

OBJECTIVE & KEY RESULTS OKR IN ACTION!

COMBINING ENERGIES FOR COMMON STRATEGIES



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1. Introduction

In the current organizational contexts, set in an uncertain and constantly changing market, setting goals is not just a necessity, but a critical success factor.

NOver the years, various studies have highlighted the importance of being able to adapt to an unpredictable future. <u>One analysis</u> revealed that **organizational agility** has a significant impact on a company's financial performance.

Companies with high agility and resilience show a 150% higher return on investment (ROI) and a 500% higher return on equity (ROE) compared to others. These companies also reported significant improvements in their financial performance, with gains in terms of speed, customer centricity, operations, innovation, employee engagement, and productivity.

<u>Another study</u> found a **strong correlation between organizational agility and organizational performance**, particularly in terms of customer satisfaction.

A framework for the deployment of a transparent and collaborative business strategy like OKRs can represent a significant factor.

When organizations align their teams towards shared goals and measurable key results, they are laying the foundation for a sustainable future characterized by:

- Cross-functional collaboration;
- Clear communication on priorities;
- An open mindset towards change.

It's no coincidence that the OKR framework has gained significant traction in recent years. The chaos induced by the global COVID-19 pandemic saw companies around the world facing unprecedented challenges, further emphasizing the need for agility and strategic focus in goal setting.



OKRs provide a structured framework to translate corporate vision into achievable, measurable, and time-bound objectives, through a flow that is both top-down and bottom-up, involving the entire organization - from the top executives to individual teams.

OKRs involve:

- Setting an objective;
- A clear statement of **what** is intended to be achieved;
- Defining **3-5 key results** to monitor progress.

OKRs aim to align the entire organization by channeling everyone's energies towards common and strategically relevant goals.

This White Paper offers:

- A comprehensive exploration of OKRs;
- An in-depth look at their origin, evolution, and application;
- An analysis of their benefits and challenges;
- Examples for a deeper understanding.

Thus, the document serves as a guide that compiles the best implementation practices, which we hope will be useful to your organization.



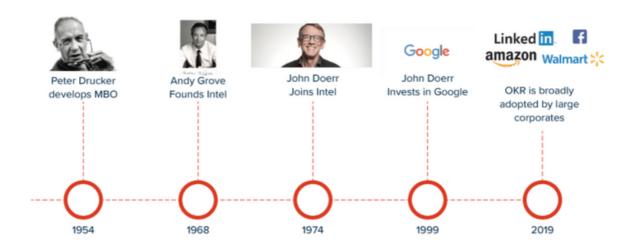
2. The origin and evolution of OKRs

The history of **Objectives and Key Results** (OKR) is deeply rooted in Intel under the leadership of one of **Silicon Valley**'s technology industry pioneers, **Andrew S. Grove**.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of intense competition in the semiconductor sector, and Intel, which had just entered the industry, faced tough competition from established companies like *Fairchild and Texas Instruments*.

Grove, in <u>his book</u> "High Output Management," introduced a management by objectives system that was based on a simple yet robust principle: **employees are** more effective when they understand their goals and participate in defining the results they must achieve.

In doing so, he laid the groundwork for the OKR framework as we know it today.



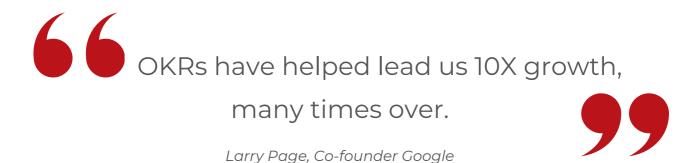
In the late 1970s, the young engineer **John Doerr** joined Intel, where he quickly learned Grove's objective-setting system. In 1980, when he became part of the venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins, he began introducing this system to the portfolio companies of the firm, including Google.



John Doerr officially introduced OKRs to Google's executive team in 1999 through a presentation workshop attended by co-founders **Larry Page** and **Sergey Brin**. They not only found the system intriguing but also began applying it immediately.

