



OKRs drive ABB's Product Strategy

ABB product managers use OKRs to cultivate strategic thinking and align their actions with ABB's vision



CLIENT

ABB

INDUSTRY

Energy & Sustainability

EMPLOYEES

105,000

CHALLENGES

The five divisions of ABB's Electrification business area developed a program to help project managers improve the core competencies required to excel at their jobs and act strategically in creating truly innovative products.

Integrating OKRs into the development program revealed the challenge of defining outcome-based OKRs aligned with strategy and avoiding task lists. It became clear that product managers could benefit from coaching to define and execute their OKRs that contributed to the company's broader strategic initiatives.

ABB is a multi-national electrification and automation leader working to build a sustainable future through resource-efficient technology. Headquartered in Zürich, Switzerland, ABB's 105,000 employees are dedicated to accelerating industrial transformation through four main business areas: Electrification, Motion, Process Automation, and Robotics & Discrete Automation.

ABB's Electrification business includes a broad portfolio of products and services, from low- and medium-voltage products to electric vehicle solutions and smart building technology. In the spirit of innovation, Franco Gatti and his Product Management Excellence team spearheaded an initiative to help ABB Electrification's product managers build core competencies, enabling them to think strategically and align their efforts with ABB's larger purpose.



RESULTS

ABB offered coaching and training, through Wave Nine, to any participants requesting it. Wave Nine's OKR coaching empowered product managers to:

- **Set outcome-based,** measurable OKRs
- **Avoid the temptation** to simply list tasks
- **Identify stretch goals** worth striving for
- **Drive a mindset** change centered around strategy
- **Ensure that all OKRs fit** into ABB's larger vision and mission

“Our goal was to promote a mindset change in the product managers and provide the necessary tools to act strategically.”



Franco Gatti
Product Management
Excellence Lead

ABB Electrification

In today's evolving business landscape, product managers play a more strategic role, navigating the crossroads of various organizational functions. To succeed in this dynamic environment, organizations like ABB are turning to Objectives and Key Results (OKRs). OKRs offer a consistent approach for aligning teams, fostering innovation, and achieving strategic objectives at scale. This ensures that product managers, regardless of their industry or product type, can excel and contribute to their organizations' success.

The initiative involved internal training for 650 product managers in different roles within Electrification business area, on-the-job application of learning, and coaching from Wave Nine to nurture the competences and skills necessary for strategic action.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACROSS FIVE DIVISIONS

ABB Electrification consists of five divisions, each with a broad range of products and services. The business area includes:



Smart Power

Low-voltage electrical products and systems



Distribution Solutions

Medium-voltage electrical products and systems



Smart Building

Commercial and residential electrical solutions



Installation Products

Powering and protecting the world through reliable, sustainable electrical products



Service Division

Offering a wide range of digital solutions



Franco Gatti, Product Management Excellence Lead, worked with his team to design a versatile program for product managers. They incorporated various learning formats and competency areas to address the diverse needs of different divisions, recognizing the significant variations in product management based on product types.

“Product management is one of our most strategic roles, and we need them to drive strategy with a clarity of purpose linked to our high-level business strategy.”



Franco Gatti
Product Management
Excellence Lead

ABB Electrification

THE JOURNEY TO UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

The program centered around the “Four Stages of Competence” model, which identifies four distinct stages involved in learning any new skill. We all begin at a stage of unconscious incompetence, where we don’t know what we don’t know. The ultimate goal is to progress to a stage of unconscious competence, where the knowledge is so ingrained in the learner that there’s room for improvisation and the many insights that spring from intuition.

The four stages look like this:

1

Unconscious incompetence

The learner is completely unfamiliar with the topic and has no real understanding of what mastering the subject involves.

2

Conscious incompetence

The learner has a clear understanding of what is required and a general understanding of the path forward.

3

Conscious competence

The learner has gained a powerful understanding of the subject and, when applying concerted effort, they can achieve results.

4

Unconscious competence

The learner has a deep understanding of the topic, and the skills have become automatic in many respects. This opens the door to intuitive insights and tremendous creativity.



ABB identified three steps in their development process to identify areas for improvement and their plan for developing and mastering new skills. The process integrated the OKR methodology during the second step, when product managers set goals to move themselves from conscious incompetence to conscious competence.

Here are the steps they laid out and the role OKRs played in that process.

STEP 1: SELF-EVALUATION & TRAINING

ABB's participating product managers evaluated themselves on a set of skills, such as market knowledge, portfolio planning, and driving strategy—identifying their position in the four-stage model for each subject matter. They then used an internal e-learning tool, created by ABB, to move from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence in the most vital areas.



“It’s important for product managers to learn the frameworks required to excel at their jobs, from soft skills to hard skills. We made the deliberate decision to bring OKRs into the program, helping them move from conscious incompetence to conscious competence and beyond.”



Franco Gatti
Product Management
Excellence Lead

ABB Electrification

STEP 2: OKR TRAINING & MATURITY WITH THE WAVE NINE ACADEMY

ABB introduced OKRs at the conscious incompetence stage. Wave Nine provided an end-to-end OKR education solution through the Wave Nine Academy, working with product managers to establish an OKR foundation through on-demand learning, virtual and on-site OKR certification classes.

