

The Leader's OKR Guide

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Introduction

This guide was written for Product Managers, but should be helpful as a reference outside of this context for any leaders using OKRs in the context of a larger organisation.

You'll find it organised into **6 parts** that could be used independently:

1. **What are OKRs** (p 2-3) a standalone guide that introduces Objectives, Key Results and Initiatives, Plans and Actions.
2. **Working with OKRs** (4-5) covers Weekly Meetings and the various other meetings you'll need.
3. **Developing OKRs from Strategy** (6) talks about how to connect your OKRs with your strategy.
4. **Working with Sponsors** (7-8) discusses how to work with sponsors while setting and executing OKRs
5. **Working with Other Stakeholders** (9) covers some tips for how to work with dependencies, customers, commercial teams and managers.
6. **Sponsors' Guide to OKRs** (10-11) is a guide that will help sponsors in conjunction with **What are OKRs** (2-3) and optionally **Working with OKRs** (4-5).

Additional Content:

- A. **Roles used in this Guide** (12) briefly discusses how we use role names in this guide.
- B. **Example OKRs** (13-14) explains some example OKRs for Explore and Exploit phases, and provides a list of some Good and Bad examples for discussion.
- C. **Case Study** (15-16) describes how we used OKRs in Google Transit with sponsors and stakeholders.

Common Problems – Throughout this guide you will find common problems highlighted with this icon



OKR Examples – Throughout this guide you will find OKR Examples highlighted with this icon

OKRs

1. What are OKRs?

OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) are more than just a goal format. They are a leadership framework for leaders everywhere in the organisation, from CEOs and functional executives to cross-functional leaders like Product, Project and Program Managers.

Leaders, teams, and stakeholders collaborate to set OKRs that specify the most important problems to work on, and what success looks like. This empowers the team to make independent decisions about their daily work and keep those decisions aligned with longer term strategy and vision. At the same time, they provide a means for stakeholders to maintain visibility and provide a structure for review.

The quarterly set-align-execute-review cycle forms a rhythm that creates urgency to deliver results in the short to medium term, and creates regular opportunity to course-correct, both during the execution cycle and in regular strategic reviews.

Key Questions for...

Setting OKRs

- ▶ **Objectives:** What are the top few things to focus on this quarter? Why and why now?
- ▶ **Key Results:** For each objective, how will we define success? How will that help us?
- ▶ Should we **empower people** with broader key results?
- ▶ Should we **align people** with more specific key results?

Reviewing OKRs

- ▶ Do these Objectives capture our strategy?
- ▶ Do these Key Results help us make decisions?
- ▶ Do we have what we need to deliver?
- ▶ Are we aligned with our sponsors?

Objectives

Each quarter, set one to five Objectives that define the *areas you want to focus on this quarter*.

- ▶ **Form:** [We will...] <VERB> this <OUTCOME>
- ▶ **Fewer is better:**
 - ▷ One is perfect as it creates a single focal point.
 - ▷ Three works well for most teams.
 - ▷ More starts to create confusion and misalignment.
- ▶ **Set direction and inspire action**
 - ▷ Aim for memorable so it's easy to bring up in meetings and discussions.
 - ▷ Your objectives taken together should communicate your strategy for this quarter.
 - ▷ Focus on the customer: that's what matters.
- ▶ **No need for numbers or objective criteria**
 - ▷ That's what Key Results are for.

Too many objectives.

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. The fewer objectives you set, the more valuable each becomes. Don't try to cover everything (this isn't a good time to be MECE!), just the most important things.

Long, boring, or complex objectives.

If you think you may need to explain or illustrate your objective, there is still work to do to make it simple and clear. Err on the side of short, informal, and memorable. Avoid business jargon (synergy, leverage), empty adjectives (dynamic, innovative) and technical definitions (market segment, operationalize).

Key Results

Each quarter, set one to five Objectives that define the *areas you want to focus on this quarter*. For each objective, set two to five Key Results that define success for that objective.

