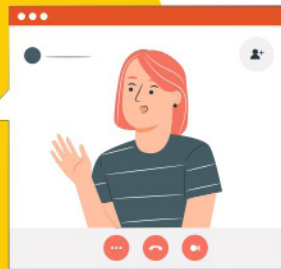
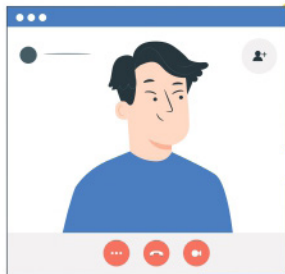




Zimyo

OKR Playbook for Remote Teams





The world of work has witnessed a massive shift post the pandemic. With the virus resurfacing and lockdowns getting implemented more than once in countries, remote work seems likely to continue for a long time to come. Even with the development of a vaccine for the coronavirus, neither employees nor employers are confident enough to go back to the old way of work.

Ensuring safety of employees continues to be paramount. Even when the pandemic ends, remote work will not magically fade away. Studies are hinting towards an emergence of a hybrid workplace that will change the way organisations operate forever.

With remote work likely to stay as an option for a long time to come, organisations should deeply focus on ways to keep their employees focused and motivated. While studies have found remote work to increase productivity, the lack of human connection can also make employees fatigued and disengaged.





What has Changed in Remote Work?

Before the pandemic, meeting up with colleagues and having face to face conversations was common. Being in physical proximity definitely leads to higher energies. Managers also most likely took more responsibility for the professional growth of their employees. With remote work, managers might not be able to participate regularly in defining the path for their employees.

A recent survey by Fast Company found that 67 percent of employees haven't received a single piece of constructive feedback from their manager in the past 30 days. And 47 percent of employees reported having fewer professional development opportunities while working from home. These numbers point out to the probability that while productivity might be high, employee careers might actually be suffering.

A lot of employees still expect their managers to mentor and help them with their goals, large and small. The lack of professional mentoring might cause inaction on the part of employees, and the continuance of it can make them completely clueless about their own goals, as well as the larger goals of the organisation. Thinking about remedying this should be a top priority for organisations.

With remote work becoming the new norm, organisations will have to figure out ways in which they can keep employees motivated and lay down clear goals for teams as well as individuals. One way to do this effectively is through OKRs.



What are OKRs?

Objectives and Key Results (OKR) is a collaborative framework used by category leaders such as Google, Twitter, Spotify, Dropbox, LinkedIn to define their goals and measure the outcome. It has been deemed as an effective method to set goals and actually achieve significant growth for businesses, not just in terms of revenues but also in terms of creating a more engaged and motivated workforce.



The O stands for the objective, which tells teams and individuals the larger goals of a company. These goals are aspirational and can be about growth, change or innovation. Examples can be – to increase customer engagement or to develop a more sustainable business model.

The KR are the Key Results which refer to measurable goals needed to achieve the larger goal in the objective. For instance, if the objective is to increase customer engagement, the KRs could be to solve 100 customer complaints in a day, and respond to messages from 60 customers on social media on a daily basis. The OKR methodology is a process of setting and aligning company and team goals (objectives) and connecting each objective with three to five key results.



What is the Need for OKRs for Remote Teams?

Studies have shown how remote work can lead to feelings of alienation and loneliness among employees. In the UK, over 9 million people (more than the population of London) suffer from loneliness. Human beings crave for social connection and staying inside the house all day with the anxiety of their safety and uncertain times can make them feel low.

Virtual connections do happen but they can never substitute the energy that a face to face interaction can bring. With the distractions of home and family life, it can bring about a disconnection of the employee from the culture of the organisation she works for. This can be a big problem in the coming months if not catered to. There is a reason why the OKR methodology has been championed by category leaders in the likes of Google. Amazon, LinkedIn, Spotify, Dropbox. Google's co-founder Larry Page has attributed OKRs as a key reason behind Google's success. The basic reason how OKRs lead to better performance among teams and organisations can be explained by psychology.





