



RESEARCH REPORT

The Death of OKRs

(and How to Revive Them)

Why half of OKR programs stall, when it happens, and what the programs that survive do differently.

420 companies of 50–200 people

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FOREWORD

Half of OKR Programs Have Stalled Somewhere

OKR programs usually stop without anyone deciding to stop. They launch well, get through the rollout and then lose attention one cycle at a time, until a team still has OKRs on paper that nobody opens.

We surveyed 420 operations and strategy leaders at technology companies of 50–200 people, all running OKRs today, to measure how often this happens, when it happens and why.

Half have stopped using OKRs on at least one team. The stall usually comes two or three cycles in, once the launch energy has gone and before the habit has formed. In half of cases, nobody makes a decision about it.

The causes are practical ones. Goals lose their owners. Progress stops being updated between reviews. Key results turn into to-do lists. The people setting strategy aren't the people doing the work.

Programs that last share a small set of habits that keep goals owned, visible and measured between reviews. They don't depend on a particular framework or one person's energy, and each one can be in place within a single cycle.

420

Companies surveyed

50–200

Employees per company

100%

Running OKRs today

0

OKRs Tool customers in the sample

PART ONE**How OKR Programs Die**

How often programs stall, when it happens and how often they end without a decision.

PART TWO**What Kills Them**

The causes leaders name, how they change over time and the patterns behind them.

PART THREE**How to Revive Them**

The habits healthy programs share, eight warning signs, a revival plan and a self-assessment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Findings at a Glance

How OKR programs stall, and what keeps them running.

1 in 2

Have lost OKRs somewhere

49.5% have stopped using OKRs on at least one team. 19% have stopped company-wide.

35%

Stall after cycles two and three

The most common point to stall. Only 18% of stalls happen during rollout.

50%

End without a decision

Quietly dropped, or left officially in place while nobody uses them.

52%

Blame lack of clarity

The most cited cause of stalling, ahead of engagement (41%) and too many goals (38%).

2.5×

More zombie programs

Where progress is rebuilt before reviews, 35% describe OKRs left in place but unused, against 14% with live tracking.

56%

Stop rate on spreadsheets

Companies tracking OKRs only in spreadsheets, against 37% on dedicated software.

10→80%

The revival staircase

Very consistent goal achievement rises from 10% to 80% across zero to four core habits.

22%

Stop rate past nine cycles

Programs that get past the middle tend to last, against 56% at three to eight cycles.

THE BOTTOM LINE

OKR programs stall in the middle, when goals stop being owned, visible and measured between reviews. Programs that last make those three things automatic, so they keep running when one person gets busy.

PART ONE

How OKR Programs Die

Half of the companies in this study have lost OKRs on at least one team. The stalls cluster after the launch, before the habit forms, and half end without a decision.

1 in 2

companies have stopped using OKRs on at least one team after trying them

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FINDING 01

Half Have Already Lost OKRs Somewhere

49.5% of companies have stopped using OKRs on at least one team after trying them. For 30% it was a single team or department. For 19% it was the whole company. Every company in the sample runs OKRs today, so this counts programs that broke down in part of the business while carrying on elsewhere.

Has your company ever stopped using OKRs after trying them?



■ Never stopped ■ Stopped on one team or department ■ Stopped company-wide

Share of companies · n=420

WHAT THIS MEANS

Partial stops often start with one team that ran OKRs because it was asked to, without a clear reason of its own. Updates slow down, nobody follows up and the rest of the company carries on. A stalled team also tells every other team that OKRs are optional. Treat the first team that stops as an early warning, and find out why before the next cycle starts.

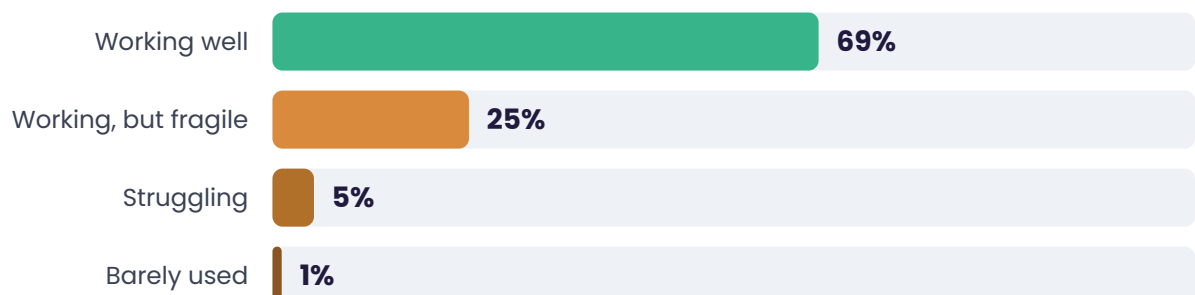
FINDING 02

One in Three Programs Is Already Fragile

Asked to describe their program right now, 69% of leaders said it was working well. The other 31% described something weaker: 25% working but fragile, 5% struggling and 1% barely used.

A fragile program is still running, which makes it the easiest kind to rescue. The warning signs on page 21 show what to look for.

How would you describe your OKR program right now?