- ▶ **Form:** Like **SMART goals**, aligned with your phase (Search/Execute/Scale or Explore/Exploit)
 - ▷ **Improvements:** Increase/Decrease <METRIC> from X to Y
 - ▷ **Quality Control:** Maintain <METRIC> above/below X
 - ▷ **Operationalisation:** Start measuring <METRIC>
 - ▷ **Project Milestones:** Deliver <CRITICAL MILESTONE>
 - ▷ **Investigation:** Answer <QUESTION> or Test <HYPOTHESIS>
- ▶ **Due Date:**
 - ▷ End of the OKR quarter unless specified.
- ▶ **Select Metrics and Milestones Carefully:**
 - ▷ Significant to customers and stakeholders.
 - ▷ Clarify the objective and measure progress towards it.
 - ▷ Define the most important challenges the team will work on.
 - ▷ Specify the desired value to create, not the actions to take.

Key Results are low level actions or milestones.

eg “Increase number of landing pages from 6 to 18”. Ask what you’re really trying to achieve. Are there other ways to achieve the goal? How can we differentiate good from mediocre?

Stating the outcome without the value that leads to it.

eg “Increase quarterly revenue from £1.9M to £2.3M” – How should we decide between the many options here? Different people will make different decisions and may end up conflicting.

Key Results that never change.

Learn each quarter and set more realistic Key Results so you can achieve them and move on to the next part of your strategy. Rolling over is fine occasionally but can become a drag.

Initiatives, Plans and Actions

Initiatives and plans are a way of organising the actions that enable you to achieve your Objectives and deliver your Key Results. These could be user stories, sprint goals, kanban tasks, a to-do list, a complex project plan with a GANTT chart, or something else. You might record them in software, or paper, on a whiteboard, or not at all. You may plan the whole quarter in advance, or a few weeks or even a day at a time. Do what works for you and the people you work with.

OKRs don’t remove the need for detailed planning and thinking about actions. Rather, they free you up to be able to do that planning and thinking whenever you need to create the results you are aiming for. Often it is helpful to create a lightweight plan for the quarter while setting OKRs to ensure your Key Results are realistic – but don’t let that plan constrain you during the quarter.

Committing to initiatives and plans rather than OKRs.

In each weekly meeting and stakeholder interaction, discuss your initiatives and plans in the context of the objective you’re trying to achieve and the key results that define success. If you find a better way to meet those objectives, then change your plans accordingly.

2. Working with OKRS

OKRs on their own don't do anything, even if they are entered in a software package. Leaders need to actively use them in communications, meetings, and daily work, especially when working with others. Consider them to be a framework for communication, that is intended to help a team maximise the value of their efforts.

Weekly Meetings

Weekly meetings are where the action happens - they are the drum-beat of execution. The way you allocate time in weekly meetings will determine how effort is invested for the rest of the week. Review progress and plan next actions for OKRs in your weekly meetings. Similarly, review business as usual key performance indicators (BAU KPIs) and customer or stakeholder feedback, and plan actions based on what you discover.

Key Questions for...

OKRs:

- ▶ What **progress** have we made?
- ▶ What **problems** have we encountered?
- ▶ What have we **learnt**?
- ▶ What are the biggest **risks**?
- ▶ What will we **change** going forward?
- ▶ What new **actions** should we take?

BAU KPIs:

- ▶ What has **changed**?
- ▶ **Why** has it changed?
- ▶ How do we **know**?
- ▶ What **data** could have helped us see this earlier?
- ▶ What **new data** do we need next week?
- ▶ What new **actions** should we take?

Customer Feedback:

- ▶ Do we **understand** the customer impact?
- ▶ Is this part of a **pattern**?
- ▶ What is the **root cause**?
- ▶ What would we **miss** without this feedback?
- ▶ What **data** could help us see this systematically?
- ▶ What new **actions** should we take?

Set-and-forget.

Just setting OKRs or selecting KPIs won't have any effect, even if you use software to keep track of them. Discuss them in weekly meetings and refer to them frequently in ad-hoc meetings. Use them to help you revise initiatives and plans.

Spending a lot of time on topics that aren't relevant to your OKRs or KPIs.

Either your OKRs are set incorrectly, or you're focusing effort on the wrong things. Make sure your OKRs represent the most important priorities, and then invest in those priorities.

OKRs are in "addition" to your regular work and weekly meetings.

Change your way of working to structure your work around the Objectives you're trying to achieve and the Key Results that define success.

Each attendee only talks about "their" OKRs or KPIs and tunes out for other discussions.

The purpose of having a team meeting is to drive collaboration between members of the team and apply different experiences and expertise to improving overall performance.

Reviewing today's KPIs without historical context.

Review the numbers over time to spot trends and increase the team's understanding of the business. Improve the KPI data each time by seeking leading indicators, comparing different time periods, and finding better ways to detect issues and identify opportunities.