Google's meteoric rise from a Silicon Valley startup to a global tech giant is well-known.

Interestingly, in a video shared with his employees, Larry Page attributed much of Google's success to the OKR system, crediting it with helping them achieve "70x growth."



Since then, the rise of OKRs has never stopped. They have been adopted by organizations outside the pure tech sector, such as: *Amazon, LinkedIn, Spotify, and even by entities like the Gates Foundation and Bono's ONE Foundation*.

This document aims to delve into their functioning, convey the challenges and opportunities that can be encountered in their implementation, and at the same time, offer encouragement: you don't need to be a giant to adopt them; all that's required is a grand vision and the willingness to achieve ambitious goals.



3. Advantages and challenges of OKRs

OKRs offer significant benefits to organizations, but - like any methodology - they also present challenges.

Advantages of OKRs



OKRs promote alignment and focus: OKRs *help align the energies of all levels of the organization* and establish a shared understanding of what needs to be achieved. They allow teams to concentrate their efforts on what really matters



OKRs provide greater transparency: OKRs are *typically shared openly within the organization*. Their transparency allows everyone to understand the priorities and progress to be made, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration.



OKRs promote accountability: with measurable key results, OKRs promote accountability. People understand *how they can contribute to the business strategy* and can monitor their own progress towards the objectives.



OKRs encourage ambitious thinking: OKRs encourage teams to set and pursue ambitious goals. They foster innovation and help the company achieve significant outcom





Challenges in implementing OKRs



Defining the most suitable OKRs: one of the most common challenges is identifying the *set of objectives and key results that best support the business strategy.* This task requires strong alignment on what the business priorities are and great clarity on what the goal to be achieved



Aligning OKRs: aligning OKRs across different levels of the organization means ensuring that *all teams work in unison and in a coordinated manner, taking into account everyone's operations.* This delicate step can reveal conflicting priorities but, if managed carefully, can lead to significant energy savings.



Excessive emphasis on OKRs: although OKRs encapsulate priorities, they should not be regarded as the only tasks within the company. *A balanced approach is necessary*, where OKRs can harmoniously integrate with daily operations.



Maintaining commitment: implementing OKRs requires discipline and constant commitment, to prevent them from quickly transitioning from a desired work method to a fleeting trend.

Introducing OKRs in a company is a **revolutionary action that can lead to great benefits** from the early stages of introduction, as it immediately brings teams to openly discuss strategic issues.



Their introduction represents an **organizational change process** that should be handled using typical change management practices.

OKRs provide a structured framework to convert the company vision into achievable, measurable, and time-bound objectives, through a flow that is both top-down and bottom-up, involving the entire organization - from the leadership to the individual teams.

Regarding this:

- On one hand, it's important not to be discouraged if the initial sets of OKRs during the first quarters are not "perfect." Practice is necessary, and it's important to accept making many "mistakes" before achieving a good level of framework execution.
- On the other hand, it's also important to keep the famous *Pareto Principle* in mind.

20% of a successful implementation is indeed related to the drafting of well-structured objectives and Key Results (KRs).

But grammar is not everything. Knowing what OKRs are and how to write them correctly represents the foundation for their introduction in a company, the remaining 80% concerns the quality - in terms of consistency, frequency, and level of interaction - of the monitoring rituals, which represent the beating heart of the OKR cycles.

It's crucial to be disciplined and focused on execution to reap the benefits of this framework, which is as simple in its rules as it is complex (because it directly involves people) in its execution.

The key lies in an approach aimed at experimentation and regular review, intended to find the necessary adjustments.



4. Implement OKRs in your organization





Every OKR implementation is different from another, depending on the context and the timing of its execution. However, we have identified **common steps to follow**.

We are talking about guidelines necessary to help you navigate the process, not a book of strict rules to adhere to!

- Adaptation;
- Practice;
- Consistency

will make your journey of introducing OKRs a voyage full of discoveries.