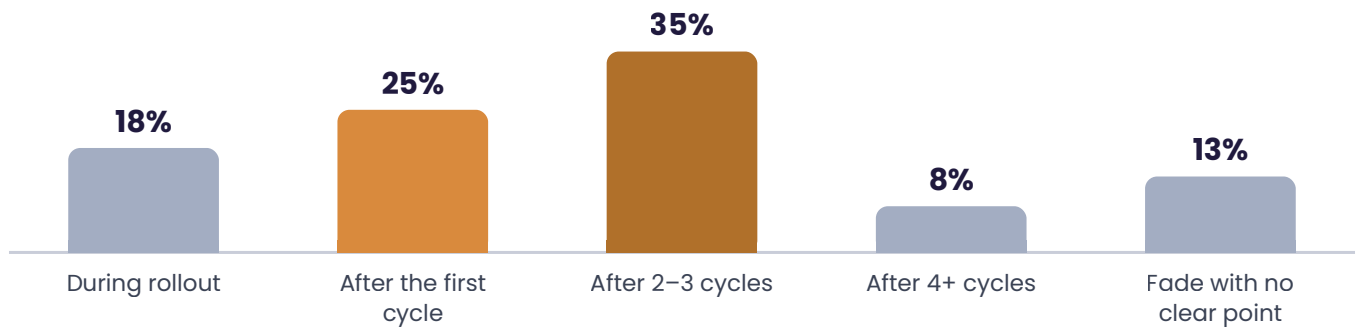
Share of companies · n=420

FINDING 03

Stalls Peak Two or Three Cycles In

Only 18% of stalls happen during rollout. Leaders place the most common stalling point after two or three cycles (35%), with a further 25% after the first full cycle. Six in ten stalls happen once the program is live, after the launch energy has gone and before the habit has formed.

When OKRs stall or get dropped, when does it usually happen?



Share of companies · n=420

WHAT THIS MEANS

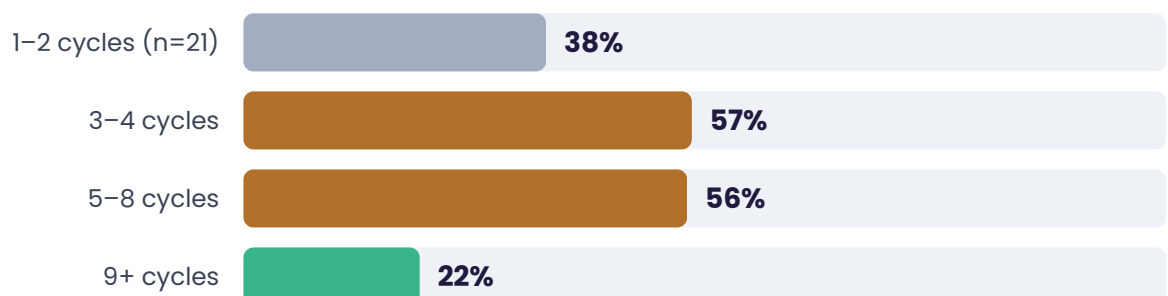
The first cycle runs on launch energy. By the second or third, the novelty has gone and OKRs compete with day-to-day work for attention. If the weekly habit hasn't formed by then, updates slip without anyone noticing. Plan cycles two and three as carefully as the launch: keep check-ins short, fix what felt clunky in cycle one and make progress easy to see.

FINDING 04

The Danger Zone Is Cycles Three to Eight

Stop rates follow the same pattern. Among companies three to eight cycles in, 56% have stopped OKRs on at least one team. Past nine cycles, that falls to 22%, even though those companies have had the longest time to stop. Programs that get through the middle tend to keep going.

Companies that have stopped OKRs on at least one team, by cycles completed



Share of companies · n=420 · the 1-2 cycle group is small and directional

FINDING 05

Half End Without a Decision

When a team stops using OKRs, 39% of leaders say it happens through a clear decision. 32% say OKRs are quietly dropped with nobody deciding, and 18% say they stay officially in place while nobody uses them. Half of all endings are silent.

A silent ending is harder to recover from, because nobody reviews what went wrong or decides what to keep.

When a team stops using OKRs, how does it usually happen?



- A clear decision to stop
- Quietly dropped, nobody decides
- Officially in place, nobody uses them
- Replaced with something else

Share of companies · n=420

WHAT THIS MEANS

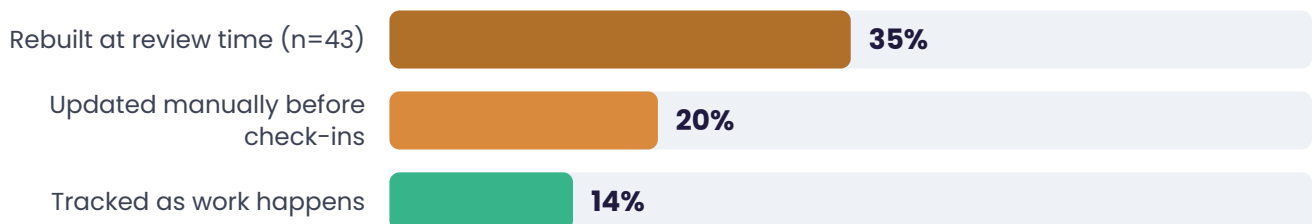
Individual goals usually have owners. The program as a whole often doesn't, so nobody asks whether it still works. Without a retro that forces a decision, a fading team just stops updating. Give one person the job of closing every cycle and deciding, team by team, what continues, changes or stops.

FINDING 06

The Zombie Program

The 18% of programs that stay on the books while nobody uses them share one factor. Where progress is rebuilt just before reviews, 35% of leaders describe this pattern. Where progress is tracked as work happens, it falls to 14%.

Leaders describing OKRs as "officially in place, nobody uses them", by how progress is updated



Share of companies · n=417

We set them at the start of the quarter and forget about them until the end.

Survey respondent, on the hardest part of making OKRs stick

PART TWO

What Kills Them

Leaders name clarity, engagement and too many goals as the main causes. Programs also stall where goals lose their owners and stop being updated between reviews.