Other Meetings

These meetings provide an opportunity to step outside of the daily and weekly execution cycle and make sure you're still on track to deliver the strategy - and indeed, check whether the strategy and OKRs you are working towards are still valid. These meetings are part of the OKR approach, but are good practice for any approach to ensure you're keeping your execution aligned with your strategy.

Mid-Quarter Review

Review progress in detail mid-cycle, predict likely end-of-quarter outcomes, and change plans, resources or OKRs if needed. There's little that happens in a mid-quarter review that can't also happen in the course of the weekly meetings, but this mid-cycle meeting provides an opportunity to course-correct. Involve sponsors and stakeholders if possible, or consult closely with them in advance and report back after.

Retrospective

At the end of an OKR cycle, review the OKR process itself and take learnings for next cycle. This may include learnings about OKRs or about your business and team. This usually just involves the OKR team, but it can include others.

Quarterly All-Hands

Announce the final results of last quarter's OKRs (use the metrics in the KRs) and any valuable learnings. Share next quarter's OKRs and how you'll deliver them. Sponsors and stakeholders attending can see the value the team is creating and back the plan for the quarter ahead.

Spending more time defending past performance than creating future results.

Look backwards only enough to learn from the past. Save performance assessment for a dedicated conversation. Focus most energy on what to do next and how to improve performance.

Using OKR results to assess individual or team performance.

Use OKRs to drive performance, not to measure it. Assess performance based on achievements in the context of constraints and resources available, not how well the OKR-setting exercise predicted the outcome. This requires in-depth engagement with the team or individual assessed.

Something changed and our OKRs are no longer valid.

Changing OKRs is never ideal, but if you learn something new or the environment changes, and the OKRs are no longer helpful, change them to ensure they are helping you go in the right direction. The only thing worse than ignoring stale OKRs is keeping working on them. Don't do silly things just because your OKRs say you should.



3. Developing OKRs from Strategy

Developing good OKRs depends on having a good strategy. If your strategy is poor, there will be too much ambiguity and developing meaningful OKRs will be very difficult.

First clarify your strategy into a few sentences or short paragraphs, covering your diagnosis, the guiding policies you intend to adopt, and what you'll need to do to get there. In the execute and scale or exploit phases of a project, your strategy will likely be quite stable, and you'll be able to refine and re-use it over many cycles. In the search or explore phase of a new project, or when customer discovery is needed, your diagnosis is the opportunity, the policies are the hypotheses you have, and what you'll need to do are the tests you'll need to run to create certainty. Your strategy will evolve as quickly as you learn.

Either way, having a good and clear strategy reduces complexity and ambiguity dramatically, because you are making choices about what to do. Writing OKRs is deciding what you will implement this quarter and defining success. The OKRs then keep you focused on it so you execute your strategy.

Key Questions for...

Strategy

- ▶ What **challenge** (problem or opportunity) are you addressing?
- ▶ What **approach** will you take to address it?
- ▶ What **coherent actions** will you carry out to accomplish this?
- ▶ What makes this approach **better** than alternatives?
 - ▷ Leverage, focus, dependencies, momentum, new solutions...

Business jargon and buzzwords masquerading as strategy.

Get specific, use simple words. Keep asking "what does that really mean?" until you have it clear enough to explain to a stranger in a lift. Do the same with your OKRs.

Not facing the real challenges. Make sure your diagnosis describes the actual challenges you face.

This will allow you to assess if your strategy is a good way to achieve them.

Output goals as strategy. Growth, revenue, profits, margins, etc are output goals, not strategy.

You need to decide which path you're going to take to get to these goals.

Trying to do everything.

If you can't narrow down your strategy to a few key elements, it's not a strategy, it's a list of options. Make some hard decisions about where to focus.

Unrealistic ambitions.

A moonshot without a credible plan is not a strategy, it's a dream. You don't need to know everything, just enough for credibility.

Good intentions.

If your strategy is that you're going to work hard, be persistent and do things better, it's not a strategy, it's wishful thinking. What choices will you make?

Writing OKRs without a strategy.

You're trying to do all the work of developing a strategy while writing OKRs, without realising. Start by writing a strategy – or set an OKR to set a strategy.



4. Working with Sponsors

Sponsors have an interest in the success of your work, though bring their own perspectives and agendas. More than just providing resources and funding, they have expertise on what is valuable for the end customer, what will work for the business, and can help you get things done. Their ongoing support and engagement are critical to your success.

