

How to Get Buy-in for OKRs



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Ready, set, go!

OKR Formula

I will **Objective** as measured by **Key Results** via **Key Initiatives and Projects**

Turning goals into results with OKRs

What are OKRs?

OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) are a proven goal-setting framework for creating alignment, focus and building a highly productive and engaged work culture to drive your business outcomes.

OKRs align your entire organization to strategy, shifting focus from output—the everyday work of your team—to outcomes, which are the results of that work. This mindset shift keeps your team highly engaged with a clear sense of purpose and understanding of how everyone is contributing to forward momentum.

Objectives are simply what you and your team want to accomplish. What is your definition of success?

Objectives added at the organizational and team levels are depicted in the following example:

Company Objective

Become the best gaming platform in North America

Marketing Objective

Improve our brand presence through media channels to increase reach of our gaming platform

Product Objective

Deliver Next version of gaming platform by 6/1

Key Results describe how you'll measure your success in accomplishing these goals.

For best results, teams and individuals should be aligned well in a hierarchy. Key results at one level become objectives of the next level.

Company Objective

Become the best gaming platform in North America

Marketing Objective

Improve our brand presence through media channels to increase reach of our gaming platform

Marketing Key Result

Increase monthly website visitors by 10%

Marketing Key Result

Grow social media followers from 100,000 to 200,000

Product Objective

Deliver Next version of gaming platform by 6/1

Projects are focused efforts that help you achieve your Key Results.

That's because OKRs are so much more than goals written on a whiteboard or tracked in a spreadsheet; they're an opportunity for every employee at every level of your organization to work together toward a common vision of success. With OKRs, everyone has a clear understanding of what work needs to be done to achieve this vision and a fully open view of progress toward set goals.

The result? Silos get broken down, employees become more engaged, strategy pivots can happen quickly, and efforts finally result in valuable outcomes for the business. It's the defining attributes of an OKR program that help organizations overcome the challenges of modern business to drive results. And it's why some of the most successful organizations in the world—like Amazon, Google, and Twitter—have embraced OKRs.

What are the benefits of OKRs?

Massive global enterprise companies have adopted OKRs, and so have 10-20 person companies. OKRs give companies of any size a strategic advantage for many reasons, and can be adopted by individuals in any role:

OKRs shift focus from output to impact.

By starting with OKRs at the center of business planning, the focus inherently shifts from the outputs your team delivers to the impact they make on the business. In addition to reducing burnout from a lack of clarity around the purpose of that work, this shift in focus helps move the business forward more effectively.

OKRs create cross-functional cooperation to unify direction and improve collaboration.

When each individual, team, and department goal is aligned to the company's broader strategy, teams have a lens through which their work, and the impact it's intended to have, is prioritized.

OKRs help organizations navigate rapid change and reduce risk.

This has been a key benefit of OKRs as companies square off against the pressures COVID-19 brought with it. The OKR framework gives a level of visibility into where efforts are focused, allowing leaders to proactively manage risk, identifying themes and changes in diverse data sets that might have gone unnoticed without a unifying system. This, in turn, helps companies shift focus from activity and output to outcomes, making the right changes at the right time to stay competitive.

OKRs create clarity that is documented, measurable, and owned.

With the OKR framework comes accountability that is tracked and measured in the OKR software or document that a company manages the process with. This accountability works two ways; with each individual responsible for their OKRs, and the company leadership responsible for enabling their pursuit.

OKRs inspire stretch and foster involvement.

When done well and made the driving force in the company's strategic rhythm, OKRs can keep every single employee connected to the broader mission and make sure they're invested in their own contribution to it.

OKRs offer clear, contextual communication with continual progress reviews.

The OKR framework doesn't stop when your goals are written. It's designed to create a business rhythm around the most important outcomes that your company is pursuing. It should influence every interaction and drive a review process that pushes for continuous improvement.

The benefits of OKRs for executives, managers, and individuals

It's human nature for us to want to know, "What's in it for me?" when being introduced to a new process.