Before starting, however, some precautions..

You wouldn't want to start a new adventure without being equipped, would you?

Let's start with the essentials ...

Read



There are numerous materials online and in bookstores. Educate yourselves, let yourselves be inspired, and let some doubts arise. Once dispelled, they will be the pillars upon which you will build the solid foundation of your framework in the company. (Passionate advice: start with the original text by Doerr: "Measure What Matters")

compare yourself



Look for those who, like you or before you, have come into contact with the methodology. On LinkedIn, among your colleagues, or in some forums, there may be those who can provide you with insights and useful reflections based on their own experience. Embody the collaboration that is inherent in OKRs from the very beginning of learning, and you won't regret it! If you wish, our <u>Redlab</u> team will also be happy to engage with you; we are always seeking new perspectives (...and curiosity is free!)"



Dive in!



The success of implementing OKRs in an organization goes beyond simply understanding the concept. A successful implementation requires a lot of practice. Experiment, and you'll immediately put into action one of the cornerstones of this framework: "fail fast, validate faster".



Small steps

Start with a pilot project, perhaps in a single Business Unit. Experiment before scaling.



Anticipate

Conducting an <u>organizational check-up</u> before introducing OKRs could be useful in identifying the current company culture and its readiness for change, thereby allowing you to anticipate potential obstacles that may arise in the adoption journey of OKRs.

Now we are truly ready to go!

As you may have guessed, OKRs are more of a practice than a discipline, so we won't spend much more time on further prescriptions. Instead, we will show you how the journey of implementing OKRs can be an exciting revolution.

Let's get started!



4.1 To understand OKRs

OKRs are a Goal Setting system:

- Dynamic
- Transparent
- Collaborative

They are a tool for translating the company's strategy into an agile mode, typically broken down into quarterly implementation and monitoring of results.

Their primary component is, indeed, *Objectives* (qualitative), from which *Key Results* (quantitative) stem. Typically, there are 3 to 5 key results corresponding to each objective.

The reason behind this is the necessity to maintain focus on priorities, avoiding excessive multiplication of results to be monitored each quarter.

Their management is primarily team-based.

The basics

- The *Objective* is qualitative;
 The *Key Results* are quantitative.
- O: where do I want to go?
 KR: How will I get there?
- The KRs are measurable and range from 1 to 3.
- The Objective and KRs define a challenging goal and a clear, shared path to achieve ambitious results collaboratively.

Although it's possible to implement them at an individual level, our suggestion is that such usage should occur only after organizational implementation is completed. This is to avoid complications such as the potential sandbagging effect (resulting in a dispersion of priority definition) or confusion with performance management systems aimed at monitoring individual performance.



4.2 The structure of OKRs

The structure



A clearly defined milestone or goal.



Specific measures defined to track the achievement of the objective.

An OKR consists of one objective and typically 2 to 5 key results.



The **Objective** is what you want to achieve: it describes a meaningful goal in a specific, concise, and aspirational manner. Therefore, their formulation is qualitative in nature, avoiding the use of metrics and numbers to express what you want to achieve.



Key Results, on the other hand, are the (measurable) steps necessary to achieve the objective. They serve to track the progress that will be made and are therefore specific, time-bound, challenging yet realistic.



Let's consider a technology startup aiming to enhance user engagement:

Objective: Ensure our customers stay forever!

Key Results:

- 1. Increase daily active users by 25% by the end of the quarter.
- 2.Increase average usage time to 30 minutes per day by the end of the quarter.
- 3. Reduce churn rate below 5% by the end of the quarter.

The connection between the objective and the key results is a crucial part of structuring an OKR.

It's essential to ensure that these key results specify concretely and measurably what the objective expresses in qualitative terms.

The main questions to ask when establishing them are:

- "How will we know if we have achieved the objective?"
- "How will we know if we are on the right track?"

A good Key Result provides an excellent answer to these questions.