Every interaction with your sponsors is an opportunity for mutual learning and creating alignment. They can provide you context much more efficiently than you can get it on your own. You of course provide them the results, but more than this, you have or are developing deep expertise in your area that is of value to them.

Multiple sponsors who disagree on critical topics.

Some disagreements you can navigate – there is rarely complete unanimity, and a little ambiguity should not hold you back. When the disagreements are more serious, bring the sponsors together (physically, virtually, or on one email thread), lay out the disagreements and impact clearly, and ask them to align. It may help for them to nominate a lead sponsor who can do this for you and represent the sponsors' views together – or if that is not possible, escalate to a more senior leader who can navigate this level of ambiguity with the sponsors as a peer.

Setting OKRs

If you can, involve sponsors in helping set the objectives and key results with you. If you can't involve them directly, seek their input before you start, review drafts with them, and include them in communication when you begin the quarter.

Key Questions for...

Discussing with Sponsors

- ▶ Which problems are most important for us to solve? Why?
- ▶ What does success look like?
- ▶ What do we need to know about the context we're operating in?
- ▶ What are our biggest risks? What does failure look like? How do we avoid it?
- ▶ What scope do we have for decision-making? How can we make decisions quickly while maintaining trust? When do we need to involve others?

Misalignment with sponsors on what level of commitment the OKR represents.

Ensure you align with your sponsors about whether you're making high-confidence commitments or laying out ambitious stretch aspirations – or somewhere in-between. It may help to specify whether a given KR is “committed”, “target” or “stretch”, or even have multiple sub-KRs to define your ambitions explicitly.

Misalignment with sponsors about how decisions are made during the quarter.

Many sponsors will default to making decisions themselves. Some will expect you to step up. Earn their trust by seeking to understand their concerns and how they make decisions themselves so you can learn from them. Educate them where needed, especially about the intentional risks you are taking, and pick your battles wisely when there are differences.

Execution

After setting OKRs and reporting the results, the most important touchpoint with your sponsors is the mid-quarter review. If they can't join that review, conduct a sponsor review in advance of your internal review to get their feedback and input, and report back to them the outcome of the mid-quarter review – any changes or important learnings.

Depending on your sponsors, you may wish to schedule regular or ad-hoc check-ins and update them with regular reporting. Maintain open lines of communication and adapt to how they work, while helping them understand how you work.

If they wish to attend the weekly meeting, this can be very helpful and an indication of the value you are providing to them and their interest in it.

Key Questions for...

Discussing with Sponsors

- ▶ Review **Progress, Plans & Problems** – like the (usually internal) weekly review, but higher level and more forward-looking. They need to audit the past to gain trust and context but focus most of the conversation on future actions to create results.
- ▶ Are we on **track** – keep them informed of major changes to likely outcomes (surprise minimisation) to manage their expectations.
- ▶ Should we **change** anything?
- ▶ Can they **help** in any way – problem-solving, resources, connections, barrier removal, alignment, etc...

Disengaged sponsors.

While autonomy is great, disengagement is dangerous, because it often indicates apathy more than high trust. Make sure you are really creating value for them and be extremely efficient about keeping them informed on key topics. When you need their input, ask explicitly so they know what is expected. In extreme cases, you may benefit from finding more motivated sponsors or changing the project to something of higher value.

Sponsor (or their delegate) micromanages the team and overrides decisions.

This may be due to low trust in the team or low experience working with product teams. More transparency is usually the solution. Learn about their concerns and how they make decisions and educate them on your approach and reasons for making decisions. Ask them for help to guide them to the most useful areas. Review the decision-making scope. In some cases, you may need more senior resources on your team, or a sponsor familiar with empowered product teams.



5. Working with Other Stakeholders

Depending on the stakeholder and their role, you may focus on different areas and interact with different frequencies, but every interaction is an opportunity for mutual learning and creating alignment, with the goal of maximising return on investment.

Dependencies

OKRs help them understand the context for what you are asking them to do. If there's a high dependency, involve them at the OKR setting stage to ensure they are willing to commit to what you need before you communicate the OKRs to others. Occasionally, it can help to involve sponsors or managers to unblock dependencies where needed.

