

OUTTHINKER

IDEAS

UNLOCKING STRATEGIC CREATIVITY

THE OUTTHINKER PROCESS



INDUSTRY SUMMIT 2026

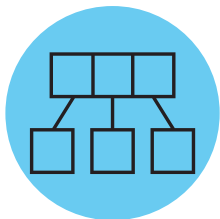
THE OUTTHINKER PROCESS

To complete the Outthinker Process, follow these five steps:



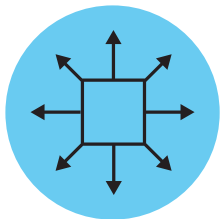
1) IMAGINE: Focusing on a pressing issue in your business, multiple small groups of participants (5-7 people) explore ideal goals. Concretely identifying future goals helps to drive and define the right strategic question(s) to ask.

- Describe your mess
- Define your most important trends
- Define your long-term ideal (or vision)
- Define your near-term ideal (or goals)
- State your strategic question



2) DISSECT: While working on the same pressing issue, participants explore the full breadth of leverage points and decide in which areas the strategy should focus.

- Assess your current situation across the “9Ps”
- Define up to 4 Ps (or leverage points) your strategy should focus on



3) EXPAND: Applying successful strategies used by top-tier companies, participants brainstorm multiple potential solutions.

- Brainstorm potential strategies



4) ANALYZE: Sorting through the options, groups ensure that they create space to explore seemingly crazy possibilities, ultimately reaching clarity on a set of innovative ideas or their proposed strategy.

- Plot the potential strategies you brainstormed
- Work on a crazy idea
- Select your strategic priorities



5) SELL: Participants present ideas to the broader group, and the ideas are captured and fed back to leadership. Discussing and exploring their firm’s political landscape helps groups define the execution tools and implementation plans.

- Identify which stakeholders you need support from
- Design your communication plan using the GAME framework

IMAGINE

- 1. MESS:** Identify the “mess” you’re in—the undesirable, but realistic, outcome you can expect if you continue on your current path.
- 2. TRENDS:** List the key trends that will shape the long-term future of your industry and your company. Consider 4 things: (1) regulation, (2) technology, (3) socio-demographics, (4) macro-economics.
- 3. LONG-TERM IDEAL:** Envision the long-term outcome you most want to achieve and describe it as concretely as possible.
- 4. NEAR-TERM IDEAL:** List the near-term indicators or outcomes that must be met to know you are on the right path to your long-term ideal goal.
- 5. STRATEGIC QUESTION:** Synthesize the near-term ideal into a question that is measurable and time bound.

DISSECT

Assess your challenge from each of the 9Ps below. Think about each leverage point, ranking it from 1-5 from 1 - "Behind" compared to competitors, 3 - "Competitive" or on par with your competitors, or 5 - "Differentiated" different than the competition in a way that your core customer prefers and such that your competition is unlikely to copy in the next few years. After assessing each P, select four of the "Ps" you want to focus on now, prioritizing them 1-4 in the dropdown.

9PS OF STRATEGY

1. POSITIONING: Who is your core customer and how are you positioned in their mind? Do you have customer or brand associations your competition will not want to emulate?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated

 FOCUS (1-4) ...

2. PRODUCT: What product attributes are you distinctive in? Does your core customer really care about these attributes? Will competitors resist copying?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated

 FOCUS (1-4) ...

3. PRICING: Is your basis pricing (not your overall price level) different from that of your competition? Does your core customer segment prefer this pricing structure?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated

 FOCUS (1-4) ...

4. PLACEMENT: Do you deliver your product/service/value proposition in a way that is different? Will your competition resist copying your approach?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated

 FOCUS (1-4) ...

5. PROMOTION: Do you communicate your value proposition differently than your competitors (through marketing, sales, corporate communication, etc.)? Do you enjoy a consistently lower acquisition cost?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated
 | FOCUS (1-4) ...

6. PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE: What do your customers see, hear, feel, smell, or taste when they interact with your brand, product, or service? Does this differentiate their experience of you?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated
 | FOCUS (1-4) ...

7. PROCESS: Are your internal processes different in a way that makes them more efficient and/or effective? Would competitors resist adopting your processes (for example, because their opportunity cost is too high)?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated
 | FOCUS (1-4) ...

8. PEOPLE: Are your talent policies different than those of your peers (consider who you hire, how you organize, how you incentivize, and your culture) in a way that gives you an advantage? Will competitors resist copying?

behind

 competitive

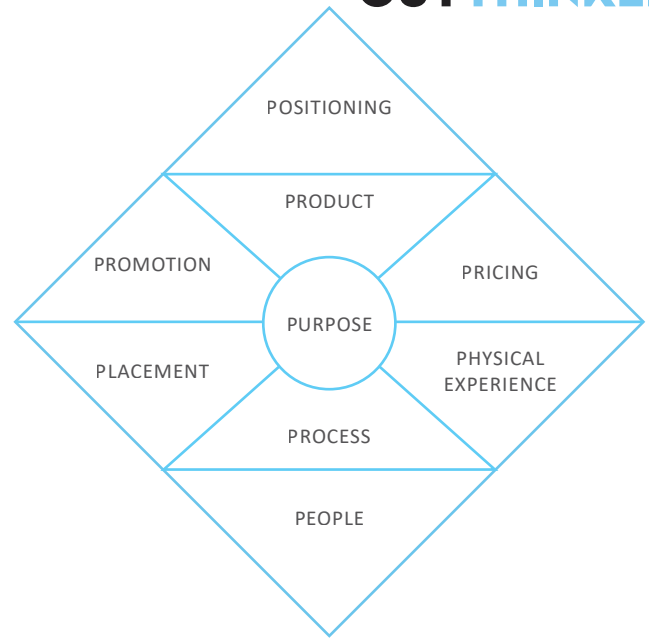
 differentiated
 | FOCUS (1-4) ...

9. PURPOSE: Are you clear on your purpose, are you making it clear to your stakeholders, and does this purpose activate your people and stakeholders?

behind

 competitive

 differentiated
 | FOCUS (1-4) ...



SELECTING YOUR 9Ps FOCUS

Given your “9P” assessment, what 1-4 areas should your strategy focus on now? Consider where you assessed weaknesses that are critical to shore up, strengths that could be leveraged more effectively, or other issues that call for attention.

