

The OKR Rollout Playbook

Get an OKR rollout through its first year, quarter by quarter

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OKR results improve faster than people's belief in them. Completion averages 51% in the first two cycles and reaches 79% by cycle five, but the team only starts trusting the process once it has a few cycles behind it. This playbook is for the person running the rollout: what to expect, where rollouts get dropped, a plan for each quarter, and what to say to leadership when the early numbers disappoint.

WHAT TO EXPECT, CYCLE BY CYCLE

Cycles 1-2

51%

average completion

The team is learning the habit while running it, and it can feel like extra admin.

Cycles 3-4

59%

average completion

Results are better and goals are sharper, but people still ask whether it's worth the effort.

Cycle 5+

79%

average completion

OKRs are how the company plans, and the end-of-quarter score rarely surprises anyone.

Trust lags results by a cycle or two.

24% of startups rate their trust in the OKR process top-of-scale, against 40% at companies with more cycles behind them.

FIVE DECISIONS TO MAKE BEFORE LAUNCH

- ☐ **Name one person who runs the rollout.** One owner for the process, with time set aside for it each week.
- ☐ **Limit each team to one or two objectives.** Teams running 1-2 objectives are twice as likely to achieve them as teams running three or more.
- ☐ **Put one named owner on every key result.** Single ownership comes with 26% higher completion.
- ☐ **Fix the weekly check-in day and time.** Teams checking in weekly complete 43% more of their OKRs than teams reviewing monthly.
- ☐ **Keep OKRs out of bonuses in year one.** 96% of employees sandbag when goals affect their ratings, against 81% when they're kept separate.

The Three Danger Moments

Where first-year rollouts get dropped, and what to do at each one

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First-year rollouts usually lose momentum at predictable points, and each one has warning signs you can watch for and a response you can prepare in advance.

ANY WEEK

1. The weekly check-in slips

3x

Teams that skip check-ins are three times more likely to abandon OKRs altogether.

WARNING SIGNS

Updates arrive late or in one burst before a review.
The check-in gets moved "just this week". Fewer than half of owners update on time.

WHAT TO DO

Move the check-in into Slack or Teams so it comes to people. Track the share of owners updating each week and raise it at the leadership meeting when it drops.

END OF CYCLE TWO

2. The results look flat

51%

Average completion in cycles one and two, before the climb to 79% by cycle five.

WARNING SIGNS

Leadership asks whether OKRs are "working". The retro turns into a debate about the framework.
Teams propose going back to the old way.

WHAT TO DO

Set expectations before cycle one ends. Report the leading indicators (check-in rate, ownership, linked goals) next to completion, and use the script on page 4.

THE NEXT PLANNING ROUND

3. Goals stop linking up

93%

Of companies where very few OKRs link to company goals, 93% report abandoning OKRs.

WARNING SIGNS

Teams draft their OKRs before company objectives are published. Objectives can't name the company goal they serve. The goal list keeps growing.

WHAT TO DO

Publish company objectives first. Make a named parent objective a condition of approval, and cut any team objective that can't name one.

Watch for goal-gaming as the stakes rise.

92% of employees admit to at least one form of goal-gaming, and 70% have reported a goal as healthier than it was.

Your First Year, Quarter by Quarter

A change plan for the person running the rollout

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Q1

LAUNCH

Goal: get the weekly habit running

- ☐ Start with leadership plus one or two willing teams
- ☐ One or two objectives per team, one owner per key result
- ☐ Weekly check-ins from week one, at a fixed time
- ☐ Tell leadership to expect around 51% completion this cycle

Measure: share of owners updating weekly

Q2

PROTECT

Goal: survive the cycle-two review

- ☐ Run a structured retrospective at the end of cycle one
- ☐ Make three or four specific changes and record them
- ☐ Report leading indicators next to completion
- ☐ Prepare the leadership update before the review

Measure: changes made from the retro, check-in rate holding

Q3

EXPAND

Goal: bring in more teams without losing the rhythm

- ☐ Add teams using the pilot teams as examples
- ☐ Require every team objective to name its company objective
- ☐ Add a confidence score to every key result at each check-in
- ☐ Hold a mid-quarter review for anything still at zero

Measure: share of team OKRs linked to company objectives

Q4

EMBED

Goal: make OKRs part of how the company plans

- ☐ Run annual planning through company-level OKRs
- ☐ Compare cycle-one and cycle-four results with leadership
- ☐ Decide how OKRs relate to performance reviews (keep stretch goals out of pay)
- ☐ Hand each team lead ownership of their team's check-in

Measure: completion trend across the four cycles

Retrospectives compound.

Teams that run structured retrospectives complete 30–45% more OKRs the following cycle.

When Cycle Two Disappoints

What to tell leadership, and the scorecard to bring with you

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THE LEADERSHIP UPDATE: FILL IN THE BLANKS

Where we are. We've completed two cycles. Completion was _____% this cycle, against _____% last cycle. The benchmark for cycles one and two is 51%, rising to 59% in cycles three and four and 79% by cycle five.

What's working. _____% of owners now check in every week, _____% of key results have a single owner, and _____% of team objectives link to a company objective.

What we're changing. From the retrospective, we're making these changes next cycle:

What I need from you. Two more cycles at the current scope, company objectives published before team planning starts, and OKRs kept separate from bonuses this year.

THE ROLLOUT HEALTH SCORECARD

Leading indicator	Target	This quarter	Last quarter
Owners updating their key results every week	90%+		
Key results with one named owner	100%		
Team objectives linked to a company objective	100%		
Key results with a confidence score at the last check-in	100%		
Key results still at zero at the mid-quarter review	Under 10%		
Retrospective held, with changes recorded	Every cycle		

Run your rollout on OKRs Tool

Weekly check-ins in Slack and Teams, required ownership and a live alignment map. Free 14-day trial, no credit card.

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Data: The OKR Benchmark Report, Growing Pains of OKRs, The Goal-Setting Benchmark and The State of Goal Management.