Wave Nine’s coaching empowered product managers to:

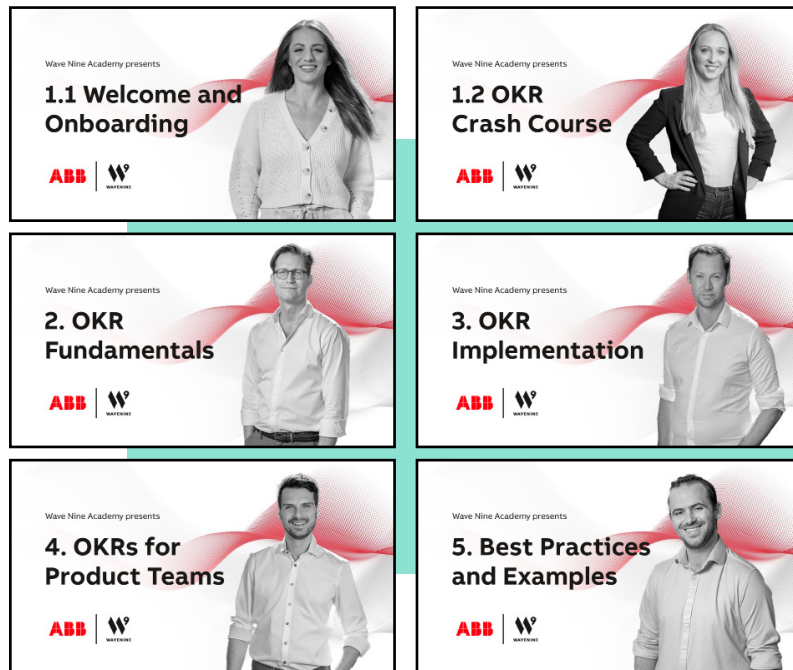
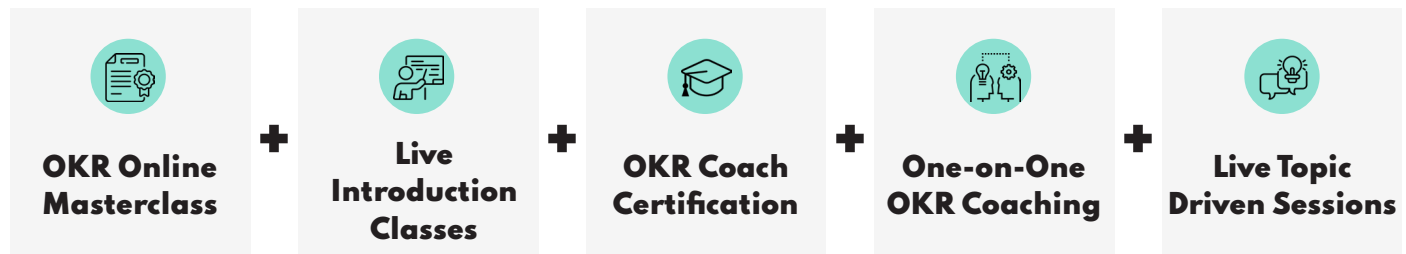
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Wave Nine Academy

Wave Nine Academy - Enterprise is the proven OKR education solution, enabling large and international organizations to provide their employees with high-quality, personalized and company-specific strategy execution and OKR knowledge. Ideal for newcomers and seasoned practitioners, with proven success from 200+ global implementations.



Wave Nine Academy - Enterprise, includes:



The ABB OKR Online Masterclass

The self-paced learning courses are designed to develop internal OKR expertise that ensures a common understanding of OKRs is used at ABB. Each training includes videos, tactical advice including real-life examples and best practices, case studies, templates and checklists.

STEP 3: ON-THE-JOB APPLICATION WITH WAVE NINE'S GUIDANCE

Franco and his team never intended the core competency program to be entirely theoretical. In fact, they envisioned 70% of the employee's development taking place through real-world, on-the-job engagement. They would spend only 10% of their time on e-learning and 20% on coaching.

Wave Nine's live, one-on-one OKR Coaching gave ABB's product managers the opportunity to put OKR theory into practice, adapting it to real-world conditions to spark innovation and ensure alignment. It also allowed them to work toward achieving deep, unconscious competence in areas crucial to their performance and overall business objectives.

“OKRs aren't only for setting goals, they're also about managing them. That's why our training covers the entire OKR cycle, supporting teams from start to finish.”



Jessica Stimac
Director

Wave Nine Inc.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ABB'S PROGRAM

When Franco reviewed the existing OKRs, before working with Wave Nine, he found that many product managers had simply reformulated their task lists—rather than writing outcome-based OKRs. He quickly realized that, without proper coaching, it would be difficult for product managers to create OKRs that led to a genuine mindset change. And a mindset change was, in fact, the ultimate goal.

“It’s a simple concept, but it’s actually very difficult to implement in an effective way, and that’s where coaching comes in,” says Franco. “You can’t just start writing, it requires thoughtful analysis.”

With Wave Nine's guidance, ABB Electrification's product managers started formulating impactful, actionable OKRs that harmonized with the company's broader strategic objectives, such as groundbreaking innovation and sustainability.

“Working with Wave Nine was a great experience. They were conscious of the challenges we faced, coming up with ideas and solutions to address them proactively.”



Franco Gatti
Product Management
Excellence Lead

ABB Electrification

READY TO INTEGRATE OKRS INTO YOUR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

 www.wavenine.com

 www.linkedin.com/company/wavenine



Wave Nine Inc.
490 43rd Street
Suite 90
Oakland, CA 94609
United States
[wavenine.com](https://www.wavenine.com)

Wave Nine empowers companies to achieve business goals through the OKR framework and the OKR rhythm. For enterprises fully committed to the OKR process, we provide comprehensive playbooks, OKR templates, and resources that invigorate teams, clarify strategies, and enhance accountability. Our hands-on approach involves consulting, coaching and multi-modal education, engaging executive and teams alike. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, with additional offices in Germany, the UK, Australia, and Portugal, our international team can bring your strategy to fruition.