4.2.1 Types of OKRs

There are primarily two types of OKRs:



Committed OKR.

OKRs that the team commits to achieving 100% (also known as *Roofshot*) and are often linked to key metrics of the company.

Examples of Committed OKRs are those related to workplace safety:

O: Be the safest workplace in the world.

KR1: 0 fatal incidents in the next quarter;

KR2: 0 near misses in the next quarter;

KR3: Achieve 95% compliance in the next internal safety standards audit.

Aspirational OKR



Also known as "moonshots," they are ambitious and help teams think outside the box. They push the organization to innovate and often lead to desirable advancements. For this reason, reaching them at 70% is already a success.

Examples are numerous, and one of these could be:

O: Achieve a record quarter.

KR1: Increase YoY revenue from €5M to €7.5M;

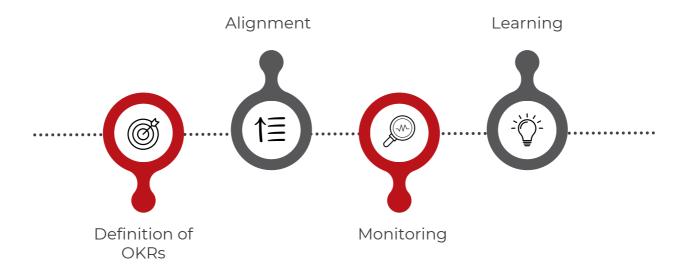
KR2: Increase EBITDA margin from 15% to 20%.



4.2.2 The OKRs Cycle

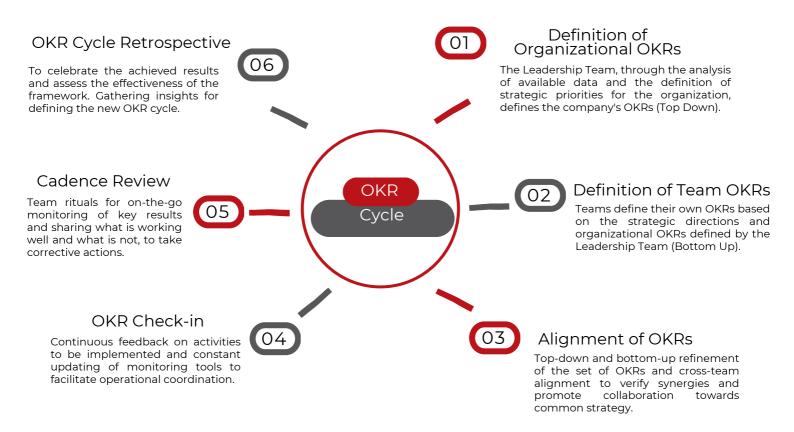
The OKRs operate in typically quarterly cycles. This temporal segmentation helps organizations to adapt, adjusting as needed based on changes.

A complete cycle usually involves 4 phases:



- **1. Definition of OKRs**: Objectives and corresponding Key Results are identified at both the organizational level (i.e., the Leadership Team) and the team level (i.e., at a more operational level).
- **2. Alignment**: OKRs are shared and disseminated throughout the entire organization to ensure that everyone works towards achieving the same objectives.
- **3. Monitoring**: Regular check-ins are conducted to measure progress and adjust strategies, if necessary.
- **4. Learning**: Teams reflect on the results achieved and the lessons learned to guide the definition of future OKRs.





4.3 The initial assessment

The first step in implementing OKRs is to ensure **solid sponsorship from the leadership team**. Without management support and active participation, the implementation will have a short life span. Leaders play a crucial role in defining the vision, objectives, and setting an example.

To assess the commitment of the leadership group, one could plan - for example - a workshop or meeting with precisely this objective.

4.3.1 Why OKRs?

To facilitate the leadership team in defining their expectations for the framework and laying solid foundations for its implementation, it is useful to ask them to articulate why they want to introduce OKRs into the organization.

- What opportunities do they see in their adoption?
- What organizational challenges can find a solution?



