BARYONS

EXECUTION COHERENCE

AN EXECUTIVE BRIEF FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS THAT PLAN BY THE QUARTER

After the OPSP

The hidden execution-coherence gap in 90-day priorities: how leaders interpret success, trade-offs and escalation between planning moments.

90-day priorities | Huddles | Trade-off rules

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The plan is clear. The trade-offs vary.

The One-Page Strategic Plan™ (OPSP) and quarterly priorities give a leadership team clear direction, and daily and weekly rhythms keep it visible. Execution still depends on how leaders interpret success, trade-offs and escalation points between planning moments, often in different functions at the same time.

19%

OF U.S. EMPLOYEES STRONGLY AGREED SENIOR LEADERS SET CLEAR PRIORITIES (AUG 2026)[1]

70%

OF THE VARIANCE IN ENGAGEMENT ACROSS BUSINESS UNITS IS ACCOUNTED FOR BY THE MANAGER[2]

Gallup's August 2026 U.S. employee data found only 19% strongly agreed that senior leaders set clear priorities for their organization.[1] That figure covers employees in general, not Scaling Up™ companies, and it does not say why. It does show how far apart a priority set at the top and the way people experience it can be, even in organizations that plan carefully.

Scaling Up companies start with an advantage: priorities are few, owned and reviewed often. A 90-day priority is still a sentence, and each function that receives it has to decide what to protect when capacity is tight. Those decisions happen after the huddle, mostly out of view of the plan. The rhythm keeps the priority visible. By design, it does not show how each leader is reading it.

WHAT THIS BRIEF COVERS

1. **How a 90-day priority changes shape.** The mechanism, and why it appears.
2. **A hypothetical example.** One priority, two functions, two finish lines.
3. **Five checks before the next reset.** Usable this week, with no new reporting.
4. **Where Baryons fits.** What it adds between planning moments, and its limits.

A QUESTION TO TAKE INTO THE NEXT QUARTERLY PLANNING SESSION

Would two of your functions describe success for the same 90-day priority the same way?

How a 90-day priority changes shape

A priority can be unambiguous at quarterly planning and still be applied differently by Thursday.

Each quarterly priority carries three kinds of information. The result is written on the OPSP. The success criteria and the trade-off rules usually are not. Those travel through huddles and conversations, and each retelling keeps the headline while losing some of the why. The OPSP is meant to stay short, so this is a feature of the method rather than a flaw.

WHERE INTERPRETATION VARIES

- **Success is pictured differently.** One function hears a deadline; another hears a quality bar. Both match the words on the plan.
- **Trade-offs are made locally.** When capacity is tight, each leader decides what to protect, usually without knowing a peer chose differently.
- **Huddles are built for progress.** Daily huddles surface what is moving and what is stuck. They rarely surface how a leader read a trade-off.
- **Escalation points differ.** One leader raises an issue in the huddle; another absorbs it to stay on plan.

WHY IT HAPPENS IN WELL-RUN COMPANIES

Strong planning cultures produce confident execution. Leaders act on their reading of a priority quickly rather than reopening it, which is what the rhythm is for. It also means a small difference in reading can become weeks of committed work.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

A meta-analysis of team cognition found that shared understanding of the work explains differences in team performance beyond motivation and behavior.[3]

Gallup research finds managers account for 70% of the variance in team engagement.[2] The finding is about engagement, not planning methods, and it does not describe any one company. In a Scaling Up company, managers are also the people turning 90-day priorities into weekly decisions, so their reading of a priority tends to become their team's reading. Two functions can each be faithful to the plan and still pull in different directions.

Clarifying one trade-off rule early costs a conversation. Clarifying it at quarter-end costs a quarter.

03 · HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

One priority, two finish lines

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE. NOT A BARYONS CUSTOMER.

Priority: launch the new service line with three anchor clients

A 250-person professional services firm runs on Scaling Up. Its quarterly priority is to launch a new service line with three anchor clients, and it shows on track every week.

Sales reads success as all three clients signed and live by quarter-end, and promises fast starts. Delivery reads success as three launches that go well, and protects capacity for current clients. Each team reports progress honestly in the daily huddle.

