The 9 Pillar Strategy Pyramid

Many organizations have a strategy on paper, yet their people cannot see how their daily work connects to it. The Strategy Pyramid is a simple tool to close this gap. It was developed in 2011 by Wendy McGuinness of the McGuinness Institute in New Zealand, drawing on the work of strategy thinkers such as Robert Kaplan and David Norton. The pyramid sets out nine pillars of a good strategy, grouped into three parts: purpose, strategy and execution. Each pillar answers one clear question, and together they link the reason an organization exists to the work people do every day.

1. Purpose: Mission, Values and Vision

The first three pillars describe the purpose of the organization. The mission answers the question: why do we exist, and whom do we serve? The values set out the principles and beliefs that guide how people behave and make decisions. The vision paints a clear and inspiring picture of where we want to be in the future. Together, these pillars give everyone a shared direction that changes very little from year to year.

Example: a family agrees on why a healthy home life matters, on simple rules such as eating together, and on a picture of a calm and active family in five years.

At work: Mostafa manages customer service at a mobile phone company. His team's mission is to help customers solve problems quickly, its values are respect and honesty, and its vision is to become the most trusted service team in the country.

2. Strategy: Strategic Intent, Drivers and Enablers

The next three pillars turn purpose into a strategy. The strategic intent states the big goals and the path the organization will take to reach them. The drivers are the few priorities that will create success, such as growth in new markets, innovation, lower costs or a better customer experience. The enablers are the resources and capabilities that make the strategy possible, such as skilled people, technology, funding and infrastructure. Drivers push the organization forward, while enablers make sure it has what it needs to move.

Example: a student who dreams of becoming a doctor aims to enter medical school, focuses on science grades as the driver, and relies on a quiet study room and a good tutor as enablers.

At work: Mostafa's strategic intent is to solve most customer problems in the first call. His drivers are faster answers and friendlier service, and his enablers are better training and a new customer database.

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3. Execution: Targets, Indicators and the Strategy Map

The last three pillars make the strategy happen. Targets and initiatives are the specific, measurable results and the projects that will deliver them. Performance indicators, often called key performance indicators or KPIs, track progress and show early whether the work is on course. The strategy map is a simple one-page picture that shows how all the pillars connect, so everyone can see the whole strategy at a glance. Without execution, even the best purpose and strategy remain words on paper.

Example: a runner training for a marathon sets a weekly distance, checks her time on every run, and keeps a training chart on the fridge.

At work: Mostafa sets a target of eight out of ten problems solved in the first call and launches a training project. He tracks the first-call rate every week and puts a one-page strategy map on the team's wall.

4. Using the Pyramid Every Day

The pyramid works best when every part shapes the one below it. Reading from the top down, leaders can check that every target and project really serves the mission, values and vision. Reading from the bottom up, each employee can see how daily tasks support the bigger purpose. The pyramid also helps to find gaps, such as a vision with no enablers, or targets that nobody measures. It should be reviewed regularly, because strategy changes over time while purpose usually stays the same.

Example: a family planning a holiday checks that the budget, the bookings and the daily plan all fit the reason for the trip: relaxed time together.

At work: in a team meeting, Mostafa notices a project to write new call scripts that supports none of the drivers. He stops it and moves the time to training, which supports the strategic intent.

Conclusion

In summary, the Strategy Pyramid organizes strategy into nine pillars and three parts. Purpose explains why we exist, what we believe and where we want to go. Strategy sets the big goals, the drivers and the enablers. Execution turns them into targets, indicators and a clear strategy map. When all nine pillars connect, everyone can see how their daily work builds the future of the organization.

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