Customers

Customers are often external so will rarely have visibility on your OKRs. Engage in Customer Discovery work to learn what they really need so you can define the problem, your approach and your actions before you set your OKRs. A good indicator that you're on the right track is if you believe your customers would be excited to see your OKRs - if they wouldn't care, perhaps your OKRs aren't adding as much value as you hoped.

Commercial

These are usually a broader group than your sponsors, and are often your main channel to your customers. They can be a good proxy for helping you understand customers and whether your OKRs will deliver value. Engage them early to ensure they are ready and willing to connect you with the customers when needed.

Managers

Ask your manager for guidance to ensure your OKRs are delivering value to the right stakeholders, and coaching on the day-to-day work. One side-effect of that deep involvement is that they can assess your performance well, rather than relying on your OKR results alone.

Trying to teach all stakeholders OKRs.

It can be helpful if they are familiar with OKRs, but there's no need. Just share your OKRs and say "here's what we're trying to get done this quarter", and use that to drive a useful conversation. You may need to be explicit about commitment levels to ensure you're aligned (as with sponsors).



6. Sponsors' Guide to OKRs

What are OKRs for?

OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) define the value the team intends to deliver this quarter. They enable delegation of daily decision-making to the team doing the work, while maintaining visibility and influence over the results the team is aiming to deliver. Your ongoing engagement, especially while setting the OKRs but also while executing them, is critical to the success of the team. The key is to find a balance that empowers the team to deliver the results, while maintaining sufficient oversight.

Every interaction with the team is an opportunity for mutual learning and creating alignment, with the goal of maximising return on investment. Frequently, you will be providing additional context about customers, business value, constraints, and problems. You won't have all the answers, but you have a broader perspective, and they can benefit from that. They provide results, but more than this, they have or are developing deep expertise in an area of value to you that you can access more efficiently than if you were acquiring it yourself.

Apathy or lack of time.

If the demands of sponsoring a project are too great, or it isn't valuable enough to warrant your time and attention, consider whether sponsoring it is the right thing for you to do. You may need to delegate sponsorship to a sufficiently senior person who can, help the team find another sponsor, or identify a new project of higher value.

Multiple sponsors who disagree on critical topics.

The product team has enough ambiguity in their domain without needing to navigate extra ambiguity caused by sponsor disagreements. Try to align with other sponsors, perhaps nominating a lead sponsor responsible for this, to simplify things for them so they can focus on the product and market rather than internal concerns.

Setting OKRs

Your input during the OKR setting process will help set their direction for the coming quarter. You may not be able to be involved in the process itself, but provide them context, review their drafts and ideas, and make your support explicit once the OKRs are set. Focus on how best to pose challenges that will engage the creativity and develop the potential of the team for the future, rather than trying to define the activities they will do at this early stage.

Key Questions for...

Discussing with the team

- ▶ **Objectives:** What are the **top few things to focus** on this quarter? **Why** and **why now**?
- ▶ **Key Results:** For each objective, how will we **define success**? How will that **help the team**?
- ▶ **Context:** What do you need to know about the context you're operating in?
- ▶ **Risks:** What are the biggest **risks**? What does failure look like? How can we avoid it?
- ▶ **Remit:** What **scope** do they have for decision-making? How can they make decisions quickly while maintaining trust? When do they need to involve others?
- ▶ **Alignment:** Is the team **aligned** with each other and with me as a sponsor?

Misalignment with teams on what level of commitment the OKR represents.

Ensure you align with the team about whether they're making high-confidence commitments or laying out ambitious stretch aspirations – or somewhere in-between. It may help for them to specify whether a given KR is "committed", "target" or "stretch", or even have multiple sub-KRs to define their ambitions explicitly.

Misalignment with teams about how decisions are made during the quarter.

Many teams will want to make more decisions themselves than you may initially be comfortable with – though you may need to challenge some teams to take more responsibility and initiative. In both cases, provide them enough context and guidance to make good decisions, and only intervene when the cost of a bad decision is higher than the benefit of the learning that comes from them making it.

Using traditional lagging operating metrics (eg revenue, utilisation, etc) to manage early stage product development.

The goal of product development is to discover a new solution that creates value for customers that has not been explored before. To do this effectively, we need to measure what matters on this journey and take the appropriate risks to maximise learning. OKRs are a tool to help do this - if we select the right metrics.

Execution

After setting OKRs and reporting the results, the most important touchpoint is the mid-quarter review. If you can't join that review, conduct a sponsor review in advance of their internal review, and request a follow up afterwards. You may also want to create ad-hoc or other regular meetings to keep in touch. Maintain open lines of communication and adapt to how they work, while helping them understand how you work.