You already know that there are incredible benefits for organizations as a whole when they adopt OKRs. But, to help you communicate the benefits of OKRs to your leaders, teams, or colleagues, we've broken it down into the outcomes they'll see individually if the company adopts OKRs.

We've also incorporated findings from our [2021 Goal Management Report](#) to give you some hard data to fuel the fire. When asked to rank the top three benefits of their goal management process, executives, managers, and individual contributors all answered with similar shared values: higher performing teams, faster growth, increased revenue, and less wasted time.



33.7%
More revenue

34.2%
Less time wasted

32.1%
A higher performing team

Executives rank “less time wasted” and “more revenue” with nearly equal frequency. Notably, they rank predictability and proactive risk management higher than either managers or individuals.



29.8%
More revenue

39.5%
Faster growth

30.7%
A higher performing team

Managers rank “faster growth” as the value they see most often from their goal framework. In fact, managers choose “faster growth” almost 15% more often than executives and individual contributors.



35.9%
Less time wasted

28.5%
Faster growth

38.3%
A higher performing team

Individual contributors say “a higher performing team” is a benefit of their goal management framework most frequently, followed by less time wasted.

Benefits of OKRs for executives

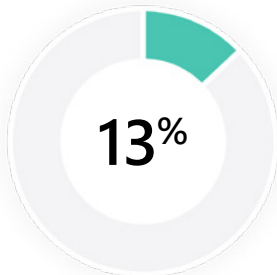
The shift to remote and hybrid work has been happening for some time and the pandemic has massively accelerated this shift.

Rethinking work

What is the current state of the workplace?

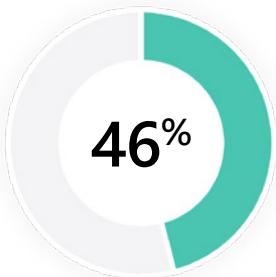


50% of leaders say company is planning full-time in-person work in year ahead



13% of managers know how work contributes to strategy

What are employees looking for from their employers?



46% positive culture



40% A sense of purpose and meaning

Business leaders are now asking themselves...

- How do we operate together—at scale—in this new hybrid workplace? Where will we work? At home, in an office, or a little of both? Across time zones? Asynchronously?
- How will we stay aligned? How will we implement our company strategy and goals in this new hybrid work model?

Executives can easily feel like they're flying blind if they don't have an effective goal framework in place. OKRs provide these benefits (and many more) to executives:

- Full visibility into progress of business initiatives across all levels of the organization
- Stronger collaboration between departments and teams
- High-performing, empowered, and engaged employees
- Clear connection between daily work and overarching organizational goals
- More autonomous, focused teams

Make it happen:

Ask to present on OKRs at your next leadership meeting or offsite. Share the business benefits that Microsoft has seen from using OKRs internally by sharing our latest case study.

Pro Tip: Share a product feature with leaders in your organization that will get them to their ah-ha! moment when it comes to OKRs and Viva Goals. We recommend starting with the Review Dashboard feature, which makes presenting on progress—with context—at quarterly business reviews, departmental deep dives, town halls, team meetings, and board meetings easy for leaders

Impact, visibility, and alignment

Champions

Omar Shahine, Corporate Vice President of Product; Steven Bailey, Corporate Vice President of Engineering, Patrick Kelleher, Principal Project Manager; Maryleen Emeric, Chief of Staff for Modern Work Marketing organization.

Background

Setting and managing goals consistently at leadership levels; communicating the goals to the organization in emails and town halls; low visibility into how those goals were being actioned across whole team; receiving reports in combination of dashboards, spreadsheets and slides.

Pain points

Team leaders did not have visibility into how their objectives were being implemented and actioned through their organization, so could not make sure goals were met; individuals didn't consistently understand how their projects accrue to their team's goals – did not know the 'why' behind their work and it was creating negative employee poll results.

Solution

Empower leaders and teams to take customized, flexible approach to OKRs for their organization, training OKR Champions in best practices, and founding the internal OKR Center of Excellence to advise across the company.