52%

of leaders name lack of clarity as a cause of OKRs stalling, the most cited reason

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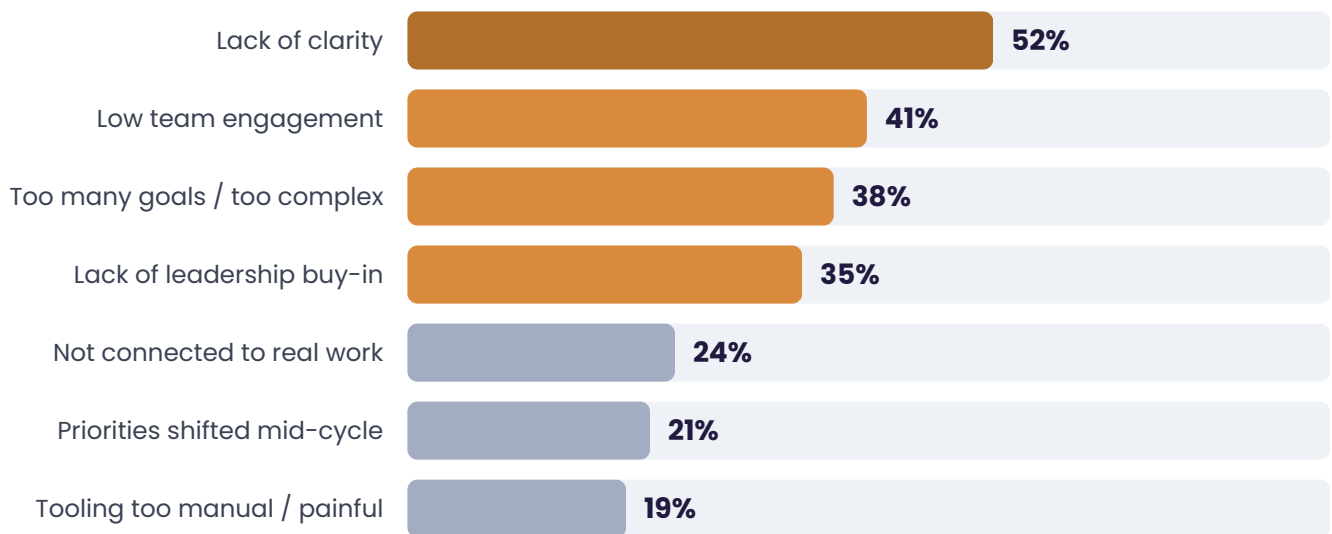
FINDING 07

What Leaders Say Kills OKRs

Asked what causes OKRs to stall, leaders point first to lack of clarity (52%), followed by low team engagement (41%), too many goals (38%) and lack of leadership buy-in (35%). Tooling ranks last at 19%, just behind priorities shifting mid-cycle at 21%.

Among companies that have already stopped OKRs on a team, leadership buy-in climbs to 41%, the largest rise of any cause. Teams that have been through a stall are more likely to trace it back to the top.

What most causes OKRs to stall or get dropped?



Share of companies · n=420 · multi-select, so figures sum to more than 100%

WHAT THIS MEANS

Lack of clarity usually means one of three things: teams don't know which goal matters most, can't tell how a key result is measured, or can't see how their goals connect to the company's. The data backs all three (Findings 09 and 12). Write them down before the cycle starts: one number per key result, one owner and a visible link to a company objective.

19%

Tooling is the least cited cause. Yet companies tracking OKRs only in spreadsheets have stopped on a team 56% of the time, against 37% for companies on dedicated software (Finding 11). Manual upkeep tends to slip between meetings, where it is hardest to see.

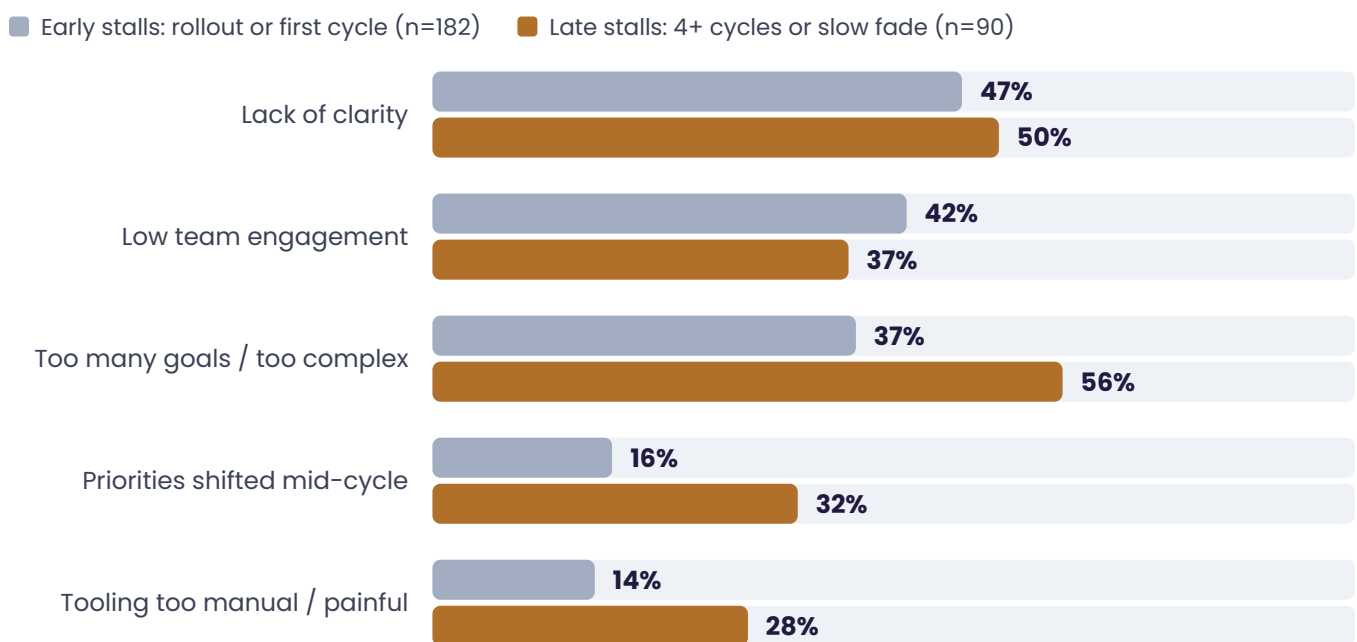
FINDING 08

Early and Late Stalls Have Different Causes

Early stalls, during rollout or after the first cycle, come down to confusion. Lack of clarity (47%) and low engagement (42%) lead the list.