According to psychology, goals play a dominant role in shaping the way people see themselves and others. A person who is focused and goal-oriented is likely to have a more positive approach towards life. Studies have shown that when we train our minds to think about what we want in life and work towards reaching it, the brain automatically rewires itself to acquire the ideal self image and makes it an essential part of our identity. Achievement of goals lead to fulfillment and push us towards doing even better work the next time

Having goals also increases the probability of success as those goals are driven by a larger value and help people evaluate themselves on their abilities. Goals make us more focused, willing and motivated to go all out for the larger picture. These goals, when shared, become even more meaningful as teams can help each other out through the journey of achieving them. Without goals, your employees and teams can feel confused and directionless.





Benefits of OKRs for Remote Employees

OKRs allow you to set and communicate the most important goals in your organisation in an organised, focused and measurable manner. OKRs are especially beneficial if you have remote teams spread across the world and you want a way to keep them all on the same page and connected to one another. Here are the ways in which OKRs can solve the challenges that remote work brings with it.

It Enables Robust Communication

OKRs set collective goals which are decided mutually by everyone involved in achieving the goals. Because everyone is involved in the planning, they feel more connected to the goals from the very beginning. Secondly, each OKR is set within a specific time frame, like a quarter. Within this defined time period, teams have regular meetings and check-ins to discuss the status of the goals, how the processes can be improved, address the ad-hoc challenges and clearing backlogs.

OKRs tie everyone together through these touch points, and allow for consistent communication and a platform to voice concerns, if any. Teams can choose to meet weekly and take updates from one another and share their journeys. The whole process allows for open, honest communication and a zeal of walking towards common goals. With robust communication and shared goals, there is a lower risk of teams working separately or cluelessly. OKRs give everyone a common motive to work towards making something better, together.





It helps track personal and team progress

OKR is a simple tool to create engagement and alignment around mutually decided goals. With clearly defined and measurable goals, employees have the clarity and a clear sense of direction on what they should aspire to achieve. The regular check-in's in an OKR solution focus on measurable and quantitative ways to track progress on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis. This data is stored to keep coming back to and make adjustments and improvements, wherever required.

Individual progress of an employee as well as the progress of a team is regularly tracked in OKR, which gives a holistic view of the past, the present and what the future tasks look like. All the data is shared with the entire team, which ensures everybody can see the current status and track the OKR.

It makes prioritising tasks effective

Prioritising tasks and following up on them requires focus, clarity and support from peers. However, only 52 percent of employees believe that the way they spend their time matches with their organisation's priorities. This number could be way lower for remote employees. It is easy to lose focus in a remote work environment. Constant interruptions at home, notifications on the phone and social media apps can make it very simple to fall into an abyss of distraction when working in silos.





It keeps individuals and teams laser focused

With OKRs, everyone can be aware of what needs to be accomplished in each week, month and quarter. OKRs can help empower employees to say no to any task that does not match with the objective. OKRs make it absolutely clear that employees are supposed to focus on only certain aspects and not get distracted or overburdened with other tasks that might hinder their focus in any way.

Because the goals are commonly defined and shared by multiple people, the drive to achieve them is higher. Tasks that require the highest priority are placed on top of the agenda, and colleagues support each other to their best ability to help achieve them. This allows employees to remain focused and not get distracted midway.



Getting Started With OKRs for Remote Teams



Setting up OKRs for your remote teams can be done if you spend time figuring out exactly what you want to achieve by the end of a certain quarter. Drilling down to the minutest details and creating a very strong blueprint is the key. However, this blueprint needs to be tracked from time to time and changes will also be made as the journey progresses.

Step 1 – Introduce your remote team to the concept

Research finds a positive impact on performance when people commit to goals. Effective goal setting trains the mind to think about what is needed and work towards achieving it. Psychologists and mental health researchers associate goals with a higher predictability of success. The first step has to be managers ensuring that all remote team members understand how the OKR method works and how it will help them as a team and individual level. Once you decide to use OKRs to set, track and measure goals of your remote teams, the first step is to introduce them to this goal management process. Showing your remote teams the bigger picture and the “why” of setting OKRs is very important to set the right foundation. Managers must be transparent about why OKRs are going to be introduced and how it can help the organisation perform better on an individual and team level.

Plan to introduce the idea of OKRs to your remote team during an all-hands meeting just a few weeks before a quarter starts. Lay down the vision clearly in front of your employees and allow them enough time to think, reflect and get back to you with questions and concerns, either right away or after some time.