Examples of responses to this question can be one or more of the following, indicating that OKRs meet their expectations:

- Better alignment;
- Greater focus on what matters;
- Increased collaboration between teams and between teams and leadership;
- Greater transparency;
- Promoting engagement and motivation.

4.3.2 Where do OKRs come from?

The creation and alignment of OKRs is the first part of the framework implementation process.

In particular, especially when launching the program for the first time, it's important to ensure that the leadership team agrees on the business priorities to be tracked throughout the year through objectives and key results.

The OKRs devised in this phase stem from the overall strategic plan and are as closely aligned as possible with the purpose and values of the organization as a whole. This connection between **business strategy** and **core values** lays the foundation for OKRs because it makes them consistent with the company's culture and priorities. Additionally, it leads the leadership team to make choices, focusing on what is truly important to achieve in the coming year, even if it means setting aside what is not strictly necessary.

The outcome of this initial definition work will be organizational OKRs (or strategic OKRs) and represents the foundation for building the entire set of OKRs in the company.



4.4 Education and Training

The implementation of OKRs is an exciting change management process that requires the ability to manage uncertainty and to encourage people to overcome their natural resistance to transformation.

Investing time in <u>training</u> all members of the organization who will be introduced to the method will allow them to acquire solid theoretical foundations and to apply new social practices in a "protected" context in which they will be protagonists.

Establishing a small pool of internal champions (or OKR ambassadors) with a greater knowledge of the methodology and its nuances can also provide valuable support in supporting the OKR practice. They will be able to anticipate potential issues and help teams integrate the new way of working into their daily operations.

4.5 Setting up OKRs

We have reached the phase of defining OKRs at the beginning of the cycle.

We will reason on a quarterly basis, as this is the typical cadence adopted by the framework. However, this does not preclude the adoption of different deadlines that may be preferable depending on the context.

The recommendation is, in any case, not to significantly extend the cycles to avoid undermining their effectiveness. The shorter the cycles, the more it will be possible to act in a timely manner to effectively achieve the company's objectives.



4.5.1 Organizational OKRs

Start with the definition of Organizational OKRs by the Leadership Team.



As mentioned earlier, this initial set will serve as a "strategic compass." It will provide the direction towards which team OKRs will aim, reflecting the strategy and its connection to the company's vision and purpose.

Once finalized, make sure to communicate them clearly to the entire organization and, if possible, also share the reasons why they were chosen.

A dedicated meeting could be a good way to disseminate to the entire organization the purpose of implementing OKRs and what the priorities are in terms of content and results that the company as a whole will need to contribute to achieving.

Supports for presenting the OKRs can vary depending on the context; it could be a simple Excel file on the intranet, specialized software, or a bulletin board in the company's spaces.

The purpose, whatever solution you adopt, will be to make it accessible to everyone at all times what the company's priorities are and the links between the organizational OKRs and the tactical ones, which we'll see in a moment.

4.5.2 Team OKRs

Once the organizational OKRs are defined, it's time to align the team OKRs with them. This step ensures that everyone works towards achieving the same overall objectives and that each person is informed about the results that each team will be committed to pursuing for the implementation of the overall strategy.



We recommend using a bottom-up approach and allowing teams to create their OKRs aligned with those of the organization. Encourage them to aim high and to seek/support other teams and departments.

The tactical OKR implementation teams may not directly correspond to the company's canonical offices or departments but may be structured as crossfunctional groups. This is one of the "magic" aspects that, thanks to the framework, finds a way to manifest.

The team alignment phase offers a valuable opportunity to address the siloed structure that, in some companies, represents:

- Both an advantage in terms of specialization and operational efficiency;
- As well as an obstacle to innovation and the fluidity of internal communication, sometimes at the expense of quality.

Certainly, the mere introduction of OKRs will not be the key to building a new organisational structure, but it will open a period of discussion and experimentation with new collaborative practices that can bear fruit cycle after cycle.

