

How Vattenfall's wind modeling department went from debating deliverables to achieving outcomes

RENEWABLE ENERGY · WIND ENERGY MODELING DEPARTMENT · OKR CONSULTING

Vattenfall's specialized department for wind energy modeling was productive, but feature debates set its priorities. A one-day workshop and months of coaching from Wave Nine turned OKRs into the way the department works.

90%

of the department's work anchored to its OKRs

3-4

focused projects running at a time, down from five per person

6 months

of clear planning horizon

AT A GLANCE

CLIENT

Vattenfall, one of Europe's largest energy companies, with a mission to make fossil-free living possible within one generation.

INDUSTRY

Renewable Energy

DEPARTMENT

Modeling and Optimization, specialized in wind energy modeling

CHALLENGE

Prioritizing solutions over outcomes, reactive short-horizon planning, difficulty quantifying the department's value, and stakeholder conversations consumed by feature debates

SOLUTION

A full-day OKR workshop facilitated by Wave Nine, followed by several months of coaching, custom process design and a tailored OKR playbook that embeds OKRs in the department's operating rhythm

RESULTS

More focus, several focused projects at a time, a strict six-month OKR cycle, measurable progress that leadership can see, and stakeholder conversations focused on strategic priorities

THE CHALLENGE

PRODUCTIVE, BUT WORKING ON THE WRONG THINGS

A skilled department that delivered regularly, and prioritized solutions over outcomes.

Vattenfall is one of Europe's largest energy companies, with a mission to make fossil-free living possible within one generation. A significant part of that mission lives in its wind energy division, where teams design, evaluate and optimize wind farm projects across the continent.

Within that division sits a specialized department for wind energy modeling, led by Tom Willems, Head of Modeling and Optimization. The department builds the technical models and software that power wind farm design: the analytical backbone that lets project teams evaluate business cases, test scenarios and select the most viable designs to bid on. Unlike the project-focused teams around it, Tom's department works in engineering and product development mode, building, iterating on and improving the software everyone else depends on.

On paper, Vattenfall's modeling department wasn't failing. It was productive, technically skilled and delivering regularly. But Tom started to notice a pattern that was quietly costing the department: it was prioritizing solutions (features, models, pieces of functionality) over the outcomes those solutions were meant to create.



ONE FEATURE LIST, TWO DIRECTIONS

TOP-DOWN

Guidance from senior leadership and stakeholders

Organizational goals described in solution-specific terms

"Build this," "achieve this deliverable"

BOTTOM-UP

The department's own backlog

Models to update and functionality to improve

Technical debt to address

Every quarter: a list of features to build

FEATURE NEGOTIATIONS

Every quarter, a list of features to build came together from two directions. Top-down guidance came from senior leadership and stakeholders, who often described organizational goals in solution-specific terms ("build this," "achieve this deliverable"). A bottom-up backlog added models to update, functionality to improve and technical debt to address. Stakeholders engaged on those solutions, debating which features mattered more and which model updates should take priority. The conversations turned into technical feature negotiations, with little room left for strategy and impact.

How do you weigh a feature that saves engineering time against one that improves a project's business case? There was no clean framework for it, so decisions came down to instinct and to whoever was most vocal in the room.

The department was also operating in reactive mode. Planning extended maybe three to six months out, and that horizon was constantly disrupted by whatever was happening across the organization: a new vessel type, a change in foundation technology, a stakeholder request that jumped the queue.

“ We noticed we were changing our goals quite often. We were working more towards solutions and features rather than actual outcomes. ”

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

That realization set everything in motion. The department needed a shared language that could move conversations from deliverables to outcomes, and it found that language in OKRs.



■ Four challenges stood out

01

Solutions before outcomes

Prioritizing features and models led to misaligned work.

02

Reactive planning

A short planning horizon, constantly disrupted by organizational noise.

03

Invisible value

It was hard to quantify the value the department was creating.

04

Feature debates

Stakeholder conversations were consumed by features, with little time for strategic priorities.

■ THE WORKSHOP

ONE DAY, THREE OKRS AND A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Tom and his department knew early on that implementing OKRs without expert support was a risk they weren't willing to take, so they brought in Wave Nine for guidance. Wave Nine kicked things off with a full-day OKR workshop at Vattenfall's Copenhagen office, bringing together Tom's department and a few representatives from its primary "sister team," which uses the modeling software day to day.

Before the workshop, the department had done meaningful pre-work. It ran structured interviews with stakeholders and users across the organization and compiled their needs into a set of strategic beliefs to inform the OKR-setting session. The department also came in with its own high-level thinking on long-term strategy and where it could create the most business value.



Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

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With these kinds of changes and methods, you really want experienced people to guide you through the process, who already know all the pitfalls. That's why we chose Wave Nine.

OUTCOMES FIRST

Wave Nine led the session and kept the room focused on one valuable question: of everything this department could focus on, which two or three objectives genuinely capture the most important outcomes?