Value

Improved visibility into how leadership goals are implemented; improved employee connection to business goals and confidence in impact of projects and initiatives; alignment across teams and functions; faster onboarding of new hires.

“OKRs allow anyone in the organization to see what other people are working on. Individuals can see the importance of their initiatives to their team. Leaders can quickly see how their objectives are implemented throughout their organization and quickly make changes to ensure that their goals are met.”

— Jennifer Perret, Principal Group Program Manager, Microsoft

Benefits of OKRs for Team Managers and People Leaders

Increase engagement and success with OKRs

- **Alignment:** Ensuring everyone is rowing in the same direction across the organization and pulling on the same rope.
- **Focus:** 3-5 OKRs per person, per quarter. The power to say “no” and prioritize work effectively.
- **Transparency:** Ownership of core outcomes across the organization creates clear accountability and surfaces dependencies & roadblocks.
- **Agility:** Frequency of assessment is critical for agility, and dynamic real-time data enables faster decision making.
- **Achieve:** Striving for incredibly ambitious outcomes and reaching for what’s possible.

For team managers, or anyone in a position where they need to make decisions on behalf of a larger group, they’ll have similar benefits to the executives, with some subtle differences. Here are a few of the greatest benefits that they’ll experience when adopting OKRs:

- Priorities are more focused, so team members are more autonomous
- More efficient team meetings with actionable outcomes
- Full transparency and increased collaboration with cross-functional partners
- Clear alignment between daily work and larger business initiatives
- Defined accountability and clear ownership of OKRs
- Improved ability to allocate resources effectively

Make it happen:

Schedule 1:1s with key leaders to identify the top goal-related challenges they’re experiencing with their teams and share with them how OKRs can address those challenges. Give them this [blog post from Microsoft Viva Goals CVP Vetri Vellore, which explains that OKRs can help every employee understand how their contributions matter.](#)

Benefits of OKRs for Individual Contributors

For individual contributors, the benefits of OKRs are strongly related to engagement and purpose. That's not too surprising, given the close relationship between employee performance and company culture (which is rated higher, on average, when a goal framework is in place¹). Here are some of the major benefits individual contributors can expect when adopting OKRs:

- Priorities are more focused, so team members are more autonomous goals
- Visibility into the top priorities for the organization and for individual teams
- Ability to better prioritize work, so less time is wasted on non-business critical initiatives
- Improved autonomy and ownership of their piece of the business
- Greater alignment to team members

Make it happen:

Show individual contributors in your organization what OKRs look like in action, and the benefits they offer for employee experience. Read the case study here: [Focus and alignment: How Microsoft uses OKRs to achieve business goals.](#)

If they still aren't sold

While these benefits may seem to speak for themselves, they may not be enough on their own to convince your organization to adopt OKRs. In the following section, we've made a list of the most common rebuttals you're likely to hear when introducing the idea of OKRs, and the way you can respond to them.

If they say: "I already have too much on my plate" Or "I don't have time for this."

You can tell them:

- OKRs keep you focused on 3-5 goals at a time so you can give more attention to what matters most.
- When you have OKRs defined, it becomes very clear which work is driving results for the business. This empowers you to say "no" to work that's not a priority.
- While all new things take a little time to get used to, the OKR methodology includes intentional efforts and tools to help the process become a welcomed habit, not a time-consuming task.

If they say: "We're already tracking this information elsewhere."

You can tell them:

- Perhaps this information already exists, but is it functional? When goals, data, and processes are constrained by siloes or dispersed across multiple systems, it limits our organization's ability to embrace opportunities, address risk, and adapt to change.
- Our leaders need easy access to information that reflects progress, challenges, or opportunities across the organization so they can plan for success. Without this, they're flying blind. With the OKR framework, there is full transparency — for every individual, leader, and executive — into business results.
- Great! With the right OKR tool, you won't need to duplicate your efforts to record this information. You'll have integrations that will pull the data right into one single system.