1

2

3

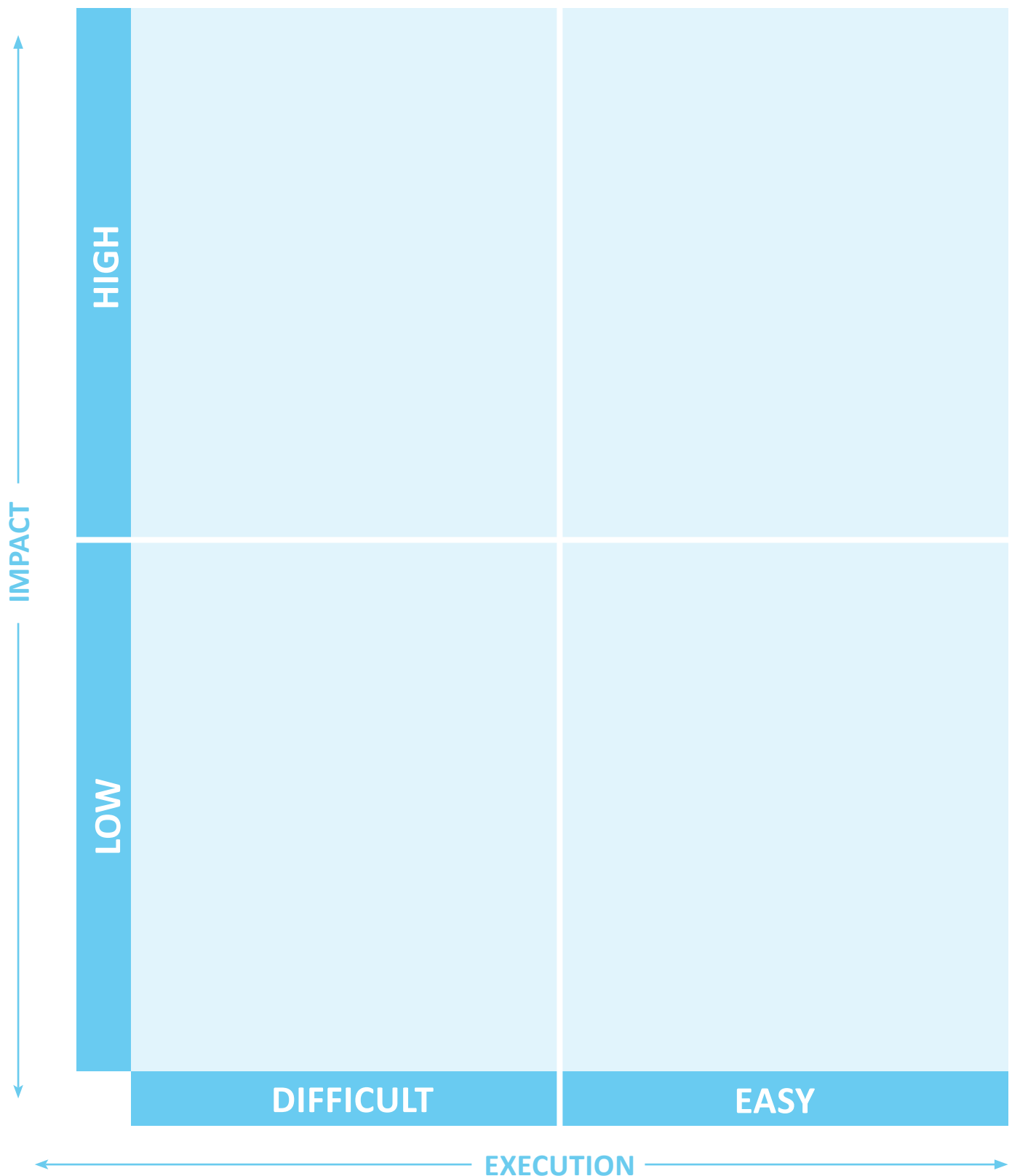
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EXPAND

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ANALYZE: PLOT YOUR IDEAS

Think about the impact and degree of difficulty for each of your ideas and place them on the matrix.



ANALYZE: BREAK DOWN A CRAZY IDEA

Pick one high-impact, difficult, Crazy Idea and list the three biggest barriers that make the idea seem difficult. Brainstorm potential tactics to remove those barriers.

IDEA	BARRIER	POTENTIAL TACTICS

ANALYZE: DEFINE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Select 3-7 ideas or groups of ideas from your matrix and list them here as your top strategic priorities.



Use this space to create a visualization of your strategic priorities in a way that makes it communicate the strategy.



SELL

WHO DO YOU NEED TO CONVINCe?

Use the following model to identify key internal and external stakeholders you need and who are critical to address for your success.

HIGH POWER					
LOW POWER					
	ADVOCATES	EARLY ADOPTERS	FENCE SITTERS	POSITIVE DETRACTORS (+)	NEGATIVE DETRACTORS (-)

WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE?

Having identified your key audience, customize the message and the delivery to get buy-in.

GOAL	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	ENGAGEMENT
What do you want the stakeholder to do or believe?	What do you know about them?	What compelling messages do you want them to hear, and how can you wrap them into a compelling narrative (situation, complication, question, answer)?	How can you best engage them?

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PATTERNS BY P

For each “P” you chose in Dissect (Step 2), read through the applicable patterns and questions, and brainstorm as many ideas as you can.