In this context, the support of an OKR coach who facilitates new dynamics and streamlines alignment operations between teams could represent a good investment for the sustainability of the implementation and its fruition from the early stages.

WE ADVICE AGAINSTa "cascading" approach to OKRs.

The development of organizational OKRs and their subsequent top-down assignment through the identification of a working group for each key result could compromise team engagement and their drive for innovation. This approach would also be a deviation from the framework, partially undermining its essence, which, as we have seen, relies on alignment and cooperation as strong points for developing people's engagement and accountability.



One last suggestion for executing this phase effectively concerns the clarity of the links between all OKRs. Once all Objectives and Key Results have been developed, it can be useful to hold a final session to inaugurate the entire set. Ensure that all interdependencies between team OKRs and organizational OKRs are explicit and relevant, as well as between all team OKRs themselves. The purpose is to ensure that all priorities have an action plan and that teams respect each other's needs both in terms of strategy and daily operations.

As we mentioned, OKRs should not represent for people an additional "thing to do" but rather a tool to contribute to the company's objectives in a conscious and collaborative manner. Therefore, the development of team OKRs should respect both the desired innovation and the operational needs of daily business.



4.6 OKR Cycles

Once everything is set up, the actual cycle begins with the start of the period (typically the quarter). This is also the time to plan in advance all the monitoring meetings that will take place to ensure disciplined execution.

4.6.1 Cadence Review Meeting

Cadence Review Meetings are frequent operational meetings (typically weekly or bi-weekly) involving all members of an OKR team. Their purpose is to track progress and identify corrective actions to address any issues or delays in achieving the OKR.

Usually, their duration is short (10 - 15 minutes) and structured with a fixed agenda. The final part of the meeting involves sharing learnings and celebrating successes achieved.

The use of a visual aid showing the degree of achievement of key results is fundamental to their management; what makes these meetings effective is the ability of participants—typically moderated by the champion or an OKR coach, at least in the initial phases—to give and receive feedback from their colleagues, sharing their experiences with everyone.

4.6.2 End-of-Cycle Retrospectives

At the end of each OKR cycle, the retrospective is the moment when each OKR team evaluates the results achieved and shares the valuable learnings to plan a new OKR cycle consciously, challengingly, and realistically.

The outcomes of each retrospective will be shared with the leadership team and the rest of the organization, if the major stakeholders of each OKR are not already present at the meeting.



During the retrospective, the main focus is on **identifying the causes of both** successes and failures, with the aim of improving both the adoption of the framework — so that it generates its benefits in a lasting way—and analyzing the factors that contribute to the optimal execution of the company's strategy.

The emphasis on learning rather than simply judging the success or failure of an OKR encourages the group to project itself into the future with an approach focused on continuous improvement and encourages the company to foster a healthy "culture of error".

Use all the information generated from the retrospectives to improve the next OKR cycle in terms of framework adoption and content.

4.6.3 Beginning of a New Cycle

If you've made it this far, you've reached the beginning of a new cycle. You can pick up from *point 4.3* with all the insights and improvement suggestions shared during the retrospectives.

Let's start again.



5. Conclusion

OKRs involve defining an objective that describes what you want to achieve and key results to measure progress towards that objective. They are established and revised in regular cycles, promoting agility and continuous improvement within the organization.

Successful implementation requires strong sponsorship from the leadership team, training for organization members, definition and alignment of OKRs across various teams, regular monitoring meetings, and a culture of review and learning, as evidenced by end-of-cycle retrospectives.

Even in the face of obstacles along the way, with perseverance and continuous learning, organizations can leverage OKRs to drive their growth.

As you may have gathered, there are no strict rules for implementing this framework in your organization. OKRs are more of a practice than a methodology to be adopted wholesale.