If you wish to attend their weekly meeting, this can add value, but be careful of micromanaging or focusing too much on the plans and initiatives rather than the objectives and key results the team is trying to achieve.

Key Questions for...

Discussing with the team

- ▶ **Review Progress, Plans & Problems** – Review the past to gain trust and context but focus most of the conversation on how to deliver the OKRs – reviewing plans in context of what is known now.
- ▶ **Are we on track?** – Make sure you're informed of major changes to likely outcomes so you aren't surprised. Surprises happen when two-way communication isn't working correctly, which is as much your responsibility as theirs.
- ▶ Should we **change** anything?
- ▶ Can you **help** in any way – problem-solving, resources, connections, barrier removal, alignment, etc...

Micromanaging the team & overriding their decisions.

If you are making their decisions, but are only available on a limited schedule, you will slow them down and create dependency. Your role is to be a coach, escalation point and problem-solver. Override decisions sparingly, and only to avoid an exceptionally bad outcome or to force a learning.

Low trust in the team's independent work.

More transparency is usually the solution. Learn more about how they work and why they made certain decisions and educate them on your concerns and the thinking behind your decisions. Discuss decision-making scope. In some cases, you may need a senior person on the product team, or to find a different sponsor.

Using OKRs as a passive reporting tool or to measure the teams' performance.

OKRs help teams work in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environment where fast decision making is key. Use them instead as part of a two-way conversation to help coach the team and guide their product strategy and decision-making.

Roles used in this guide:

Many organisations use different roles and role titles. Don't worry about mapping your titles to these roles. Interpret this guide as it applies to your situation.

Product manager

Discovering and delivering a product that meets customer needs and works for the business (desirable, feasible, viable). Often leads a cross-functional product team, though usually without line management responsibility. This guide is written for the Product Manager but could apply to other OKR leaders.

- ▶ **Responsible** for developing the strategy and writing OKRs
 - ▶ This includes **Consulting** the product team, Sponsor and other Stakeholders
- ▶ **Accountable** for delivering the product along with the rest of the product team and Enablers.

Sponsor

The “investor” who provides the funding and resources and expects a return on their investment. Usually close to the customer.

- ▶ **Accountable** for getting a return on investment by delivering value to their customers.
 - ▶ As part of this, they **review** and **approve** OKRs and strategy.
- ▶ **Consulted** about execution, often **contributing** by **providing context** or **additional resources**, **connecting** other stakeholders, **coaching**, **removing barriers**, and **problem-solving**.

Other Stakeholders

Others with an interest or involvement in the product. May include:

- ▶ **Enablers/Dependencies** – teams or functions you partner with to deliver, including complementary product teams, platform or technology teams, marketing, legal, finance, and so on.
- ▶ **Commercial/Business Lines** – deliver the product to the customer, usually including sales, customer relationships and often actual delivery and service.
- ▶ **Customers** – the end customers who you build the product for. Consider if they are internal or external to your business, and whether you need to treat buyers, users and channel or delivery partners separately.
- ▶ **Managers** - often you'll have a line manager separate from your sponsor. In many ways, they are like the sponsor but “in your team”, so can help you navigate sponsor issues if needed.

They may or may not use OKRs, and they may or may not be internal to your organisation.

- ▶ Usually Informed and/or Consulted about your OKRs and progress, often contributing to them.

Example OKRs

OKRs are as unique as the organizations and teams that use them, and the products, problems and situations they find themselves in. What works for one team may be counter-productive to another team in a superficially similar situation. Start from your own strategy and situation and build OKRs from there rather than copying other examples.

That said, it can be helpful to see examples of other teams OKRs in context. Here is a collection of example OKRs that other teams have found useful, and some discussion of their context. The details have been removed to facilitate discussion of the principles at work.

Search Phase

Context: New product in a narrow but lucrative niche of some existing offering. An existing offering served a general use case, but users in a specific niche were signing up and then churning rapidly.

Objective: Discover a proposition that works for the **X** niche

Key Result 1: Identify the top **5** reasons niche customers left our more general offering.

Key Result 2: Test our top **10** features and rank them by attractiveness to new niche customers.

Key Result 3: Increase trial signups from niche customers from **X** to **Y** per week.