POSITIONING: <i>Who is your core customer and how are you positioned in their mind? Do you have customer or brand associations your competition will not want to emulate?</i>			
STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
22	Move early to the next battleground	Who is the future user/customer?	
27	Reuse what others abandoned	What customers or brand attributes have others abandoned?	
17	Seize the “deer in the headlights” moment	What customer or brand attribute will our competition not defend?	
13	Appeal to a key weakness or desire	What is the most critical need we can solve for our core customer?	
4	Stay out of their stronghold	What is our competitors’ brand positioning? What does it look like to stay out of that stronghold?	

PRODUCT:

What product attributes are you distinctive in? Does your core customer really care about these attributes? Will competitors resist copying?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
13	Appeal to a key weakness or desire	What are the most critical needs/ jobs to be done that our product might meet?	
9	Bundle or disaggregate	How can we combine products, or disaggregate parts of our product, to create a new type of product?	
20	Sacrifice one front to win another	What product attributes should we intentionally underperform on?	
25	Create a façade then move the action	If our current product were a façade, to where would we move the action/ profit?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	What are the future products our core customer will want?	

PROMOTION:

Do you communicate your value proposition differently than your competitors (through marketing, sales, corporate communication, etc.)? Do you enjoy consistently lower acquisition costs?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
13	Appeal to a key weakness or desire	What is the most high-priority customer need and how can we focus our messaging to activate that need?	
20	Sacrifice one front to win another	What promotional tactics should we abandon so we can invest in higher-return tactics?	
21	Reveal your strategy	What would happen if we authentically revealed our strategy/ offer?	
6	Find a third party influence (“kill with a borrowed knife”)	Who has influence with our core customer and how can we get them to promote for us?	
28	Send a covert message	What “secret message” can we direct at a non-target customer to deliver the real message to our true target?	

PRICING:

Is your basis pricing (not your overall price level) different from that of your competition? Does your core customer segment prefer this pricing structure?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
2	Exchange a “brick” for a “jade”	What could we offer for free to position us to sell something else at a higher margin?	
9	Bundle or disaggregate	How could we bundle (or disaggregate) our offering to separate ourselves from price competition?	
20	Sacrifice one front to win another	What could we offer at an extremely low price to position us to sell something else at a higher margin?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	What is the future of pricing (the way customers pay, the structure at which they will pay)?	
25	Create a façade then move the action	How can we set prices to pool profits where we hold a competitive advantage?	

PLACEMENT:

Do you deliver your product/service/value proposition in a way that is different? Will your competition resist copying your approach?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
5	Partner with someone unexpected	What product/service can we partner with to offer a more complete solution?	
14	Beat the grass to startle the snake	What new distribution channels can we experiment with?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	What is the future of distribution in our space?	
24	Borrow a road	Who has access to our target customer and how can we borrow their road?	
30	Take the unorthodox path	What is the obvious way of distributing? What alternative path won't people expect?	

PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE:

What do your customers see, hear, feel, smell, or taste when they interact with your brand, product, or service? Does this differentiate their experience of you?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
1	To catch something, first let it go	What do we want to copy about how competitors are designing physical experiences?	
11	Close the exits	How can we “close the doors” on customers so they stay longer and purchase more?	
13	Appeal to a key weakness or desire	What is the most critical need customers have and how do we accentuate that need through physical experience?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	What is the future of physical experience?	
32	Create something out of nothing	What brand new experience can we create?	

PROCESS:

Are your internal processes different in a way that makes them more efficient and/or effective? Would competitors resist adopting your processes (for example, because their opportunity cost is too high)?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
1	To catch something, first let it go	What processes are competitors using that we can adopt?	
20	Sacrifice one front to win another	What steps in the process can we skip or underperform in to differentiate?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	What is the future of processes and operations?	
27	Reuse what others abandoned	What processes have others abandoned? What if we adopted those?	
30	Take the unorthodox path	What is the obvious process? What completely different approach could we consider?	

