

EXECUTION AND OPERATING RHYTHMS

Rhythms, Cadences and Objectives

Grove · Doerr · Beer

PAPER 02 / 02

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

If execution is a discipline, operating rhythm is how that discipline is kept – the objectives, cadences and conversations that convert strategy into weekly action. This closing paper covers the origin of output-oriented management, the goal system it spawned, and the honest conversation that unblocks execution. The question: what machinery keeps an organisation executing, week after week?

The three figures form a line of descent and a corrective. Grove built the operating philosophy – and the goal mechanism – at Intel. Doerr carried that mechanism into the modern technology company as OKRs. Beer supplies what tools alone cannot: the honest, collective conversation without which any cadence becomes empty ritual.

Andrew Grove 1936–2016

High Output Management · Intel

CORE THESIS

A manager's job is to maximise **output** – not their own, but that of their team and of the neighbouring teams they influence. The route to it is **leverage**: spending time on the few activities that multiply the performance of many others. Grove treated knowledge work with an engineer's rigour, and in the process created the mechanism that became OKRs.

FRAMEWORK

Idea	What it means
Managerial output	The output of your team plus the teams you influence
Leverage	Prioritise activities that multiply others' output
Objectives and key results	Set a clear objective and a few measurable results (Intel's iMBO)
Task-relevant maturity	Vary your management style to the person's experience at the task
Indicators and forecasting	Run the organisation on paired, forward-looking measures

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner doctrine from building and running Intel – an engineering sensibility applied to the management of knowledge work.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

One of the most durable operating texts ever written, and the origin of the objectives-and-key-results method. The critique: it is rooted in 1980s Intel and manufacturing, and some specifics have dated – though the core has aged remarkably well.

John Doerr *Measure What Matters, 2018*

OKRs · Kleiner Perkins · from Intel to Google

CORE THESIS

Objectives and Key Results are a goal-setting system that creates focus, alignment, commitment and stretch, and makes progress trackable. An **Objective** is a qualitative, memorable statement of what to achieve; **Key Results** are the few quantitative measures that prove it was achieved. Doerr carried the method from Intel into Google and, from there, into the wider economy.

FRAMEWORK

The four “superpowers”	What it delivers
Focus and commit	A few priorities, chosen and named explicitly
Align and connect	Transparent goals link teams laterally and vertically
Track for accountability	Regular check-ins; graded, visible progress
Stretch for amazing	Ambitious goals pull performance beyond the safe

Doerr pairs OKRs with **CFRs** – Conversations, Feedback and Recognition – as a continuous alternative to the annual performance review, run on a quarterly cadence.

METHODOLOGY

A practitioner and venture-capital account, evidenced through case studies of organisations that adopted OKRs, from Google to non-profits.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Made OKRs the dominant modern goal-setting method. The critique, expanded below: OKRs are frequently implemented badly – collapsed into task lists or KPIs, cascaded too rigidly, or gamed – and the evidence for them is largely testimonial.

A NOTE ON EVIDENCE

A caution on OKRs: their popularity outruns their evidence base, which is mostly case studies and advocacy rather than controlled research. In practice they fail more often from implementation than from design – treated as a rebranded KPI system, cascaded mechanically, or tied to compensation in ways that invite gaming. Adopt the discipline of focus and transparency; resist the ritual.

Michael Beer *Fit to Compete, 2020*

Honest conversation and execution · Harvard Business School

CORE THESIS

Strategy execution is blocked by six **silent killers** – organisational barriers that senior teams cannot see because people will not speak truth to power. The remedy is not another tool but a structured, **honest conversation** that makes the undiscussable discussable, and thereby turns execution into organisational learning.

FRAMEWORK

The six silent killers	How it blocks execution
Unclear strategy and priorities	Conflicting goals pull effort in different directions
An ineffective senior team	Unresolved disagreement at the top cascades down
A top-down or laissez-faire style	Either extreme shuts down honest input
Poor vertical communication	Truth does not travel upward
Poor coordination	Functions and units fail to work across boundaries
Weak down-the-line leadership	Too few leaders can carry the strategy into action

METHODOLOGY

Action research and longitudinal study, operationalised as the Strategic Fitness Process – a disciplined method for senior teams to collect and confront unvarnished truth from their own organisation.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The evidence-based account of why execution *silently* fails, and the necessary complement to the cadence tools: rhythm without candour changes nothing. The critique: the process is intensive and depends on rare senior courage to hear hard truths.

Synthesis

Contribution	Core mechanism	Framework	Adds to rhythm
Grove	Leverage and output	High-output management; iMBOs	The operating philosophy
Doerr	Focus and alignment	OKRs and CFRs	The goal and cadence system
Beer	Honest conversation	Six silent killers; SFP	The candour that makes it work

FOR THE OPERATOR

Operating rhythm is how strategy becomes weekly action – leverage and output (Grove), focus and alignment through OKRs (Doerr), and the honest conversation that unblocks the system (Beer). For the operator, the lesson is blunt: cadence without candour is ritual, and a goal system only performs on top of an organisation willing to face reality. That closes the Execution and Operating Rhythms series – and defines much of the machinery a fractional operating leader is brought in to install.