Step 2 – Lay down the objectives

Once everybody on your after remote team has gained a complete understanding of the OKR methodology, it's time to communicate the high level objectives that the company has set for itself. Knowing the vision the organisation sets for itself is seldom known to all employees. OKR gives a chance for everyone to have the same higher goal by letting every employee know of the large goals the organisation aspires to achieve. Knowing the objectives also helps teams align their own goals to the larger company goals.

The way you decide to lay down the objectives can either be a top down approach or a bottom up approach. In a top-down approach, the senior management defines the OKRs first and then asks managers to set OKRs for their remote teams.

The remote teams then lay down their own goals in alignment to the pre-defined objectives. The other way is the bottom-up approach, where employees are asked to offer their suggestions on what the objectives should look like. Company wide OKRs are set after brainstorming sessions with everyone participating in the goal setting process.





Step 3 – Prioritise goals

Brainstorming with your remote employees is great, but can also bring in a lot of ideas to the table.

While it can be tempting to work on each idea, prioritising the key results that align closest to the objectives is key. Too many objectives or key results can take up a lot of time for everyone and leave them overwhelmed. Identifying which goals need to be prioritised is once again a team effort.

For instance, 50 percent of objectives at Google come from the bottom up. This shows the employees that their opinion is valued and the organisation trusts their decision making ability. This can have a tremendous impact on the motivation levels of the employee, as they get to participate in the entire goal setting process.





Step 4 – Set key results for teams

Identify your teams and discuss how they can contribute to achieving the objective over a period of time through quantifiable key results. This helps managers focus on the work and value added by teams, rather than micromanaging individuals and tracking their work hours. For instance, if the objective is to become the number one ranking product on google, one of the key results of the marketing team could be to publish 4 content pieces a week that eventually shows up on google search.

Similarly, the customer success team can work with the marketing team to build this knowledge base that helps address the most common pain points of the customers. The key results for the teams need to be quantifiable, with a number attached to each, so that the progress can be tracked and changes be made if something is not working. Convey to your remote teams that each member's contribution counts and everyone has to work in tandem to achieve the larger goals. The idea should be to learn to innovate and focus on result-oriented action.





Step 5 – Set a time frame for goal accomplishment

Once the objectives and key results are established, they need to be subdivided into further tasks that break them down into smaller, more achievable targets. The time frame for each of these tasks needs to be set, with deadlines attached for every small goal. The usual practice is to set OKRs for every quarter, with small deliverables every week. The time frame would depend on the kind of objectives and the perception of how many hours it would take to accomplish them. While most companies go with quarterly, your team might set weekly or monthly OKRs. The time should be enough to help employees achieve their goals and there should not be any unnecessary pressures created.



Step 6 – Set up regular check-ins

While setting the OKRs might take up a significant amount of time, following up on the course of the quarter is key to ensuring the tasks listed get executed. It is extremely crucial to track progress with regular check-ins with the teams to find out how the journey is progressing. The team at Buffer acknowledges how OKRs can also change during a quarter depending on how things pan out with time. This dynamism of OKRs needs to be accounted for and everyone must be in the loop if the direction of a few goals changes in the course of time.

Challenges are bound to arise in the course of achieving the goals and teams need to catch up regularly to work through the setbacks. While check-ins are important, it is crucial to strike a balance by not meeting your remote team every other day and actually barring the achievement of goals by taking up too much time. The goal should be to set up regular meetings to keep everyone aligned, and not use it as a way to micromanage employees. Set up weekly calls with the remote team and discuss progress on each key result, identify what's working and what needs modification and trust your employees to reach their goals.



Step 7 – Track and review progress

The reason why key results **NEED TO** be assigned a number to is so that their progress can be tracked. While progress needs to be tracked at regular intervals, objectives also need to be reviewed at the end of the quarter.

Some questions to ask can be:

- **Did these create value?**
- **Were these ambitious enough?**
- **What can be improved next time?**

Needless to say, involve your remote team when you do this exercise.

Let everyone share their learnings, celebrate the successes and present their point of views on how things can be improved. The whole point is to do great work while feeling belonged to one unified culture set by the company.