PEOPLE:

Are your talent policies different than those of your peers (consider who you are, how you organize, how you incentivize, and your culture) in a way that gives you an advantage? Will competitors resist copying?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
4	Stay out of their stronghold	What kinds of people and culture do our competitors focus on? What would it look like to do the opposite?	
13	Appeal to a key weakness or desire	What are our employees' most critical needs? How could we overinvest in that while underinvesting in what they care less about?	
22	Move early to the next battleground	Who are the future employees? How can we cultivate them now?	
30	Take the unorthodox path	Where do our competitors look for employees? Where are they not thinking to look/ recruit?	
33	Be good	How can we engage employees with the opportunity to do good or do fulfilling work?	

PURPOSE:

Are you clear on your purpose, are you making it clear to your stakeholders, and does this purpose activate your people and stakeholders?

STRATEGIC PATTERN		QUESTIONS	IDEAS
4	Stay out of their stronghold	What purpose defines our competitors' stronghold? How can we authentically stick to our own stronghold?	
5	Partner with someone unexpected	Who else benefits when we fulfill our own purpose?	
9	Bundle or disaggregate	What is the bigger picture that our purpose is part of?	
27	Embrace what others abandoned	What part of the problem/purpose are others turning away from?	
17	Seize the "deer in the headlights" moment	What problem/purpose will others not address because they have a conflicting agenda?	

APPENDIX B: THE 36 STRATEGIC PATTERNS

Outthinker draws on proven strategies for outperforming competitors from an ancient Chinese text, *The 36 Stratagems*. Our research shows many companies today have successfully disrupted their markets using strategies based on the five key strategic patterns from *The New Playbook (denoted by*)*. All of them, however, offer the opportunity to develop bold, innovative, and disruptive ideas.

STRATEGIC PATTERNS AND DESCRIPTION		QUESTION
1	To catch something, first let it go. Do not attack; rather let it go and follow close behind.	What would happen if you let your competitor or customer go?
2	Exchange a “brick” for a “jade.” Give something on which you place relatively little value in exchange for something you value much more.	What “brick” can you give away?
3	Invite them in, then remove their exit. Entice them to enter your domain then remove their means of returning to their domain.	How can you invite them into your domain then prevent their return?
4	Stay out of their stronghold. Purposefully stick to your stronghold. This preempts resistance or lures them out to your advantage.	What is your stronghold? How do you avoid theirs?
5	Partner with someone unexpected. Find and partner with someone unexpected who benefits if you win.	Who else benefits if you win?
6	Influence through a third party. Find someone else to influence your target to your advantage.	What third party could influence others to your advantage?
7	*Force a twofront battle. Apply your unique capability into a new area, forcing a two-front battle.	What is your unique capability? What new area could you extend into?
8	Alter a critical relationship. Assess the critical relationships that resistance depends on and shift them.	What critical relationships do you want to alter?
9	Bundle or disaggregate. Combine or separate things into parts so as to alter how others perceive you and remove yourself from direct comparison.	What can you combine or separate?

STRATEGIC PATTERNS AND DESCRIPTION		QUESTION
10	<p>Control resources. Rather than engage in head-on confrontation, analyze ways you can increase control over critical resources and their supply.</p>	What critical resources can you increase your control over to gain advantage?
11	<p>Close the exits. When you enjoy a moment of influence, take full advantage of it and prolong it.</p>	What moments of power can you capitalize on?
12	<p>Remove key support structures. Focus on removing key supports that provide the integrity for resistance, rather than attacking it head on.</p>	What are the “structural beams” of resistance and how can you remove them?
13	<p>Appeal to a key desire. Find their critical desire and appeal to it to gain advantage.</p>	What is their strong need or desire? How can you appeal to that or capitalize on it?
14	<p>Learn through a small-scale advance. Launch a “false” or small-scale advance to understand what response a real advance would trigger.</p>	What small advance would garner insight?
15	<p>Seize opportunity out of trouble. When trouble strikes, others may freeze or retreat. Capitalize on this by advancing.</p>	Where others freeze or retreat, what would happen if you advance?
16	<p>Retreat to advance later or elsewhere. Rather than persisting with your current fight, retreat to preserve your strength and apply it somewhere else or at some other time.</p>	What is your unique capability? What new area could you extend into?
17	<p>Seize the “deer in the headlights” moment. Advance where a conflicting agenda or distraction will prevent reaction.</p>	What will they not do or defend because they are temporarily distracted?
18	<p>Appear crazy. In order to avoid being perceived as a threat, appear to be following an unrealistic plan or appear incapable of fulfilling it.</p>	How can you appear “crazy” so they discount you?
19	<p>Let them fight. When others are engaged in conflict, refrain from acting. Stay out of the fray, let them fight, and move in later when they are weak.</p>	What “fights” should you stay out of?

