Book Summary: Measure What Matters, by John Doerr

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1-Page Book Summary of Measure What Matters

*Measure What Matters* is venture capitalist John Doerr's guide to implementing the "OKR management system," a goal-setting process he adapted from one used at Intel. The OKR system is used at LinkedIn, Disney, and Twitter, among countless other companies.

What Are OKRs?

As its name implies, *Measure What Matters* helps you figure out what matters at your company and how to measure its success. The first step to knowing what matters is clarifying your OKRs, objectives and key results.

Objectives

The objective is the goal: what the company, team, or individual aims to achieve.

Objectives:

- State the overall goal or vision
- Must be tangible, concrete, and objective
- Must be action-oriented

Example: Hire new employees to meet the needs of the expanding organization.

Key Results

Key results are benchmarks toward the objective.

Key results:

- State the measurable sub-goals that, if achieved, will collectively result in achieving the objective
- Usually include numbers (revenue, market share, active users, growth, and so on)
- Include specific deadlines

Example:

**Objective:** Hire new employees to meet the needs of the expanding organization.

**Key Result #1:** Meet with 3 candidates this month for the role of director of finance and hire 1.

**Key Result #2:** Meet with 5 candidates this quarter for the role of marketing manager and hire 1.

**Key Result #3:** Meet with 5 candidates this quarter for the role of product manager and hire 1.

How to Implement the OKR System

**Step 1: Identify your objectives.** Start with the company's biggest priorities. Ask yourself, "What are the most important tasks we need to accomplish in the next three months, the next six months, and the next year?"

Once you've identified your organization-level objectives, departments, teams, and individuals identify their own objectives. About half of an employee's objectives trickle down from the top. The employee creates the other half herself.

Tips:

- Every objective, regardless of whether it's an individual or department objective, should align with the company's top objectives.
At each tier, **tackle no more than 3-5 objectives.**

**Everyone’s objectives need to be public, including the CEO.**

**Step 2: Identify your key results.** For each objective, ask yourself, “What steps do I need to complete to reach my objective?”

**Tips:**

- **Assign only 3-5 key results to each objective.** If you need more key results to reach an objective, your objective isn’t narrow enough or isn’t framed well.
- Make sure your key results are specific, comprehensive, and aligned. Successfully completing your key results must culminate in achieving your objective.
- Everyone’s key results need to be public.
- Employees should create most of their own key results, whether the objective comes from the top or not.

**Step 3: Decide on the length of your OKR cycle.** Your team should operate on the same goal-setting schedule, or OKR cycle. For most companies, there are two simultaneous OKR cycles, quarterly and annual. Annual cycles are for long-term OKRs, and quarterly cycles are for short-term OKRs that support the longer-term objectives.

**Step 4: Choose a cloud-based management system.** To effectively track OKRs, you need a place to store and share them. A cloud-based system is best. (Shortform note: Cloud-based OKR systems include WorkBoard, Ally, Culture Amp, and Asana. You can also simply use shared documents.)

**Step 5: Designate an “OKR shepherd.”** For the OKR system to work, everyone, from the CEO to the lowest-level employee, has to take part. But you’ll likely encounter resistance and procrastination. It’s useful to put someone in charge of keeping the rest of the team or organization accountable for setting and working toward their OKRs.

**Step 6: Set stretch goals.** Eventually, in addition to “committed OKRs” (objectives that must be met for your company to function and thrive), you should create “stretch OKRs,” objectives that make you feel a little uncomfortable because you’re not sure you can accomplish them. Stretch OKRs push you to achieve more than you thought possible.

**Step 7: Check in with employees weekly or monthly,** and continually reassess OKRs. If they’re no longer relevant, jointly decide to change or discard them, even mid-cycle.

**Step 8: Score and reflect.** At the end of each cycle, score your performance for each OKR. Reflect on how you did and what that means about the goals you set. What will you do differently next quarter?

**Step 9: Repeat this cycle every month or quarter.** Realize that hitting on an effective OKR system takes time, so be patient with yourself, your colleagues, and your administration.

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**Four OKR Superpowers**

The primary benefits of OKRs come from their four superpowers: focus, align, track, and stretch.