Obstacles to OKRs

The importance of having a goal management system in place is acknowledged by business leaders everywhere. Leaders spend days trying to set their mission and values and tie objectives and goals to the larger vision that they believe in. As high as 86 percent of leaders say defining a purpose is essential to a successful growth strategy. However, only a few organisations actually manage to set or communicate goals effectively to employees. Let's look at the major reasons that lead OKRs to remain a practice just on paper.

Failure in communication of goals

Using newsletters or an all hands meeting to notify employees about OKR's and expecting them to understand and follow up doesn't work. The spark will fade eventually and employees will get drowned in their day to day deliverables. A survey conducted by Anatomy of Work Index found that only 43 percent of people understood their organisation's overarching mission and less than half of all employees understood how their day-to-day work contributed to broader goals.

Leaders need to communicate goals and objectives, and do it often. OKRs need to be ingrained in their daily work, defining every direction and decision. The connection between employee's daily activities and the "why" of it needs to be clearly established. More often than not, organisations fail to provide this clarity to employees which leaves teams unable to prioritise work according to progress.



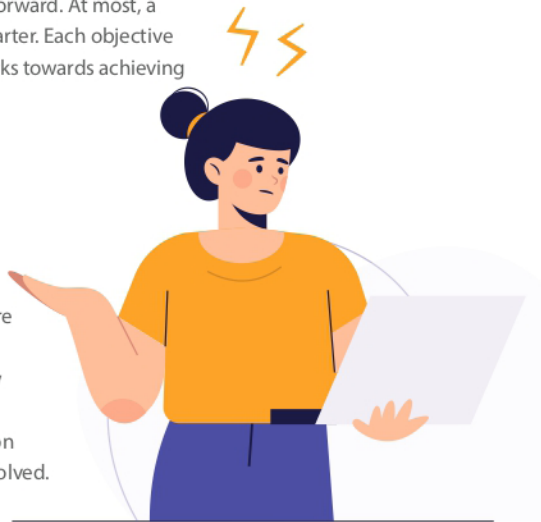


Too many goals

Another reason why OKRs fail is because there are way too many objectives and corresponding key results. Brainstorming might make ambitions soar high, but it is important to focus on the most important objectives to take forward. At most, a company should not exceed more than five objectives per quarter. Each objective has its corresponding five more key results. And everyone works towards achieving just these goals.

Decisions are not made together

OKRs are bound to fail if they are just guidelines passed down from top management to your remote teams. The foundation of OKR relies on everyone taking an active part in defining what goals should be. Every team needs to be consulted before making any decision, as they are the ones who do the actual ground work. Involving everyone also gives a 360 degree view of perceptions and makes goals richer and more holistic. Failing to do so will also lead to a failure in OKR implementation as team members will eventually lose interest and not feel involved.



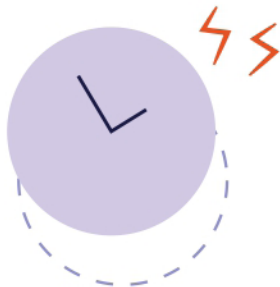


Lack of trust

OKRs cannot work in an unsaid corporate environment where top management makes all the decisions. This gives an impression to team leads and members that their opinion is not trusted and they do not know the nitty gritty of their job. Teams know best when it comes to defining what needs to change in their departments. And their invaluable feedback should be taken into consideration while creating OKRs.

Not following up at regular intervals

The real work starts after the OKRs have been listed out in detail. Following up with everyone on the status of goals is critical to ensure goals are met successfully. Failure to create a ritual once every week will lead to energy levels dissolving and OKRs getting forgotten, eventually leading to failure.





Key results are vague

The key results under every objective has to be assigned a number so that the growth can be tracked numerically. Key results require a lot of critical thinking and brainstorming and keeping them vague or difficult to measure will end up creating a distorted picture of how well the OKR methodology fared.

Ineffective tools

The reason why remote work is a success is because today we have access to technology that makes our lives so much easier. Even when it comes to setting up OKRs, the right goal setting tool is absolutely crucial in making sure the process gets the discipline and respect it deserves.

