin, and one cannot work well without being aligned with the other.

Tactical project management focuses on increasing the performance of projects. But what good is performance without purpose? Strategic focus provides alignment to business purpose and value. **It is imperative to bridge the gap between the strategic and tactical.**

Are you buried in details and day-to-day deadlines, or are you able to focus your thinking and actions on a larger, strategic perspective?

To be a successful project manager in today's world, you have to be "*stractical*," which means thinking strategically while executing your projects tactically.

Stractical thinking can be applied from three dimensions:

**From a day-to-day project perspective** stractical thinking, planning and actions reflect your ability to take into account the big picture, to recognize patterns and trends, foresee issues, predict outcomes, and have alternative plans to fall back on.

**From a business viewpoint**, it means you understand the business objectives and ensure your project is focused on achieving business objectives.

**From an organizational standpoint** it means you are in sync with your organization or department's strategic goals like achieving industry standards or certifications.

For example, in an application software development project, on the tactical side you have to worry about delivery deadlines, cost and solutions; on the strategic side, you have to reconcile your organization's software standards, scalability, adaptability, ease of change, etc.

Here are some specific steps you can take toward becoming a 'stractical' project manager:

- Understand the business and organizational reasons for doing the project.
- Keep your team apprised and focused toward strategic objectives – persistently ask and challenge. Why are you doing this task and how does it help to achieve the business outcome?
- Make sure project deliverables are aligned to specific business objectives, benefits and outcomes.
- Learn to understand and speak the language of business while communicating about the project.
- Differentiate between short-term symptoms and long-term root causes when addressing issues and opportunities.
- Learn to balance the sometimes-conflicting demands of strategic and tactical goals.

Being stractical is not going to be easy. It is going to require you to step outside your comfort zone and balance and reconcile the competing and conflicting demands of the strategic and tactical spheres. But it is well worth it because it is going to help you focus on the right things.

Remember: you might be executing flawlessly, but if you are executing the wrong things, what good is it?

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