**Superpower #1: Focus**

OKRs clarify your focus by limiting you to 3-5 objectives at a time. Remember that every time you commit to something, you make yourself unavailable to commit to something else, so choose your commitments wisely. Once you’ve chosen where to put your focus, commit to those objectives.

OKRs also clarify your focus by limiting you to 3-5 key results per objective. Because the success of your key results must result in the success of your objective, you need to create key results carefully. For example, the three sets of key results (KRs) below are all proposed paths toward the objective of winning the Indy 500, but only one set is focused enough to get you there.

**Weak KRs**

**Objective:** Win the Indy 500.

- KR #1: Achieve a faster lap speed.
- KR #2: Decrease time during pit stops.

**So-So KRs**

**Objective:** Win the Indy 500.

- KR #1: Achieve a lap speed that’s 2% faster.
- KR #2: Decrease time during pit stops by an average of 1 second/stop.

**Strong KRs**

**Objective:** Win the Indy 500.

- KR #1: Achieve a lap speed that’s 2% faster.
- KR #2: Decrease time during pit stops by an average of 1 second/stop.
- KR #3: Decrease pit stop errors by half.
- KR #4: Spend 1 hour/day practicing pit
In the example above, the weak key results aren't specific enough. The so-so key results are better because they're measurable and specific, but they don't specify how to decrease pit-stop time the way the strongest key results do.

Superpower #2: Align

OKRs are good at aligning companies because OKRs are always public. CEOs can look at the goals of their executives, managers, and junior staff, and junior staff can (and should) look at the goals of their bosses and the CEO. This allows people to coordinate their goals with those of the company and their peers.

Use Both Top-Down and Bottom-Up Alignment

Generally, there are two approaches to alignment: top-down and bottom-up. In the top-down approach, directives start with the CEO and cascade down through the ranks to the junior employees. In the bottom-up approach, junior employees working on the frontlines, the people who have the most access to customers and product issues, identify pressing needs and relay them up the chain of command to the CEO.

The most effective companies are aligned in both directions, with half of an employee's objectives coming from the top and half set by the employee herself. If you're assigning an objective to one of your employees, make sure you clearly demonstrate how the objective connects to the company's top priorities.

Employees should set most of their key results themselves. People who choose their goals take more responsibility for reaching them.

Superpower #3: Track

OKRs are always measurable, and at the end of each OKR cycle you score them. These scores help you track your progress, and they indicate when you need to double down on a particular goal or when you should revise or abandon it.

During the OKR cycle, check-in with your manager weekly or monthly to discuss your OKR progress and decide among four options for each goal:

Option #1: Continue the objective or key result—If everything's going well and you're making progress, keep going.

Option #2: Revise the objective or key result—If changes in your environment or workflow have caused the goal to get off track, update it.

Option #3: Start a new objective or key result—As conditions change, you may need to add new goals. If you already have five objectives, put one or two on the backburner to make room for the new goal.

Option #4: Stop an objective or key result—Some goals become irrelevant or impractical. Don't stubbornly cling to a goal just because you set it. If it no longer serves your larger purpose or the company's, toss it.

Scoring OKRs

At the end of the OKR cycle, you score and reflect on your OKRs. The wrap-up phase consists of three parts: objective scoring, subjective self-assessment, and reflection.

Objective Scoring

The employee and manager assign a score to the objectives. The simplest way to score an objective is to average the completion rates of its key results. One way to score is to use a scale of 0.0 to 1.0, based on how much of the key result was completed.

- 0.7-1.0 is a “green” score, meaning the individual or team achieved the goal.
- 0.4-0.6 is a “yellow” score, meaning the individual or team made progress but didn't complete the goal.
- 0.0-0.3 is a “red” score, meaning the individual or team failed to make progress toward the goal.

Subjective Self-Assessment

Objective data are important, but they don't always tell the whole story. Low numbers could conceal a strong effort, and strong numbers could be inflated.

For example, let's say your objective is to recruit more customers, and one of your key results is to make 50 phone calls to potential customers. You end up making 35 phone calls, for an objective score of 0.7. On paper, this looks like a success. But if
you waited until the last minute and rushed through your calls, signing only 1 new customer, the objective score of 0.7 isn't really indicative of your performance.