If they say: "This isn't how they do it in Measure What Matters."

You can tell them:

- *Measure What Matters* is a great book, and a huge contributor to the popularity of the OKR methodology. However, it's not a playbook that works for every organization. Since we're not Google or Intel, we need our own, individualized rollout plan that takes our organizational culture into account.

If they say: "I don't want to be scored."

You can tell them:

- OKR scoring isn't about compensation (in fact, that's actually a way to hinder performance and growth!). Instead, it's about continuous improvement.
- OKRs make performance discussions more actionable, and more frequent with regular check-ins. That's a good thing, because it means that even if you fall a little behind, you'll get back on track quickly.

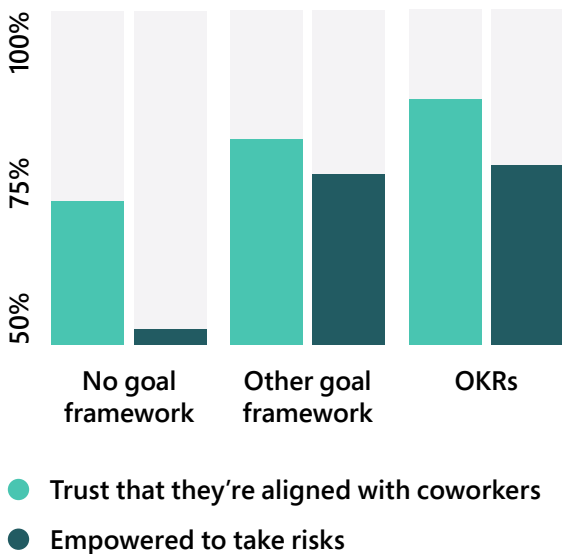
- OKRs are supposed to be ambitious, so there is room for unforeseen challenges and obstacles. The methodology is designed to tolerate failure, without discouraging individuals — and the organization as a whole - to push the boundaries, be innovative, and achieve more.

OKR Scoring and Engagement

When we surveyed employees for our 2021 Goal Management Report, we found that only 53% of individual contributors who don't use a goal framework feel empowered to take risks. 88% of customers, however, say they feel empowered to take risks, despite the possibility of failure.

This data suggests that without a structure in place for setting and measuring goals, employees lack ambition to innovate, in part because they are hindered by a fear of failure. In contrast, employees working toward set goals are engaged enough to worry about whether they'll reach them and empowered enough to take the necessary risks to get there.

OKRs Enable Alignment and Innovation



If they say: "I don't want my team to be distracted by frequent check-ins."

You can tell them:

- Again, with the right tools in place, check-ins aren't a distraction. They simply become part of your workflow.
- Checking in often gives you the data you need to understand what's happening within your business. This high resolution allows you to continuously fine-tune and improve.

- Check-ins let you catch issues or roadblocks in real-time instead of waiting for an end of quarter review to notice something's gone awry. This way, you have a chance to get on track before things get completely derailed.

If they say: "It's going to be too hard to get everyone on board."

You can tell them:

- There are benefits of OKRs for people at every level of the organization (and show them the list from the previous section!).
- All new processes take time, but most organizations get into a rhythm within 3-6 months (1 or 2 OKR cycles) and start seeing results quickly.
- There are OKR softwares (like Viva Goals) that seamlessly integrate with tools we're already using at our organization, so it'll quickly become part of our normal workflow.
- If industry leaders like Google, Amazon, Slack, and Dropbox have gotten their workforces on board, then we can, too.

Ready, set, go!

The steps you're taking to get your organization on board with the OKR methodology will be critically important to the success of your OKR program.

When everyone understands the benefits they stand to see — as individuals, teams, and as an organization - when this framework is in place, they will be more willing to overcome any hesitations they may have to change, and get on board. And the sooner they do, the sooner your organization can start turning goals into business results.

Ready to get started? Learn more about Microsoft Viva Goals here.

<https://microsoft.com/viva>