Key Result 4: Increase activation rate of new niche customers from **X%** to **Y%** per week.

Discussion: The team had some ideas about what they needed to do to serve this market, but needed to test these hypotheses with some customer discovery (KR 1 & 2). These ideas would then be applied to increase signups in this target market (KR3) and further, improve the product to ensure they were actually providing value that mattered to these customers (KR4). They had decided not to test pricing this quarter to focus on getting the product right.

Execute Phase

Context: Existing enterprise SaaS product growth had stalled. They had evidence that a self-service product would open untapped markets in the SME space, and possibly help grow their enterprise users faster. This required that they make the product much easier to integrate and change the go to market strategy from enterprise sales to technical marketing-driven.

Objective: Make our product really easy for developers to find, integrate and use

Key Result 1: Developers can integrate and use product without external dependencies.

Key Result 2: Decrease average elapsed time for developers to complete first use from **X** days to **Y** hours.

Key Result 3: Increase 7 day active trial users from **X** to **Y**.

Key Result 4: Deliver new recurring monthly revenue of over **\$X** without sales contact.

Discussion: By reducing effort for developers to use the product (KR 1 and 2 – note how aggressive KR2 is), they expected to be able to attract many more trial users (KR3). By establishing an appealing pricing model for small scale usage, they wanted to get developers to use their corporate credit cards to sign up for a paid account online (KR4). KR4 was designed to be met with a single sale - the X was very low – but it required building an online checkout process.

OKRs

More Example OKRs

The following OKRs are adapted from real OKRs, with details changed for the purposes of illustration. While the examples are somewhat fanciful, they are here to illustrate points and be useful as a guide, rather than to be copied directly.

Objective: Explore genetic therapy as a treatment to improve banker ethics

Key Result 1: Measure the ethical effectiveness of 45 new genetic treatments on senior bankers

Key Result 2: Sign 3 gene therapy proof-of-concepts with tier 1 or 2 banks

Key Result 3: Increase Biotech Banker Club membership from 260 to 370

Key Result 4: Increase inbound biotech startup leads from 2 to 12 over rolling 30 day period

Key Result 5: Decrease bankers lost to genetic malfunction from 5 to 2 over rolling 30 day period.

OKRs

Objective: Exploit AI mortgage technology to sell more mortgages

Key Result 1: Increase number of AI mortgage products with a sale from 13 to 19

Key Result 2: Increase daily unique views of AI mortgage news site from 18k to 21k

Key Result 3: Decrease average time to conversion for AI mortgages from 30 to 17 days

Key Result 4: Decrease average excess risk per mortgage from 15% to 2% vs manual assessment

Key Result 5: Sign AI mortgage partnerships with 3 new mortgage brokers

OKRs

Objective: Scale up bio-blockchain to reduce CO2 emissions from blockchain

Key Result 1: Increase number of BDRs who have sold bio-blockchain from 17 to 85

Key Result 2: Increase CSRs trained on bio-blockchain from 30% to 95%

Key Result 3: Decrease time to deliver bio-blockchain implementations from 10.5 to 7.3 days

Key Result 4: Maintain CO2 saved per bio-blockchain transaction at 95% +/- 5%

Key Result 5: Launch bio-blockchain PR campaign with front-section coverage in 7 national newspapers

OKRs

Bad Example OKRs

While some of the problems in these OKRs are clear, bear in mind that sometimes it's better to have a poor OKR and learn from it than to have no OKR at all – and sometimes an OKR that is great for one team and situation is terrible for another.

Objective: Become the leading SaaS provider in our niche by being more competitive, realising synergies, and optimising our processes to reduce waste while maintaining our environmental and ethical focus

Key Result 1: Implement best practices in all of our divisions

Key Result 2: Sell significantly more products

Key Result 3: Improve our Google SEO ranking so we're number 1 everywhere

Key Result 4: Try harder to maintain great customer service

Key Result 5: Save \$50,000 in operating costs by the end of March.

OKRs

Objective: Make more revenue

Key Result 1: Increase revenue from 18k to 21k per week

Key Result 2: Create 10 new campaigns including custom landing pages

Key Result 3: Call customers 3x more often than before

Key Result 4: Increase our price from \$50 to \$55 without reducing conversion rate

Key Result 5: Write sales plan by 13 April

OKRs

Case Study – Google Transit

Background

In the mid-2000s, Google launched public transport on Google Maps, known as Google Transit. It was second only to StreetView in driving usage of Maps in any location it was launched. However, launching it in any location depended on getting access to data that belonged to all of the public transport agencies that served that location, so Google commissioned a team to arrange access to the data with commercial and technical staff. I was the technical and product leader of that team, alongside a commercial partnerships lead.