For this reason, it's important to balance objective scores with subjective self-assessments. Work with your manager to compare objective scores with the circumstances that led to them.

**Reflection**

To learn from your experiences and scores, use these questions as a jumping-off point for group discussion and self-reflection:

- Did you meet your objectives? If you did, what factors helped you be successful? If you didn't, what roadblocks did you face?
- What have you learned that you want to keep in mind during the next OKR cycle?

**Superpower #4: Stretch**

Some of your OKRs should be especially challenging. Expect “stretch OKRs” to score between 0.4 and 0.6. Setting...
Key Results

Key results are benchmarks toward the objective. In other words, key results are the “how,” the steps you need to take to meet your goal.

Key results:

- State the measurable sub-goals that, if achieved, will collectively result in achieving the objective
- Usually include numbers (revenue, market share, active users, growth, and so on)
- Are time-bound (they include specific deadlines)
- Are black-and-white—you either succeed in achieving a key result, or you don’t
- Are relatively challenging. If a key result seems easy, it, or your objective, may not be ambitious enough

Example:

Objective: Hire new employees to meet the needs of the expanding...

Shortform Exercise: Is Your Current Management System Working?

Doerr and Grove designed OKRs to be an improvement on traditional management systems. Whether or not you’re in a management position, examine the management system currently in place at your company and decide if the OKR system, or parts of it, could help your company function more efficiently.

What system of management is in place at your organization? What are its features? (For example, is there a clear goal-setting procedure in place? How often are the goals reviewed? Are they public?)

Measure What Matters Summary Chapters 4-6: Superpower #1—Focus and Commit

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 introduce superpower #1, focus.

How to Implement OKRs for focus: Create OKRs at the organizational level, the departmental level, the team level, and the individual level. At each tier, create no more than 5 sets of objectives and key results. Limiting the number of OKRs keeps you focused on what matters most.

This OKR superpower has two facets: 1) focus on your priorities, and 2) commit to the OKR process. We’ll look at “focus” first.

There are 3 steps to creating OKRs that focus your attention

1. Identify your objectives
2. Identify your key results
3. Check the quantity and quality of your OKRs

Identify Your Objectives

The first step of the OKR process is figuring out the “Os,” your objectives. Every individual and team in the company will have their own objectives and key results, but in order for these OKRs to be meaningful, they need to align with the organization’s highest objectives, so start with these.
To determine your organization's highest objectives, ask, "What are the most important tasks we need to accomplish in the next three months, the next six months, and the next year?"

You can't do everything. Answering these questions gets you focused on the few things that have to get done for the company to succeed. These are your **objectives**.

Your biggest priorities, the goals that everyone in the organization is working toward, are your **organization-level objectives**, or company-wide objectives.

Once you've identified your organization-level objectives, **departments, teams, and individuals** can identify their own objectives. These objectives often feed into and support organization-level objectives, so determining them is a matter of starting with the top objectives and figuring out what sub-goals you need to meet to achieve them. (We'll cover how to create this alignment in the next chapter.)

At each tier, focus on **three to five objectives**. Any more than this, and your focus will be too dispersed.

**Identify Key Results**

After you know your priorities, your objectives, you can start to...

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**Shortform Exercise: Focus on Your Priorities**

The first OKR superpower involves figuring out your priorities and committing to them. Use these questions as a guide.

Whether or not you're a manager, you can use the OKR tools to focus your goal-setting process. What will the length of your OKR cycle be? (Monthly? Quarterly?) What cloud-based tools will you use?

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**What Our Readers Say**

This is the best summary of Measure What Matters I've ever read. I learned all the main points in just 20 minutes.

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**Measure What Matters Summary Chapters 7-9: Superpower #2—Align and Connect**

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 cover **superpower #2, align and connect**.

**How to Implement OKRs for alignment**: Everyone in the company makes their own OKRs, and everyone's OKRs are visible to everyone else. This provides the transparency needed for people to connect their goals with those of the company and their peers.

Research shows that highly-aligned companies are twice as likely as non-aligned or badly-aligned companies to be top performers.

For employees to align their goals with their company's goals, they need to **know** their company's goals. This seems obvious, but, according to one study, **only 7% of employees actually know what their company’s overarching strategy is** and how they're expected to contribute to its success. This is why the transparency of OKRs is so important.