Many organisations manage their OKR's in spreadsheets, presentations and documents, rather than in a purpose driven tool. This makes the end-to-end goal management more cumbersome and means less time spent actually tracking, measuring, and reporting on progress towards goals.





Team OKR Examples



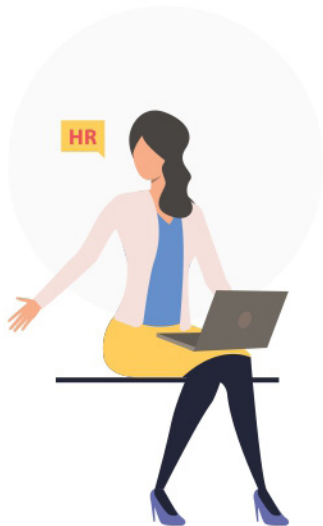


Human Resources

Objective: Increase levels of employee engagement in remote employees

Key Results:

- Increase employee satisfaction by 30%
- Achieve 80% participation in employee feedback survey
- Send an employee recognition open email every month highlighting the key achievements





Social Media Marketing

Objective: Become the most viral brand in our service category

Key Results:

- Garner 100,000 subscribers on our Youtube channel
- Create 10,000 followers on company LinkedIn page
- Upload 3 posts everyday on Instagram





Digital Marketing

Objective: Implement a new outbound email campaign

Key Results:

- Increase monthly email subscriptions by **30%**
- Launch 1 giveaway every week for most engaged users
- Create **10 how-to videos** that answer the most frequently asked questions



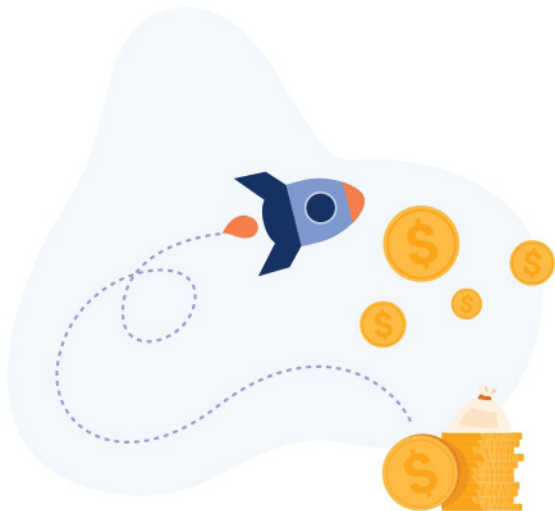


Sales

Objective: Increase **revenue** every quarter

Key results:

- Increase sales by **30%**
- Increase annual renewals by **25%**
- Reduce churn rate by **15%**



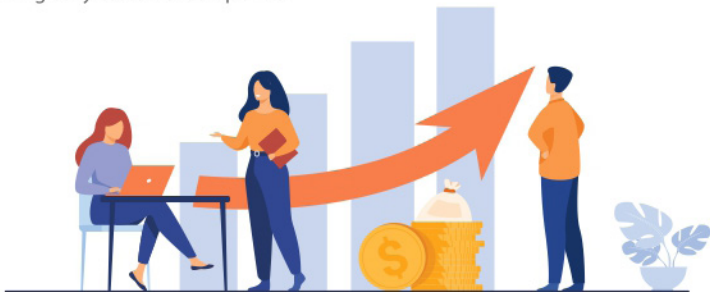


Customer Success

Objective - Deliver the most amazing customer experience

Key results:

- Increase customer participation in surveys by **30%**
- Improve NPS by **20%**
- Achieve **90%** efficiency in resolving daily customer complaints





Conclusion

Setting up OKRs for remote teams and implementing them can be challenging. However, if executed correctly and systematically, it can create wondrous results not just for the business, but also for the employees. Consider investing in an OKR software to help you track the progress.

Set up your own process, involve your team members actively and make them feel psychologically safe to contribute and voice their opinions. The key should be to not rush the implementation process and treat it just like another list of tasks to be ticked off. Instead, take your time through each stage of your OKR journey, learn from it as you go and keep growing along with it. It is a marathon and not a sprint, and definitely not a quick fix for a difficult quarter. It needs some time to perfect and every organisation's journey would be different. Take your time and see where it leads your business to.



Book a demo with us.

Schedule a demo



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