Late stalls, after four or more cycles or a slow fade, come down to overload and drift. Too many goals rises from 37% to 56%. Priorities shifting mid-cycle doubles from 16% to 32%, and manual tooling doubles from 14% to 28%. Clarity stays high throughout and peaks at 58% for stalls after cycles two and three.

Causes named, by when OKRs usually stall



Share of companies naming each cause · multi-select

WHAT THIS MEANS

A new program needs fewer, simpler goals and a clear reason to care. A mature program needs pruning. Goals pile up cycle after cycle unless someone removes them, and mid-cycle priority changes need an agreed way to update OKRs. Review the goal count every cycle, agree how changes get made and take the updating off people's to-do lists.

56%

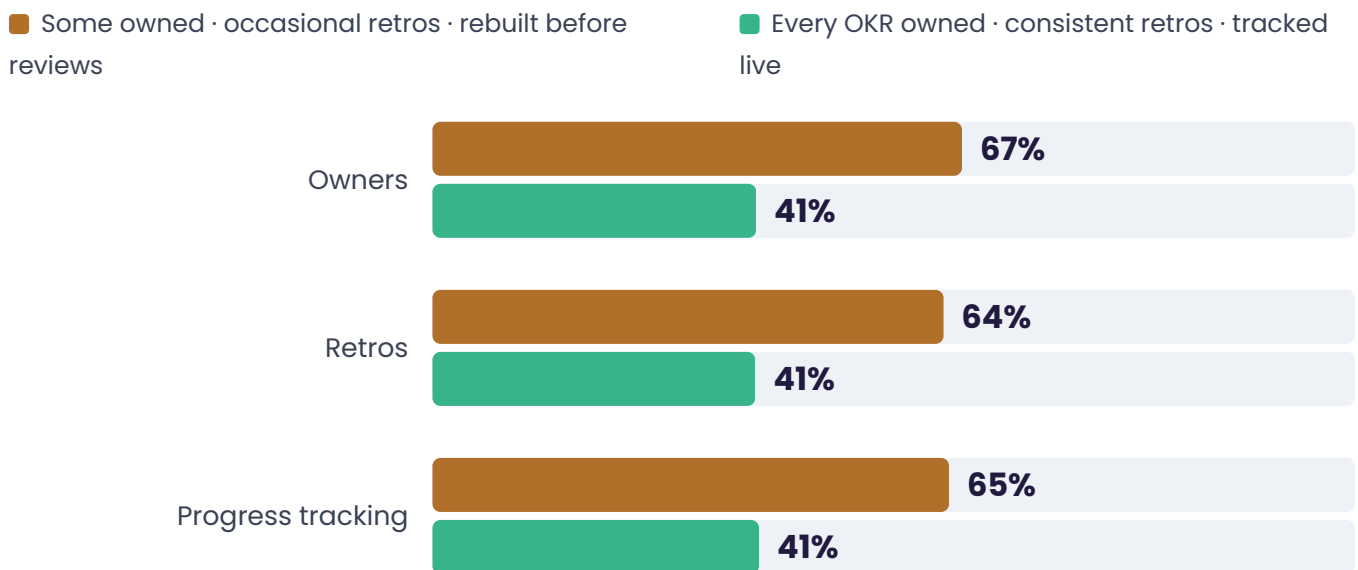
Too many goals is the top cause of late stalls. Among programs that stall after four or more cycles or fade slowly, it is the most cited cause. The longer a program runs, the more goals it collects unless someone removes them.

FINDING 09

Programs Die Where Nobody Is Looking

Silent endings follow how visible OKRs are between reviews. They run at 64–67% where some OKRs lack an owner, retros are occasional or progress is rebuilt before reviews. With each habit in place, they fall to 41%.

Leaders describing silent endings (quietly dropped or left unused)



Share of companies · n=36 vs 213 owners · 163 vs 241 retros · 43 vs 216 tracking

WHAT THIS MEANS

Problems nobody sees don't get decided. Without an owner, nobody notices a goal slipping. Without live progress, it looks fine until the next review. Without a retro, nobody decides what to do about it. The three habits work as a set.

Daily fires take over, and nobody looks at the OKRs until it's too late.

Survey respondent, on the hardest part of making OKRs stick

43%

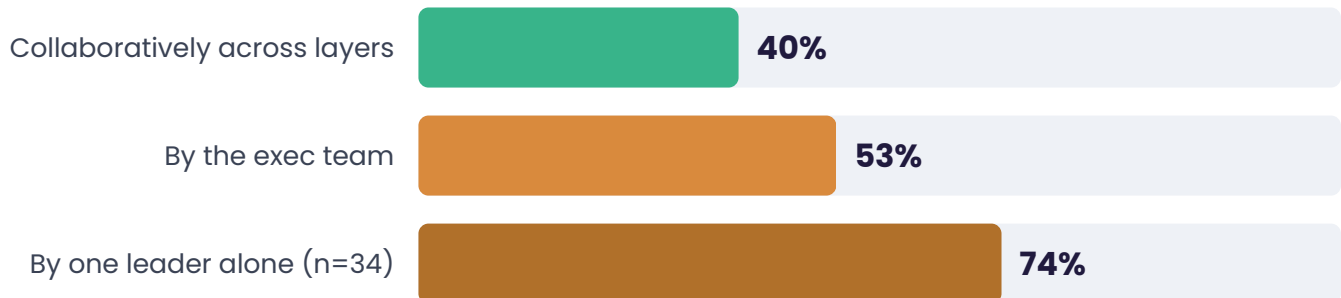
Leadership attention cuts silent endings too. Where leaders review OKRs weekly, 43% describe silent endings, against 55% where leaders review them monthly.