**The Benefits of Transparency**

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In order for everyone's goals to be aligned and contributing to the same ultimate objective, **everyone's goals, and their progress toward those goals, need to be transparent.** The OKR system builds this necessary transparency into the process. CEOs can look at the goals of their executives, managers, and junior staff, and junior staff can (and should) look at the goals of their bosses and the CEO—everything is public.

Aside from alignment, there are other benefits of transparency:

**Benefit #1: Transparency Increases Productivity and Engagement**

Studies show that you're more likely to achieve goals that you've made public, and OKRs are always public. Similarly, 92% of employees are more motivated to reach their goals at work if their progress is made visible to their colleagues, as it is in the OKR system.

**Benefit #2: Transparency Fosters Collaboration**

If your colleagues know your goals, and they know how much (or how little) progress you've made toward them, they have a better sense of how and when to help. This fosters support among peers and strengthens workplace morale.

Additionally, your goals might be similar to a colleague's, and, consequently, you might have resources, strategies, or information that could help your...

Shortform Exercise: Align Your Goals with Your Company's

Aligning your individual goals with your company's goals is critical for your company's long-term success. Reflect on how you can use communication and transparency to make your objectives more aligned.

Think of a time when you and a colleague or boss weren't aligned. (Maybe you and a peer were unknowingly working on the same tasks, making the work redundant. Or maybe your boss had one set of expectations, and you had another.) What was the situation? How was it resolved?

**Measure What Matters Summary Chapters 10-11: Superpower #3—Track**

Chapters 10 and 11 cover **superpower #3, track progress.**

**How to Implement OKRs for tracking:** OKRs are always measurable, and at the end of each OKR cycle you score them. These scores help you track your progress, and they indicate when you need to double down on a particular goal or when you should revise or abandon it.

Unlike traditional business goals, OKRs aren't set in stone. OKRs are "living, breathing organisms," and there are three phases to tracking an OKR's life cycle: setup, midlife tracking, and wrap-up.

**The Setup Phase**

The setup phase is when you decide what cloud-based system you'll use to track your OKRs, determine the length of your OKR cycles, and designate your "OKR shepherd." Refer to "Checklist: Focus and Commit" in Chapter 4. All of these actions will make tracking possible in the next phase.

**The Midlife Tracking Phase**

Studies show that people are motivated by tangible signs of their progress toward a goal, and that **making progress can be more motivating than receiving a bonus, receiving public recognition, or even achieving the goal itself.**
But for progress to be motivating, people need to see it. This is why midlife check-ins are so important. During this phase, employees check-in with their managers to discuss their OKR progress.

Ideally, check-ins happen weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually. The frequency of these check-ins will depend on the length of time needed to achieve each key result, the quality of communication in the team, the size of the group, how geographically spread out it is, and current business needs. In addition to one-on-one meetings with employees and managers, teams and departments should meet regularly to evaluate progress toward objectives they share.

4 Mid-Cycle OKR Options

At these check-ins, you and your manager check progress toward the OKRs, identify obstacles and potential obstacles, and refine key results. Discuss four options relative to each goal:

Option #1: Continue the objective or key result—if everything's going well and you're making progress, keep...

Shortform Exercise: Track Your Progress

The third OKR superpower is tracking your progress to stay accountable. Take time to figure out how you’ll measure and track progress toward your goals.

Write down one to three of your personal or professional goals for the week, month, or year.

Why are Shortform Summaries the Best?

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Cuts Out the Fluff

Ever feel a book rambles on, giving anecdotes that aren't useful? Often get frustrated by an author who doesn't get to the point?

We cut out the fluff, keeping only the most useful examples and ideas. We also re-organize books for clarity, putting the most important principles first, so you can learn faster.

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1) Paragraph to get the gist
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Measure What Matters Summary Chapters 12-14: Superpower #4—
Stretch

Chapters 12 and 13 cover superpower #4: Stretch toward outstanding achievement.

How to Implement OKRs for stretching: Some of your OKRs should be especially challenging. Expect "stretch OKRs" to score between 0.4 and 0.6. Setting challenging goals allows your company to continue innovating.