The department was pushed to use the correct structural formula for writing objectives: genuine, outcome-oriented statements that could guide the department's decisions, with no vague aspirations and no feature descriptions. One of the objectives that emerged from the session shows the outcome-first mindset:

EXAMPLE OBJECTIVE

Enable more people using our tools in the organization to make data-driven decisions by improving usability.

The objective names the outcome and leaves the choice of usability features to the department.

The second half of the day shifted to key results, and that's where the work got harder. The department surfaced a wide range of potential indicators: metrics, signals and data points that could show whether it was actually moving toward its objectives. It then drilled that list down to a set of key results that felt measurable and meaningful.

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Making great key results is a skill. You can't just learn it from a workshop. You need to do it a couple of times before you figure out what works and what doesn't.

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

By the end of the day, the department had a complete, aligned set of OKRs. Wave Nine had been clear from the start, though: the workshop was only the beginning.

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The workshop with Wave Nine was really nice. They steered us toward formulating our objectives and made sure we were prioritizing the right things. We were aligned pretty quickly and it was a really successful day.

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

A PROCESS BUILT FOR THE DEPARTMENT

In the months that followed, Wave Nine kept meeting with Tom's department every few weeks to work through the mechanics of actually practicing the OKR framework. Setting OKRs was one thing. This is where the real value started to take shape.

Refining the key results

20-30%

OF WORKSHOP KEY
RESULTS REFINED

About 20 to 30% of the key results the department had written in the workshop turned out to be too difficult to measure in practice. Some were too lagging: they could only be evaluated after six months, which made them unreliable for steering. Others, once the department dug into the data, revealed better proxy indicators that hadn't been obvious in the workshop room.

Once refined, each key result was assigned to an owner in the department who took ownership of the measurement process, writing scripts to pull data from the department's own software and storing everything in a shared repository. When the first three-month checkpoint arrived, the department had clean, real progress data to analyze.

01 • OWNER

Every key result has an owner in the department who measures it

02 • SCRIPTS

Data is pulled from the department's own software

03 • REPOSITORY

Clean progress data, ready at the three-month checkpoint

Building the OKR playbook

Wave Nine helped the department document its entire process (the ceremonies, the cadence and the decision-making logic) in a custom playbook tailored to how the department works. It became the department's reference point for understanding what it does, and why.



ESTABLISHING THE RIGHT CADENCE

One insight from the post-workshop sessions was the importance of review frequency. The department had initially planned to check in on key results once a month, which felt like enough at the time. Wave Nine pushed back: once a month isn't regular enough to steer by. Over time, the department realized it was falling back into old habits, so it adopted a bi-weekly sprint rhythm. Each sprint ends with a showcase meeting where key result progress is presented and risks and challenges are surfaced openly. Right after, that information is used to set priorities for the next sprint.

THE FIRST PLAN

A key result check-in once a month

M1 M2 M3 M4 M5 M6

Not regular enough to steer by, and old habits crept back.

NOW

Bi-weekly sprints, each ending in a showcase meeting



Progress and risks surface every two weeks and set the next sprint's priorities.

“Don't underestimate how important it is to look at the key results on a regular basis. And a regular basis is not once a month.”

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

The department landed on a hybrid cycle: a full reset every six months, in which objectives are revisited and potentially replaced, and a lighter check-in at the three-month mark to refine key result formulations and measurement methods while the direction of the objectives stays the same.



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For three to four months after the OKR workshop, we still had meetings with Wave Nine every couple of weeks discussing how the process is going and what the next steps are. That really held us accountable and gave us the push to keep doing it.

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

SAME PEOPLE, BETTER RESULTS

After one cycle, OKRs have reshaped the way Vattenfall's modeling department works, communicates and measures its own success.

The department is more focused

Before OKRs, individuals might be spread across five projects at once. Today, the department runs three or four focused projects at a time, and most people work on one project, or two at most. Less context switching and ramp-up time has meaningfully improved both efficiency and morale.

5

projects per person, before OKRs

3-4

focused projects at a time today

1-2

projects per person, at most

“

Instead of having five different projects running per person, we now have three or four projects for the entire team. There's less context switching, less ramp-up time, and fewer meetings. We're much more focused now.

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

Stakeholder conversations are more strategic

The shift from prioritizing solutions to prioritizing outcomes changed every external conversation the department has. Stakeholders who used to debate which model to build or which functionality to prioritize now engage on a different question: what outcomes matter most?

BEFORE

Which model do we build? Which functionality comes first?

NOW

Which outcomes matter most?

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That's a much easier discussion to have, because we know best what the solution is for a given outcome. What we want to know from a stakeholder is: what is more important? More people using our tools or improvement in the business cases of asset projects? That discussion is clean. We can then go figure out the solution.

