

[External] OKR's aren't really strategy...

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STRATEGY PULSE

Insights across strategy & execution -- delivered to you

Welcome back, Michelle,

Now that conferences are officially back, it's that fun time of the year where everyone comes back with the new "latest and greatest thing." In the strategy world, that normally ends up being a new framework, planning style, or facilitation method.

While not a 'new' thing, using Objectives and Key Results, or OKRs, continues to grow to more and more organizations.

So I thought we'd spend some time talking a bit about OKRs — and more specifically how they shouldn't be a replacement for your more traditional planning.

In today's pulse:

- Why OKRs are not a replacement for strategy
- A few reasons OKRs are hard
- Should you align OKRs instead of cascading them?

- From the vault: The foundation of OKRs
- Other top insights on OKRs from around the industry

OKRS AREN'T REALLY STRATEGY

There has been a lot of buzz around OKRs - or Objective & Key Results.

Many people tout OKRs as a replacement for traditional strategy and strategic planning frameworks. There are constant presentations about OKRs, plenty of systems specific to OKRs, and even a #1 NY Times Best Seller.

While OKRs can be a valuable tool for your organization, **they should NOT be a replacement for strategy.**

Ok, now before you angrily reply or close this email, hear me out...I'm not saying OKRs are bad.

I think OKRs are a GREAT way to measure and track progress against specific objectives. And they've been fantastic at getting more organizations to think about planning more.

However, OKRs should not be the sole focus of your organization's strategy. They should be a part of your strategy, but not the only part.

Ok, so what exactly are OKRs again?

OKRs stands for Objectives & Key Results. In its basic form, it's a goal-setting methodology that covers the "what" (objective) & the "how" (key result).

Typically, OKRs are set at the organizational level and then cascaded down to teams and individuals.

They are a great way to focus on the output, and not just the work, while creating a common framework across an organization

What goes wrong with OKRs

Ok, nothing is *wrong* with OKRs themselves. They just are often misused within an organization.

OKRs are great for setting specific and measurable goals, but they ***should not be the full strategy for an organization.***

1 - OKRs can rely too heavily on the Key Results

With OKRs, the Key Results are the "how" of your plan. But if established correctly, they are focused on the outcomes and not the initiatives/work itself. While being outcome-focused is a positive thing, a simple desire to obtain a key result isn't enough. It's the supporting strategies/projects/whatever-you-want-to-call-them that actually lead to the attainment of Key Results.

So without a framework for supporting initiatives, your Key Results are simply a wish list.

2 - OKRs can be focused too much on the short term

By definition, effective OKRs are meant to be focused on a 30-90 day period. So unless you have a continual planning or agile process, it's likely your OKRs are either stale or not *true* OKRs. And if you are planning frequently, you should rely on something beyond just 30-90 day windows to set a long-term vision & strategy.

3 - OKRs can create siloed planning

Finally, OKRs are often siloed within departments or teams. This can lead to a lack of coordination and alignment across the organization. As more OKRs are created, there are more and more objectives and key results across and down the organization. This leads to siloed work, siloed goals, and no true integrated strategy pointed in the same direction

Leveraging OKRs successfully

If you're going to use OKRs within your organization, [make sure they are part of a larger strategy](#). OKRs should not be the only focus. There should be a clear strategy that OKRs support.

And when setting OKRs, make sure to keep the following in mind:

- OKRs should be aligned with the larger, long-term organizational strategy
- OKRs should be supported by a specific series of work
- OKRs should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis

When used correctly, OKRs can be a valuable tool for any organization. But they should not replace traditional strategic planning frameworks. OKRs should supplement strategic planning to help organizations, teams, and individuals achieve their objectives.

So, what do you think? If I'm wrong or you disagree with me, please respond and let me know. I'd love to hear how you think about it.

KEEPING YOU ON TRACK



[Why OKRs are Hard in Organizations](#)

[Why OKRs are Hard in Organizations](#)

Are OKRs meant for every organization? In many cases they are hard without a) full transparency & b) ambitious goal-setting

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[Should you cascade or align your OKRs?](#)

[Should you cascade or align your OKRs?](#)

A common misstep with OKRs is continual cascading of Objectives & Key Results. Instead, OKRs should be properly aligned

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[Three Common OKR Mistakes](#)

[Three Common OKR Mistakes](#)

If you are leveraging OKRs, or plan to in the future, watch out for these common mistakes.

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FROM THE VAULT

Strategy insights that stand the test of time



[What's the origin of OKRs?](#)

OKRs have grown along with the rise of Google (and their adoption of OKRs) and the success of the NY Times best selling book "[Measure What Matters](#)" by John Doerr. While OKRs aren't for everyone, understanding their framework is helpful for anyone.

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

- While the traditional approach is to cascade OKRs throughout the organization, [not everyone needs OKRs](#).
- Instead of leveraging OKRs by themselves, consider [combining OKRs with the Three Horizons Model](#).
- If you're still not convinced on the pros/cons of OKRs, here's an interesting take on [the real reason your OKRs suck](#).
- Looking for more resources on OKRs? Check out [Google's re:Work guide on OKRs](#).

"Building a visionary company requires 1 percent vision and 99 percent alignment."

-- Jim Collins

Until next time,



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