Our strategy was to pursue an “open data” model with an open-source data format (GTFS) and encourage a whole ecosystem of similar apps. We believed that this ecosystem would encourage more agencies to release their data publicly, and we’d benefit from that without needing to build a large content acquisition team. We’d then compete on consumer experience rather than data availability.

The Process



1. **Negotiate** – Secure data access either via open data or with minimal conditions.
2. **Create** - The agency creates a GTFS feed with their data.
3. **QA** - We review the feed and set up regular uploads of fresh data.
4. **Process** - The product team processes the feed and puts it on a test site.
5. **Review** - The agency reviews the user experience.
6. **Launch** - We arrange a launch with PR, agency, and product go-live.

Public Transport Coverage OKRs

We developed a cross-functional OKR to drive additional coverage. I was the owner of this OKR, but it was very much shared between multiple teams. It looked like this and remained similar for some time:

Objective: Launch Google Transit in **X** more cities

Key Result 1: Increase the number of publicly available GTFS feeds from **X** to **Y**.

Key Result 2: Increase the number of cities where users can get public transport directions from **X** to **Y**.

Key Result 3: Deliver **X million** page views on Google Public Transit news articles.

Key Result 4: Speak at **X** public transport technology conferences.

OKRs

Sponsors' Dissatisfaction

After a few early wins, we weren't making much progress, especially in Europe, despite it having five times as much public transport usage as the USA. Our sponsors became dissatisfied with our progress, and asked us for more aggressive targets. We requested more resources and a budget to buy the data from agencies and fund the feed creation and review. They refused, insisted that we keep the open data strategy, and again demanded faster progress – not by a little bit, but an order of magnitude.

We gathered the cross functional team and re-assessed our strategy.

Case Study Continued – Google Transit

Analysis

Agencies had trouble generating the GTFS feed itself, as it usually required custom code. And frequently they didn't have good quality data, which they'd discover in the final review process when they saw what their data looked like on Google Maps and refused to launch until they had corrected it. Most agencies were inherently conservative, and would only take a risk if cities they considered comparable or slightly larger than themselves did so first successfully.

But more problematically, in contrast to the USA, where public transport was underutilised, European public transport was often crowded, so the agencies weren't motivated by our argument that sharing data on Google Maps would increase ridership. They were also concerned that if the data was incorrect or outdated, they could end up with crowd control problems.

Content Strategy

We decided to make it easier for them to work with us. We would automate creating GTFS feeds by working with the IT providers to integrate this as a feature, and make it easier and faster to review and improve data quality through better tools and improving our own QA service. And we'd focus on marquee cities, maximising PR goodwill when we launched to encourage other cities. Our additional OKR was like this:

Objective: Make it really easy for agencies to launch on Google Transit

Key Result 1: Launch 1 marquee city with X million media impressions mentioning Google and the Agency.

Key Result 2: Eliminate custom development to create GTFS feeds for at least X agencies.

Key Result 3: Decrease our QA turnaround time from X to Y days.

Key Result 4: Enable agencies to review GTFS stop locations on Google Maps self-service.

OKRs

Product Strategy

Beyond this, we wanted to make the product much more compelling for agencies by helping address their crowd control and overcrowding problems by sharing live data – schedule updates, service alerts, and vehicle positions. This would help passengers find better routes, creating a win-win-win for agencies, passengers and Google. Our additional cross-functional OKR was like this:

Objective: Launch real-time schedule updates on Google Transit

Key Result 1: Launch 1 city with each of live schedule updates, service alerts and vehicle positions.

Key Result 2: Increase user NPS score in those cities by an incremental X points.

Key Result 3: Sign X agencies up to launch with real time data within the next 12 months.

OKRs

Our sponsors had to fully understand and buy into the strategy, even though it didn't deliver the immediate results they wanted and required significant investment.

Outcome

Most of these OKRs took longer than we expected to complete, but we were able to show significant progress in the right direction each time, and managed our sponsors' expectations as we went. We encountered a number of other challenges which required further evolutions in the strategy and OKRs, but each time, the OKRs made our strategic choices concrete and enabled us to execute faster.