FINDING 10

Goals Handed Down Don't Last

Who sets strategy affects how long OKRs survive. Where it is set collaboratively across layers, 40% have stopped OKRs on a team. Where the exec team sets it, 53%. Where one leader sets it alone, 74%, though that group is small.

Companies that have stopped OKRs on at least one team, by how strategy is set



Share of companies · n=415

WHAT THIS MEANS

People defend goals they helped shape. When strategy arrives fully formed from the top, teams treat OKRs as a reporting task and stop updating them once leadership moves on. Leaders can set the direction and let teams draft the objectives and key results that get them there.

Getting leaders and teams aligned on shared priorities, instead of treating OKRs as an order from the top.

Survey respondent, on the hardest part of making OKRs stick

79%

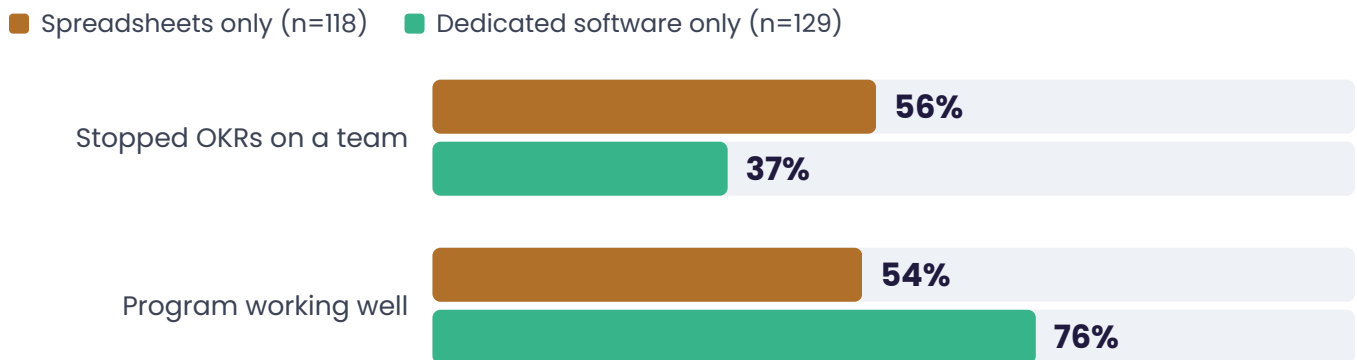
Shared strategy keeps programs healthy. 79% of companies that set strategy across layers describe their OKR program as working well, against 62% where the exec team sets it.

FINDING 11

The Spreadsheet Graveyard

Companies that track OKRs in spreadsheets with no dedicated software have stopped OKRs on a team 56% of the time, and only 54% describe their program as working well. Companies on dedicated software without spreadsheets stop at 37%, and 76% say their program is working well.

Outcomes by where OKRs are tracked



WHAT THIS MEANS

A spreadsheet has no reminders and no roll-up. Someone has to chase every update, and that job usually lands on the person who launched OKRs. When they get busy, the program goes quiet. Dedicated software takes over the chasing.

Connect OKRs to our real work, instead of a spreadsheet nobody checks.

Survey respondent, on what would most improve how their company runs OKRs

60%

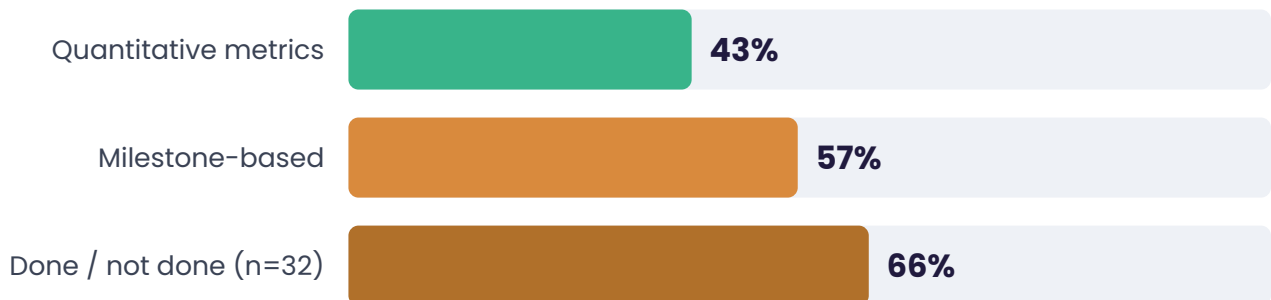
Spreadsheets also make endings quieter. 60% of spreadsheet-only companies describe silent endings, against 45% of companies on dedicated software.

FINDING 12

Goals You Can't Measure Don't Survive

The type of key result predicts survival. Teams writing quantitative key results stop at 43%, and 84% describe their program as working well. Teams writing milestones stop at 57%, with 56% working well.

Companies that have stopped OKRs on at least one team, by key result type



Share of companies · n=339

WHAT THIS MEANS

Milestones record whether a task got done, so once it ships there's nothing left to track. Numeric key results give every check-in something to discuss. Keep the project as an initiative and write the key result as the change it should cause, such as cutting onboarding time from 14 days to 7.