STRATEGIC PATTERNS AND DESCRIPTION		QUESTION
20	<p>Sacrifice one front to win another. Give up one front to preserve, even strengthen, your competitiveness on another.</p>	What could you sacrifice to win elsewhere?
21	<p>Reveal your strategy. Openly reveal your strength, weakness, or strategy to encourage others to call off their attack (e.g., because they fear your strength or no longer consider you a threat).</p>	How could you reveal your strategy so others back away?
22	<p>Move early to the next battleground. Identify the next battleground and establish a defensible position. When others arrive, use your superior position to win.</p>	Where is the next battleground? What can you do to create a defensible position there?
23	<p>Exchange the role of guest for that of host. Enter as a guest, then incrementally build trust and influence.</p>	How can you enter humbly and then build trust and influence?
24	<p>Borrow a road. Find someone who has better access to your objective. Create an alliance with them to gain passage.</p>	Whose road could you borrow? Who is borrowing your road?
25	<p>Create a façade then move the action. Create a façade that appears to be the real thing, then move the action somewhere else.</p>	If your current activity were a decoy, where could you move the action to your benefit?
26	<p>Injure yourself. Injure yourself to win trust or create common good to avoid appearing as a threat.</p>	What action can you take to show vulnerability?
27	<p>Embrace what others abandoned. Adopt a forgotten or abandoned model, idea, or technology to differentiate yourself.</p>	What has been abandoned that you could pursue?
28	<p>Send a covert message. Rather than focus on your real target, aim your effort at a different target. This sends a covert message to your real targets that will alter their behavior.</p>	What “covert message” would evoke the behavior you want in others?

STRATEGIC PATTERNS AND DESCRIPTION		QUESTION
29	<p>Feign in the east; attack in the west. Feign an attack that exposes them to a different attack. Fake left, move right.</p>	What fake attack could you launch to expose them to an alternative attack?
30	<p>Take the unorthodox path. When others are focused on the direct, orthodox approach, use an indirect, unorthodox path to take them by surprise.</p>	What unorthodox path could you take to give you the advantage of surprise?
31	<p>Hide in the open. Make your actions appear normal (i.e., appear to be everyday actions) so that others will not see that something new is coming.</p>	What are the everyday activities in which you could hide your actions?
32	<p>*Create something out of nothing. Surprise them by adding a new piece to the board (e.g., a new category, occasion, need or customer).</p>	What piece would you like to add to the playing board?
33	<p>*Be good. Adopt a strategy that benefits others, then you create no competition.</p>	How can you create a situation in which you win by benefiting others?
34	<p>*Coordinate the uncoordinated. Coordinate independent elements within your environment to create greater power.</p>	What is uncoordinated that you could coordinate to your advantage?
35	<p>Influence the leader. Rather than influence the entire organization, identify and incent just the leader(s).</p>	What actions can you take to appeal to the unique needs of the leader(s)?
36	<p>Link strategies. Rather than execute one strategy, execute multiple strategies (simultaneously or in succession).</p>	What new scenario can you invent by linking discreet strategies?

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