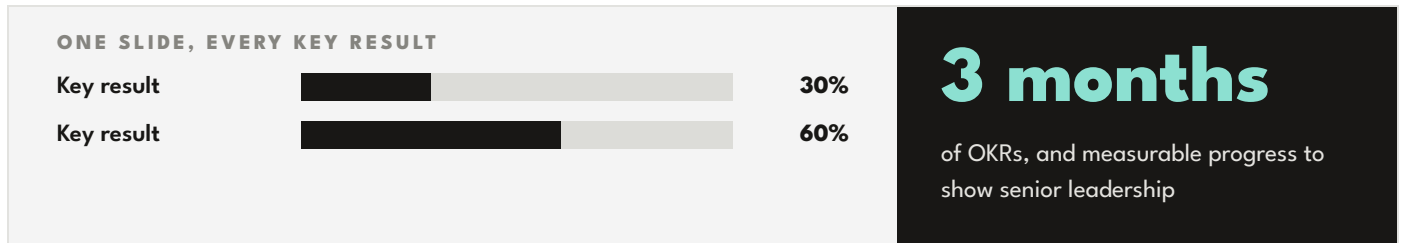
Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

PROGRESS LEADERSHIP CAN SEE

Leadership can see progress

Perhaps the most underrated outcome is the ability to quantify what the department delivers. After three months of running OKRs, Tom had a single slide showing every key result and its current progress: 30% here, 60% there, each one moving in the right direction.



“No other team around us is capable of doing that right now. It's really nice for me to show, and for senior people above me to see: look, we spent three months, we promised to improve this, and we are at 30%. And it's improving.”

Tom Willems
Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

Planning horizons have stretched

Because the department commits to a six-month OKR cycle and largely holds to it, with 90% of its work anchored to the declared objectives, it has the mental space to think further ahead. The department still responds to genuine organizational needs when they arise, and those are now the exception.

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Before, we could really only look three to six months ahead, and even then we were constantly shifting. Now we know exactly what we're doing for the next six months and that creates a lot of head space for thinking about what comes after.

Tom Willems
Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

The results at a glance

- **More focus:** less context switching and fewer projects per person mean more time for deep work.
- **A longer view:** a strict six-month OKR cycle gives the department the mental space to think further ahead.
- **Visible value:** leadership can now see measurable progress and the value the department creates.
- **Strategic conversations:** stakeholder discussions start from the organization's strategic priorities, and the deliverables follow from them.

Q&A WITH TOM WILLEMS

Q

What advice would you give to a company that is just starting their OKR journey?

"When you start using OKRs to steer and guide your team, it's not enough to have them running alongside everything else. Everything you do has to be because of the OKRs. Every decision we make as a team, we now ask: what objective are we trying to achieve with this? And if it's not tied to one of our OKRs, we shouldn't be doing it."

Q

In your opinion, what's the biggest skill most teams are missing when they try to do OKRs?

"Making great key results is harder than it looks. You need to do it a couple of times before you understand what will work and what will not. The biggest thing I see people get wrong is defining key results as something you will achieve in six months, which is only measurable after those six months. You need to switch to the mindset of defining them so that at any point in time, you can measure the progress and see how far you are. It's not an easy mindset to develop."

Q

When you step back and look at everything that has changed, what stands out as the single biggest gain?

"The biggest gain is in actually working on what the organization needs at this moment. Not only what you think it needs, but it's really measured and confirmed. And with that, you're creating so much more value."



NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN

The next challenge for Tom's department is its first independent reset: a full rebuild of objectives and key results for the second half of the year, with Wave Nine out of the room. Tom expects it won't be perfect, and he's at peace with that. The lessons from the first cycle, especially around what makes key results measurable, give him confidence that the department will produce better OKRs this time. Looking further out, Tom envisions bringing Wave Nine back in a more advanced capacity, to audit and pressure-test the department's process once it has iterated several times on its own.

The impact has also begun to spread. After Tom presented his department's OKR results to his manager, the response was immediate: other teams in the wider organization were asked to develop their own OKRs. Those teams are doing exactly that, and Tom's department has become Vattenfall's OKR center of gravity: it explains the methodology, shares its playbook and demonstrates best practices.

OKRs at the next level up are now on the agenda. The architecture is still taking shape, but for a department that once struggled to see three months ahead, planning at that scale is proof that something fundamental has changed.

SECOND HALF OF THE YEAR

The first independent reset, without Wave Nine in the room

ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

Other teams develop their own OKRs, and Tom's department shares its playbook

FURTHER OUT

OKRs at the next level up, and a Wave Nine audit of the process

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I wasn't expecting it to be so tailored. I thought we were going to learn a method and then have to figure out how to apply it ourselves. With Wave Nine, it was really catered towards our team's specific case. They were always trying to understand how we were working and adjusting the method for it. That made all the difference.

Tom Willems

Head of Modeling & Optimization, Vattenfall

STRATEGY EXECUTION WITH OKRS AND AI

Let's talk about what this could look like in your organization.

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About Wave Nine. Wave Nine are AI and OKR consultants for complex organizations. Founded in Silicon Valley, we have guided 300+ transformations in 30+ countries, trained 50,000+ people and are the No. 1 implementation partner for WorkBoard AI. We help leadership teams turn strategy into results: the right goals, a steady operating rhythm, and AI that the whole organization uses to run the business.

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