The last two messages we would like to convey before moving on to our case studies are the two key points of our team:



Let yourself be carried away

Be flexible, adapt the framework to your context while keeping its essence intact. Avoid excessive bureaucracy. If OKRs become more of an administrative burden than a tool for alignment and execution of the company's strategy, failure is imminent. Maintaining focus on the quality of objectives and clarity of metrics is essential for achieving tangible results. Getting stuck on a specific doctrine may provide comfort during turbulent times (resistance to change can challenge the adoption process), but it can be detrimental in the long run.





Who starts well ...

Let us say (after all, it's our job!) that having guidance from a coach, especially in the initial stages of implementation, can be a wise investment to avoid adding to the 83% who gave up after the first cycle. The fallout - in terms of employee engagement, productivity, and perception of leadership quality - from a botched OKR introduction process can be avoided with the help of an experienced consultant. Not only can they provide specialized guidance, but they can also offer an external perspective necessary to tailor the model to your organizational specifics.

We believe that OKRs are much more than just a tool for managing corporate performance. They represent a container in which to foster an organizational culture dedicated to transparency, accountability, and the promotion of collective intelligence.

With this White Paper, we hope to have instilled in you our full confidence in a framework that has found great success in recent times but has been around for over 40 years.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, we look forward to hearing about your successes!



6. The Allcore Case



Allcore is a company operating in the consulting sector, among the top 1000 fastest-growing companies in Europe (Source: Financial Times). Comprising 5 companies (and 500+ people), it provides products and services in the field of tax and strategic consulting.

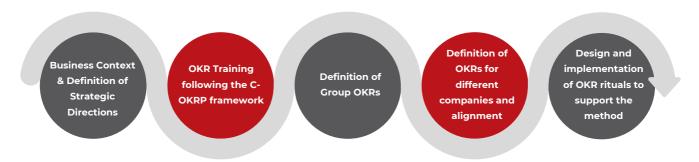


Objective: fuel the growth of a large consulting group.



Challenge: Allcore has chosen Redlab to implement OKRs within the group and make the framework a central tool to support its already significant growth. Furthermore, the OKRs must serve to create alignment among the group's companies and foster collaboration and sharing of best practices.

The program:



Results: Each Legal Entity has surpassed its targets since the first introduction of the framework..



- Alignment among the various companies and group priorities has increased;
- New products have been launched;
- The group as a whole has acquired the ability to find innovative solutions when targets are at risk.



7. Redlab

We enthusiastically support you in developing practices that fully reflect your company culture and your business.

Our approach is characterized by tangible support, step by step, in every phase of project implementation. We are committed to being by your side at all times, providing you with all the assistance you need to achieve extraordinary results.

OUR SERVICES:

OKR Certification Program



C-OKRP training program designed to help you develop the skills needed to implement the OKR culture in your business. A comprehensive, hands-on, engaging journey that will enable you to master the tools and techniques necessary to introduce and support OKRs effectively.

At the end of the course, you will receive a lifetime valid certificate from OKR International, recognizing your new skills, internationally accredited by HRCI and ICF.

OKR Starter Pack



Customized training that adapts to the roles within your organization. We will assist you in defining the initial set of OKRs and ensure perfect alignment between strategic and tactical OKRs. A service rich in training sessions accredited by ICF and HRCI, conducted in the <u>C-OKRP format</u> and made interactive by engaging workshops.



OUR SERVICES:

OKR Clinique



OKR Clinique is a virtual space where you can receive OKR consulting for your organization from one of our OKR Coaches. An opportunity to take your OKR strategy to the next level and achieve even higher levels of excellence! We will analyze your current OKR implementation status and provide valuable advice to achieve even more amazing results. With a free analysis and coaching session, you can improve your goal-setting strategy.

OKR Maturity Model



With our OKR Maturity Model service, you'll have the opportunity to assess your organizational culture in preparation for OKR implementation. Together, we'll evaluate how ready your organization is to embrace this transformative approach, and through a thorough analysis, we'll guide you in assessing strengths and areas for improvement, enabling you to adopt OKRs effectively and strategically.

OUR CLIENTS:









