McKinsey and BCG Strategy House

Many organisations have a long strategy document that few people ever read. The strategy house puts a whole strategy on one page, drawn as a simple house. Strategy consultants, including teams at firms such as McKinsey and BCG, commonly use this picture in their work with clients. No single firm owns the idea, and every organisation draws its own version. The roof shows where we want to be, the pillars show what we will focus on, and the foundation shows what holds everything up. Because it is a picture, everyone from the board to the front line can understand it quickly.

1. The Roof: Vision and Ambition

The roof sits at the top of the house and states the vision, which is where the organisation wants to be. A good roof describes a clear ambition for a set period of time, often several years ahead. It should be short enough to remember easily and bold enough to inspire people. It also answers a simple question: what does success look like when we get there? Everything below the roof must help to hold it up.

Example: a family planning to buy its own home within five years has a clear roof for all its saving decisions.

At work: Ashraf, the operations director of a mid-sized logistics company, helps his leadership team agree on one roof: to become the most reliable delivery partner in the region within five years.

2. The Pillars: Strategic Priorities

The pillars hold up the roof, and each pillar is one strategic priority, one of the few big areas where we must win. Most strategy houses have three to five pillars, because a house with too many pillars is really a list, not a strategy. A pillar is not a department; it is a result that often needs several teams working together. Under each pillar, we write a small number of initiatives, which are the concrete projects that make the priority real. In this way, the house links the big ambition to the work people actually do.

Example: a runner who wants to finish a marathon may choose three pillars: training, diet and sleep.

At work: Ashraf's team chooses three pillars: on-time delivery, digital customer service and cost efficiency. Under on-time delivery, one initiative is a new route planning system.

3. The Foundation: Values and Enablers

The foundation is the base of the house, and it holds the values, capabilities and enablers that every pillar depends on. Values describe how we behave, such as safety, integrity or customer focus. Enablers are the things that make the work possible, such as people and their skills,

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culture, systems and data. Some houses also add a floor of key performance indicators, or KPIs, which are the numbers that show whether the house is still standing. If the foundation is weak, even strong pillars will not hold up the roof for long.

Example: a beautiful house built on sand will crack, however good its walls look.

At work: Ashraf's foundation includes safety as a value, driver training, one shared customer database and a monthly dashboard showing on-time delivery and the cost of each shipment.

4. Building the House in a Workshop

A strategy house is usually built together in a workshop with the leadership team, not written alone by one person. The group starts with the roof and agrees on the ambition in a few words. Next, people suggest possible priorities, then group them and vote until only three to five pillars remain. The team then lists the initiatives under each pillar and checks which enablers are missing from the foundation. Finally, one owner is named for each pillar, and the house is shared with the whole organisation.

Example: friends planning a trip together first agree on the destination, then decide on the main activities and the budget.

At work: Ashraf runs a one-day workshop with sticky notes on a wall. Twelve ideas become three pillars, and each pillar gets an owner from the leadership team.

5. Testing the House and Common Mistakes

Before sharing the house, we test it with three simple checks. First, are there only a few pillars, or has everything become a priority? Second, does the house show clear choices, including what we will not do? Third, can each pillar be measured, so that we know whether we are winning? The most common mistake is a wish list, where every good idea gets its own pillar and nothing is really chosen. Other mistakes are a roof full of vague slogans and a foundation that nobody pays for.

Example: a shopping list with fifty items is not a plan for dinner, but a recipe is.

At work: Ashraf's first draft had seven pillars. The team merged some, dropped others, and ended with three pillars, each with one clear measure.

Conclusion

The strategy house turns a complex strategy into one clear picture. The roof shows where we want to be, the pillars show where we will focus, and the foundation shows what makes it all possible. Its real value comes from the conversations needed to build it and the hard choices it forces. A good house has few pillars, clear choices and measures that show progress. Keep it visible, review it regularly, and use it to decide which new ideas truly belong in it.

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