MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGERS

KPI: When mathematical logic causes chaos

Frédéric Le Pennec · 25 November 2024

Increasing KPIs doesn't always solve performance delays. This article shows how the race for numbers can degrade quality, exhaust teams, and worsen results.

Imagine a company with an ambitious goal for the year: recruit 100 people for a key position. So far, the statistics are clear: for each successful recruitment, they must contact an average of 100 people and meet 20. This means that ultimately, they will need to conduct around 2000 interviews to meet their targets. We have our performance indicators that guide the way.

When figures seem to provide the solution

Every week the pace is maintained, the teams conduct interviews in succession, and everything seems to be going in the right direction. However, after three months, surprise: only 10 recruitments have been completed, far from the 25 planned for the first quarter. It's a hard blow, but nothing dramatic at first glance. The solution seems obvious: meet more candidates.

And that's where everything goes wrong.

More activity to compensate for the lack of results

To make up for this delay, the company decides to increase the number of interviews. If 20 interviews were previously necessary for a recruitment, why not move to 30 or 40 candidates? Logical, right?

But instead of adjusting the schedule, recruiters are asked to maintain the same pace, while almost doubling the number of weekly interviews. What already took a considerable amount of time becomes a never-ending marathon. Recruiters now have to conduct interviews like robots. To achieve this, they shorten the duration of meetings. Before, each interview lasted an hour, with the necessary time to understand each candidate well. But in this race against time, they are forced to move to sessions of 30 minutes or less.

When quantity ends up degrading quality

The result? More candidates are met, but in degraded conditions. The interviews are rushed, questions skimmed over, candidates don't have time to present themselves properly. In seeking to increase quantity, the quality of exchanges drastically decreases.

And this drop in quality quickly has a direct effect on results. Fewer candidates are attracted by these express interviews, and many no longer see the point in continuing. The conversion rate drops even more. What was supposed to catch up the delay actually causes the opposite effect: the gap is widened.

The KPI runaway

But where mathematical logic becomes absurd is when the same pattern is repeated. Faced with the failure of 40 interviews, the company might say: "Well, if 40 aren't enough, let's do 60!" Without ever questioning the goals or the conditions under which these interviews are conducted.

Each time, only the KPIs are adjusted, never the finality. It's the illusion of performance: as long as the numbers on Excel increase, everything seems under control. But the reality on the ground is quite different: exhausted recruiters, poorly evaluated candidates, and results that continue to degrade.

More isn't always better

This vicious cycle clearly shows the limits of management solely driven by numbers. We end up sacrificing quality for quantity, forgetting that beyond a certain point, more is not better. If mathematical logic seems relentless, it becomes counterproductive when it neglects the human and qualitative dimensions of work.

And what if the problem wasn't the KPI?

So, in your opinion, is constantly adjusting KPIs without reviewing the final goals really a solution? How far can we push this logic without harming quality? Have you ever faced this situation where the race for numbers leads to a continuous degradation of results?

frederic.lepennec@coact.fr · +33 6 03 06 05 02 · coact.fr