Getting people to write measurable outcomes instead of tasks, and keeping them updated.

Survey respondent, on the hardest part of making OKRs stick

58%

Numeric key results hit more often. 58% of teams writing quantitative key results hit their goals very consistently, against 33% of teams writing milestones.

PART THREE

How to Revive Them

Programs that last keep goals owned, visible and measured between reviews. Four habits do most of the work, and each can be in place within a single cycle.

10 → 80%

very consistent goal achievement, from teams running none of the four core habits to teams running all four

IN THIS PART

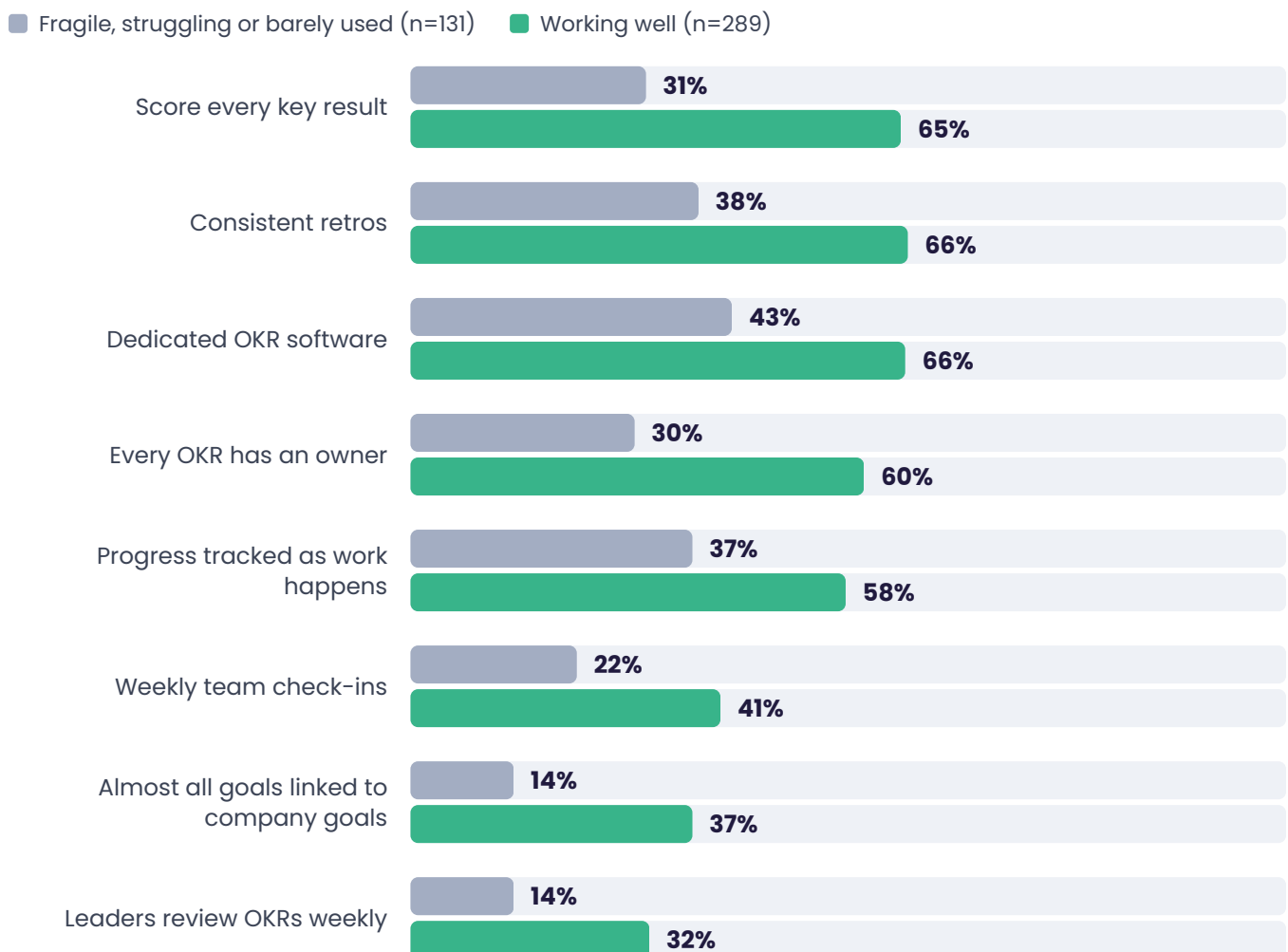
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FINDING 13

What Healthy Programs Do Differently

We compared the 289 programs that leaders describe as working well with the 131 that are fragile, struggling or barely used. Healthy programs are twice as likely to score every key result (65% against 31%) and to give every OKR an owner (60% against 30%). They are more than twice as likely to have leaders reviewing OKRs weekly, and nearly three times as likely to have almost all team goals linked to company goals.

