

Why Gtmhub Separates OKRs and Performance Reviews

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the organizational question of whether OKRs and performance reviews should be integrated or kept separate. The authors — Gtmhub's Chief Marketing Officer Casey Carey and Head of People and Talent Mykaela Doane — argue that conflating OKRs with individual performance appraisals undermines both tools, as it causes employees to set conservative, achievable targets rather than ambitious, mission-driven ones. Key evidence is drawn from Carey's experience at Google and Doane's observations managing HR at Gtmhub, a Denver-based OKR software company that raised a \$120 million Series C round and counts Adobe, Ubisoft, and Red Hat among its clients. The article presents Gtmhub's internal practice of separating OKRs from compensation and promotion decisions, arguing this preserves psychological safety, encourages risk-taking, and drives team-level alignment. The implied conclusion is that OKRs function best as a strategy execution and alignment tool, while performance reviews address individual behavior, attitude, and development — a separation that, according to the authors, also reduces administrative burden on HR functions.

Key Insights

1. Linking OKRs directly to compensation and promotions incentivizes employees to set deliberately achievable goals, weakening the aspirational and strategic function of the OKR methodology.
2. Separating OKRs from performance reviews allows OKRs to function as team-level alignment tools focused on collective outcomes, while performance conversations address individual attitude, quality of work, and cultural fit.
3. Transparency enabled by OKR platforms can reduce managerial micromanagement and allow organizations to delay formal HR infrastructure, as employees and managers gain ongoing visibility into progress and priorities.

Practical Takeaways

- Gtmhub maintains a deliberate structural separation between OKR tracking and individual performance appraisals, with performance conversations focused on attitude, mindset, and cultural contribution rather than OKR attainment percentages.
- The company recast its corporate-level OKRs mid-cycle in response to changing economic conditions, using platform transparency to communicate the changes organization-wide — illustrating an agile approach to goal revision.

Frameworks Mentioned

OKRs — A goal-setting methodology that pairs ambitious objectives with quantifiable key results, designed to align organizational strategy with individual and team-level execution.

Management by Objectives (MBO) — A goal-management approach referenced as a predecessor or alternative to OKRs, in which employees are assigned specific objectives and rewarded upon completion.

Four Disciplines of Execution — A goal and strategy execution framework mentioned briefly as one approach employees may have prior exposure to before adopting OKRs.

Critical Analysis

The primary strength of this article is its clear articulation of a practitioner-held principle — separating OKRs from performance management — supported by specific real-world context from Google and Gtmhub's own operations. The logic is internally consistent and grounded in identifiable behavioral incentives. However, significant limitations exist: the article is published-adjacent to promotional content for Gtmhub's own software product, and both contributors are Gtmhub executives with direct commercial interest in validating OKR adoption. No independent data, external research, or controlled comparisons are cited. Anecdotal claims about employee engagement, reduced micromanagement, and HR efficiency are not substantiated with measurable outcomes. The framing heavily favors OKRs as a superior approach without substantively engaging with counterarguments or documented failure modes. The Built In platform, which targets tech employers and job seekers, also skews the audience toward OKR-friendly readers.

Organizational Practice

Gtmhub maintains a structural separation between OKR tracking and individual performance appraisals. Performance conversations focus on attitude, quality of work, cultural fit, and development gaps rather than OKR completion rates. The company uses its own OKR platform internally, providing all employees visibility into metrics and goals at any level. Mid-cycle OKR revision was practiced in response to macroeconomic changes, with changes communicated transparently across the organization. Formal HR infrastructure was delayed until 120 employees, with OKRs cited as providing substitute alignment and feedback mechanisms in the interim.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a practitioner trend toward decoupling goal-setting frameworks from compensation decisions, which has implications for how PMS designers sequence and weight performance inputs. The emphasis on team-level outcomes over individual attainment signals a broader movement away from individually ranked performance metrics in knowledge-work environments. The use of platform-enabled transparency as a substitute for traditional managerial oversight points to a growing intersection between PMS design and organizational structure. The mid-cycle OKR revision practice illustrates increasing organizational interest in dynamic, adaptive goal management rather than fixed annual cycles.

Validation Status: passed