Google and Stretch Goals

This is how Google distinguishes between regular objectives ("committed objectives") and stretch objectives ("aspirational objectives"):  

- **Committed objectives** are the goals that need to be met within a set period of time for the company to prosper. Additionally, these goals need to be 100% or near-100% complete (or receive a score of 1.0) by the deadline. Committed objectives include sales and revenue goals around product releases, customer satisfaction, and hiring.

- **Aspirational objectives** are goals that reflect the bigger picture, outside of day-to-day needs, and focus on big, ambitious ideas. These are often called stretch goals or, in the words of Jim Collins, "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." (Shortform note: For more on Big Hairy Audacious Goals, read our summary of Collins's Good to Great.)

Google doesn't expect everyone to achieve their aspirational objectives, and failure is built into the process—in fact, the average rate of failure at Google is about 40%. In other words, Google considers its cycle's aspirational goals a success if 60% of them are achieved.

Not many companies have Google's resources, and therefore can't risk a failure rate that high. Your company's balance of committed and aspirational objectives will depend on your answers to the following questions:

- Do we want to break into a new market next year? (If yes, favor aspirational objectives, or stretch goals.)
- Do we want to further establish our current position in the market? (If yes, favor committed goals.)
- Do we have some extra cash to play around with? Can we afford to make a risky bet? (If yes, favor stretch goals.)
- Are we in survival mode, just trying to stay afloat?...

Shortform Exercise: Stretch Yourself

Continually striving to achieve greater things is the fourth OKR superpower. Stretch yourself by creating your own ambitious goals.

Think of a time you set a big goal and achieved it. What attitudes and practical steps led to your success? What can you learn from the success?


Part 2 of Measure What Matters explores two workplace systems that the OKR management process doesn't explicitly address: **CFRs**, the tools of effective performance management, and **positive company cultures**.

Traditional Annual Feedback vs. Continuous Performance Management

Most leaders agree that the traditional system of annual performance reviews doesn't work: According to studies, only 12% think
the process is “highly effective” and only 6% think it's worth their time.

They're probably right. Traditional performance review tools like rankings and bell curves, combined with recency bias, mean that annual reviews often aren't measured well or fairly. They also don't give feedback until long after it's most useful.

In contrast, Doerr's system of continuous performance management allows managers to give feedback regularly, help employees improve throughout the year, and address issues as they arise. Continuous performance management is more about managing and coaching than about judging employee performance.

### Annual Performance Review vs. Continuous Performance Management

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Performance Review</th>
<th>Continuous Performance Management</th>
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<tr>
<td>Based on compensation</td>
<td>Divorced from compensation</td>
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<td>Manager directs</td>
<td>Manager coaches</td>
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<td>Focused on results</td>
<td>Focused on the process</td>
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<td>Focused on employee weaknesses</td>
<td>Focused on employee strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bias prone</td>
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### CFRs: The Tools of Continuous Performance Management

Just as OKRs are your tools for implementing Doerr's improved goal-setting system, **CFRs are your tools for implementing a continuous performance management system.**

- **C:** Conversations between employees and managers
- **F:** Feedback both from and to managers and among peers
- **R:**

### Shortform Exercise: Implement CFRs

Conversations, feedback, and recognition are the keys to a successful performance review system. Reflect on how you can foster them at your company.

Describe your company’s performance review system. Is it constructive and motivating, pointless and demoralizing, or somewhere in between? Why?

### Measure What Matters Summary Chapter 17: The Side Benefits of the OKR/CFR System

We've discussed the explicit benefits of OKRs and CFRs, but there are also benefits of using the OKR system that are more implicit. You gain these benefits just by working through the OKR/CFR process, irrespective of the process's outcomes.

#### Zume Pizza

The goal of Zume Pizza is to use technology to quickly deliver cheap, healthy, delicious pizzas to consumers in the Bay Area. (Shortform note: In January 2020, Zume Pizza rebranded itself as Zume, Inc., a company that creates the technological infrastructures needed to make food production and delivery more efficient and less wasteful.) Zume Pizza is one company that recognizes the subtler benefits of using the OKR system.