Share of programs running each habit



Share of companies · n=420

WHAT THIS MEANS

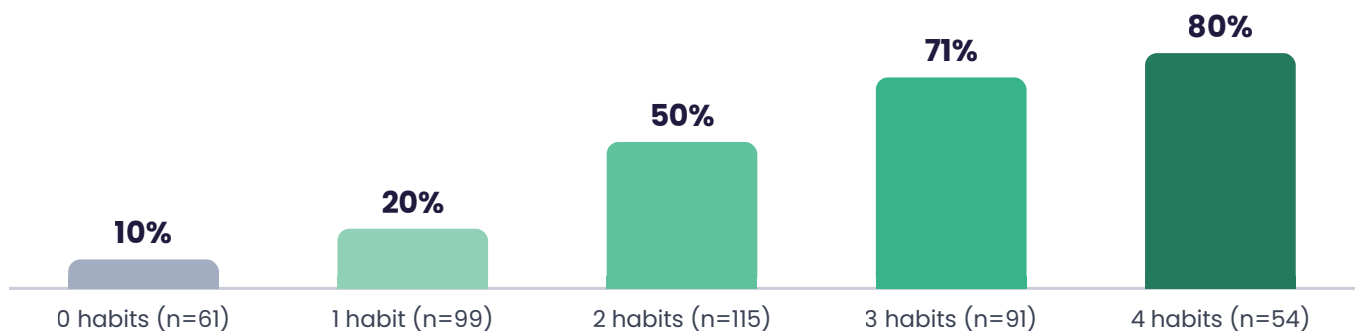
The gaps all point the same way. Healthy programs keep goals visible between reviews: each goal has an owner, every key result has a current score and leaders look every week. Each habit takes minutes a week once it's set up. Starting is the hard part.

FINDING 14

The Revival Staircase

Four habits do most of the work: a weekly check-in, progress tracked as work happens, an owner on every OKR and consistent retros. Teams running none of them hit their goals very consistently 10% of the time. Each habit added moves the number up: 20% with one, 50% with two, 71% with three and 80% with all four.

Teams hitting their goals very consistently, by number of core habits



Share of companies · n=420

WHAT THIS MEANS

The habits make each other easier. An owner makes the check-in someone's job, live progress gives it something to look at and a retro turns it into a decision. Start with one or two: teams running two already hit their goals very consistently five times as often as teams running none.

34 → 88%

Program health climbs with each habit. 34% of teams running none of the four habits describe their program as working well. With three habits, it rises to 88%.

One place to track them, and managers who review them every week.

Survey respondent, on what would most improve how their company runs OKRs

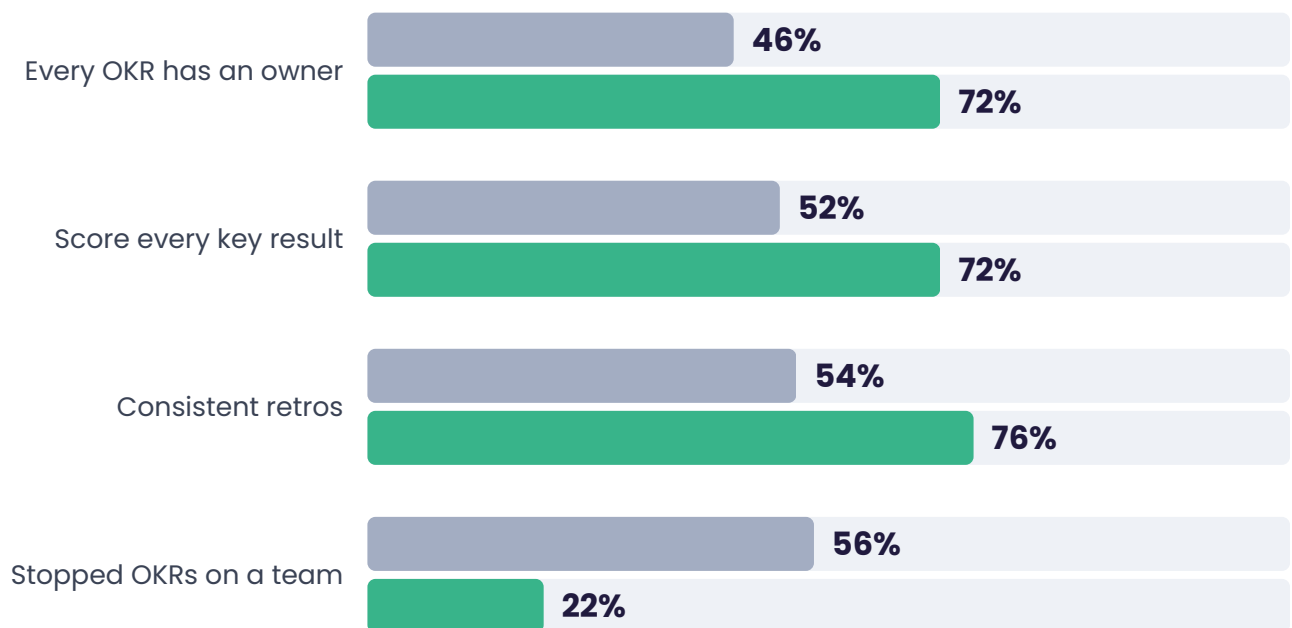
FINDING 15

What Programs That Last Look Like

Seventy-two companies have run OKRs for nine or more cycles. Only 22% have stopped OKRs on any team, against 56% at three to eight cycles. They run the same basics more often: owners on every OKR, scores on every key result and a retro every cycle.

Programs past nine cycles against programs in the danger zone

■ 3–8 cycles (n=327) ■ 9+ cycles (n=72)



Share of companies

WHAT THIS MEANS

Long-running programs keep the same basics going through cycles three to eight, the stretch where other programs let them slip. Protect the habits hardest in that window. It's where programs are lost, and where the payoff starts.

72%

of long-running programs give every OKR one owner

76%

run a retro at the end of every cycle

81%

describe their program as working well

IN THEIR WORDS

How OKRs Fade, From the People Running Them

Every respondent answered two open questions: what has been hardest about making OKRs stick, and what would most improve how their company runs them. The same themes came back in hundreds of answers.

HOW IT FADES

“When priorities shift, our OKRs quietly fade.”

“Day-to-day work takes over, and the OKRs drop off everyone’s list.”

“Keeping momentum going once the setup is done.”

“Leadership changes direction on the fly, and the OKRs suffer for it.”

“People don’t want to do them, or they forget.”

WHAT WOULD FIX IT

“Better tracking and clearer accountability, so we know who owns what.”

“A simple tool that links goals to projects and shows progress automatically.”

“Clear owners, regular check-ins and team goals that link to company goals.”

“Leaders who follow through on OKRs the way they ask us to.”

“Progress pulled in from the project tools we already use, so nobody updates it by hand.”

32%

of answers on the hardest part named **consistency or buy-in**, four times any other theme

18%

of answers on what would help asked for **better or more regular tracking**, three times any other fix

Open-ended responses (n=410 and n=412), edited for clarity and length.

DIAGNOSIS

Eight Warning Signs a Program Is Stalling

Each sign is linked in the data to a higher stop rate, more silent endings or a weaker program. Two or three together describe a program in the danger zone.

SIGN 1**Progress is rebuilt before every review**

Silent endings at **65%**, against 41% where progress is tracked as work happens.

SIGN 2**Retros happen only occasionally**

Silent endings at **64%**, against 41% where retros run every cycle.

SIGN 3**Some OKRs have no clear owner**

Only **28%** describe the program as working well, against 82% where every OKR is owned.

SIGN 4**Key results are milestones or done / not done**

Stop rates of **57–66%**, against 43% for quantitative key results.

SIGN 5**Only some key results get scored**

52% working well, against 82% where every key result is scored.

SIGN 6**OKRs live in a spreadsheet**

Stop rate of **56%**, against 37% on dedicated OKR software.

SIGN 7**Team goals only partly link to company goals**

19% hit goals very consistently, against 68% where almost all are linked.

SIGN 8**Strategy is handed down from the top**

Stop rate of **53%** where the exec team sets it, against 40% when set across layers.

ACTION PLAN

The Revival Plan

Five moves, in order of impact. Each one can be in place within a single cycle.

1 Put a Name on Every OKR

One accountable owner per objective and key result, set on the day the goal is written.

65% hit goals very consistently with every OKR owned, against 17%

2 Make Progress Live, Not Reconstructed

Update progress as work happens, so a review reads the picture instead of building it the night before.

Zombie programs fall from 35% to 14%

3 Score Every Key Result, Every Week

A confidence or progress score on every key result turns a weekly check-in into an early warning.

82% working well when every key result is scored, against 52%

4 End Every Cycle With a Decision

Run a retro and decide what happens to each OKR: continue, change or stop, so nothing is left to fade.

Silent endings fall from 64% to 41% with consistent retros

5 Build Goals With the Teams Who Run Them

Set strategy across layers, so the people doing the work help shape the goals they're measured on.

40% stop rate when set collaboratively, against 53% from the exec team

1+2

Start with ownership and live progress. Every other move depends on knowing who owns a goal and where it stands this week.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Is Your OKR Program at Risk?

Rate each statement from 1 (never true) to 5 (always true), then add up your score.

Never

Always

01 Every objective and key result has one named owner.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

02 Progress is updated as work happens, not before reviews.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

03 Every key result has a confidence or progress score.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

04 Teams check in on their OKRs every week.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

05 Every cycle ends with a retro and a decision on each OKR.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

06 Key results are measurable outcomes, not milestones or tasks.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

07 Team OKRs clearly link to company OKRs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

08 OKRs live in one shared place, not in spreadsheets.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

34–40

Healthy

The habits that keep programs alive are in place. Protect them as the company grows.

26–33

Fragile

Running, but one busy quarter from a stall. Fix your lowest two scores first.

8–25

At risk

In the danger zone. Start with ownership and live progress, then add the rest.

A self-check built on the habits in this report, not a validated diagnostic.

METHODOLOGY

About This Research

An independent survey of companies running OKRs today, built to measure how programs stall and what keeps them alive.

Sample	420 operations and strategy leaders at technology companies of 50–200 employees.
Screening	Every respondent confirmed their company currently uses OKRs.
Fielding	Online survey via Pollfish, independent of any customer list.
Independence	No OKRs Tool customers were included in the sample.
Key measures	Goal achievement uses the share answering "very consistently" to how consistently their team hits its goals. Program health uses the share describing their program as "working well". Stop rates use the share that has ever stopped OKRs on at least one team.
Stall questions	Questions on when and how OKRs stall describe the typical pattern at each respondent's company and were answered by every respondent.
Multi-select	Causes of stalling were multi-select, so figures sum to more than 100%.
Core habits	The four habits are weekly team check-ins, progress tracked as work happens, an owner on every OKR and consistent end-of-cycle retros.
Small samples	Cuts below 40 respondents are labelled with their sample size and treated as directional.
Open-ended answers	Quotes are edited for clarity and length. Theme shares come from coding every answer by its main theme.
Association, not causation	All figures are self-reported and cross-sectional, with no control group. They describe what moves together, not what causes what.

ABOUT

OKRs Tool

The simplest way to run OKRs across a growing team, without it becoming one person's full-time job.

OKRs Tool chases updates for you, gives leadership one clear view of who is working on what and what is at risk, and keeps goals measurable instead of letting them drift into tasks. Set it up in an afternoon, with no consultants or training, and roll it out to the whole company on one flat price, never per user. For the person accountable for making OKRs stick, it is the system that makes sure they do.

Updates chase themselves	Automated nudges collect progress for you, so nobody reconstructs the picture before a review.
One view for leadership	Who is working on what, and what is at risk, in a single live view that updates as work happens.
Goals stay measurable	Key results stay measurable outcomes, so they don't turn into a to-do list.
One flat price	Roll out to the whole company for one flat fee, never charged per user.
Live in an afternoon	Guided setup gets your first cycle running fast. No consultants, no training.

Keep your OKRs alive.

Start free. Your first cycle can be live this afternoon.

[Start Free](#)