**Side Benefit #1: OKRs Force Executives to Set Realistic Goals**

When Zume co-founder Alex Garden worked as a general manager for Microsoft's Xbox Live, he found that the objectives set by
executives were often unrealistic or impractical because these leaders weren't in touch with the day-to-day operations of the company.

Conversely, executives who use OKRs have to figure out what key results will lead to their objectives. They need to know the how, as well as the what. OKRs and CFRs provide leaders with a reality check.

**Side Benefit #2: OKRs Teach Future Managers How to Be Leaders**

Garden says that when you're an employee, you're often evaluated based on the volume of your contributions to the company. If you produce a lot, you're promoted, and eventually, you find yourself in a manager position. Now, instead of being evaluated by the quantity of your work, you're evaluated by the quality of your decisions. You're paid to think, rather than do.

However, no one tells you that as a manager, working smarter matters more than working harder. Furthermore, no one tells you how to work smarter. Consequently, when problems arise, you just keep working harder and harder, because that's what you've always done and that's what's worked in the past.

One major benefit of the OKR system is that it forces everyone, at every level of the company, to work smarter:

**1) Measure What Matters**

**Summary**

Chapters 18-21: How to Build a Positive Culture

In Chapters 18, 19, and 20, we look at what a healthy company culture looks like, why it's important, and how to build it with OKRs and CFRs.

**What Is Culture and Why Is It Important?**

Culture is a company's beliefs and values, and the behaviors surrounding those beliefs and values. Most importantly, culture is a shared sense of purpose.

Research shows that companies with positive cultures outperform those without them. In one study, of the companies with healthy cultures, 96% received high scores for "systematic innovation" and 96% had "increased market share."

This may be because employees understand their organization's purpose and their purpose within the organization. When a company's culture is cohesive and everyone knows its purpose, employees can make decisions quickly and reliably.

**How Do OKRs and CFRs Contribute to a Positive Culture?**

In one study, researchers found that "high-motivation cultures" depend on two elements: catalysts and nourishers.

**Catalysts** are elements of a company that support the work being done. These elements include goal setting, learning from failure, transparency, engaging in meaningful work, and freely sharing ideas. All of these elements are built into the OKR system.

**Nourishers** are elements of a company that support the interpersonal needs of employees. These elements include positive feedback, professional development, emotional support, psychological safety, and recognition. All of these elements are built into the CFR system.

In other words, OKRs are the catalysts of a positive workplace culture; CFRs are the nourishment that sustains it.

**Example #1 of Building a Positive Culture: Lumeris**

Implementing OKRs successfully requires transparency and accountability. These traits can often foster a positive workplace culture, but sometimes, a culture is too negative and distrusting for OKRs to work. If that's the case, you need to first focus on building the company's culture. Once you've established the foundation of trust, you can then implement OKRs, and they'll help further...
**Shortform Exercise: Reflect on Your Workplace Values**

Your company’s values make up the foundation of your workplace culture. Reflect on your own values and whether or not they align with your company’s.

Why does your work and your company’s work matter? How does your work contribute to the company’s goals and values?

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**Measure What Matters Summary Appendix: Checklist for Developing a Successful OKR System**

Although the OKR system is relatively simple, it can be hard to implement in the beginning. Review these tips to make OKRs work for you:

- **Tackle no more than 3-5 objectives** per cycle, and choose carefully (a cycle could be quarterly, monthly, or annually). Trying to work on more than 5 OKRs at one time dilutes your focus and spreads your resources too thin.

- **Similarly, only assign 3-5 key results to each objective.** If you need more key results to reach an objective, that’s a sign the objective isn't narrow enough or isn't framed well.

- **Make sure your key results are specific, comprehensive, and aligned.** Successfully completing your key results *must* culminate in achieving your objective. In other words, if you complete all your key results but you still don't meet your objective, you don't have effective OKRs.

- **Approach goal-setting from the bottom up.** Employees should consult with their managers to create at least half of their OKRs themselves (the other half may come from above, through the more traditional top-down approach). This increases employee engagement and ownership.

- **In the same vein, don’t dictate others’ goals.** Collective agreement and engagement are crucial for the functioning of the OKR system.

- **Continually reassess OKRs,** and if they’re no longer relevant, change or discard them, even in the middle of a cycle.

- **Set high goals.** Your OKRs should be a...