In week ten, two launches slip and a long-standing client is unhappy about reassigned staff. Both leads followed the priority. They had pictured different finish lines.

What the example shows. The OPSP was clear and the huddles worked. The gap sat in the success criteria and trade-off rules each function built around the priority.

04 · EXECUTIVE CHECKS

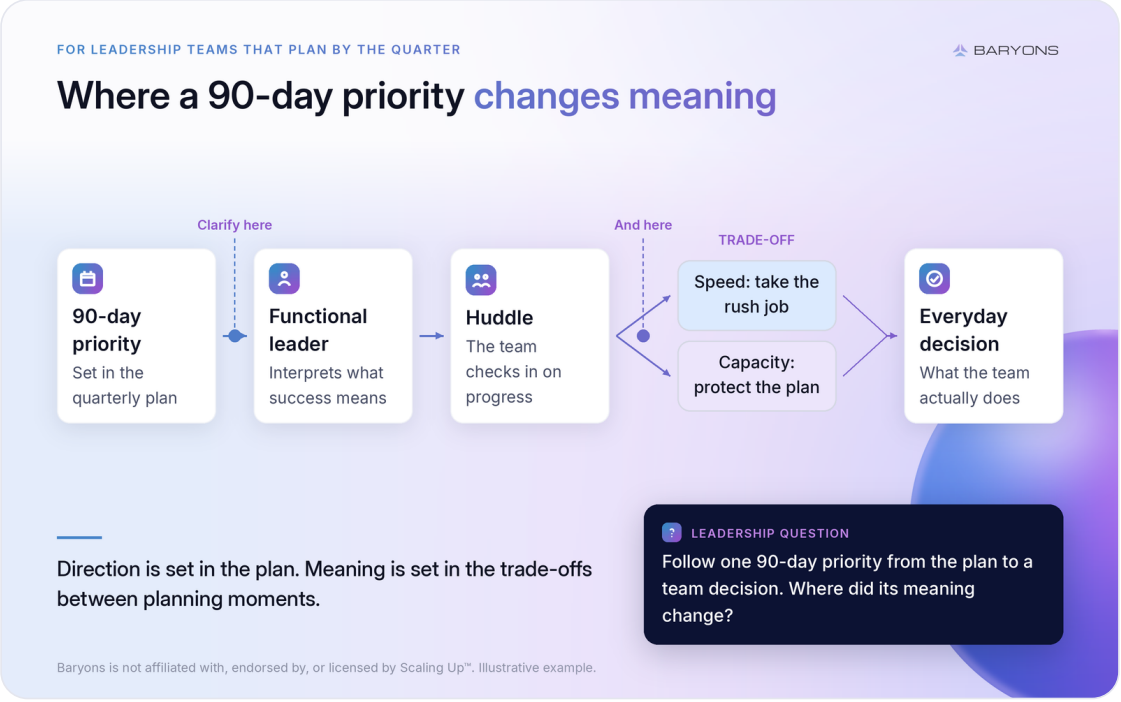
Five checks before the next reset

Each check uses one current 90-day priority and needs no new reporting. Ask leaders in two functions separately, then compare. The aim is to find a decision boundary to clarify.

1. **Describe success by quarter-end.** Ask what success looks like by quarter-end. A mismatch here matters more than the status.
2. **Name the protected trade-off.** Ask which trade-off each leader would protect when capacity is tight. Compare the answers before the next huddle.
3. **Set the huddle trigger.** Ask what would make each leader raise the priority in a huddle. Different thresholds mean late surprises.
4. **Find the owner of the next call.** Ask who makes the next real trade-off on this priority. Different names mean the rule needs stating.
5. **Look one level further down.** Repeat the first check with someone who reports to one of the leaders. Each handoff is another chance for the reading to shift.

What Baryons contributes between planning moments

Baryons complements Scaling Up. It does not replace the OPSP, quarterly planning or huddles, connect to them, or change how they run. It gives leaders an aggregate read on shared understanding between huddles and quarterly planning.



Where a 90-day priority changes meaning. Illustrative.

- **Private guidance for each person.** People get private guidance grounded in approved company priorities, in conversations of a few minutes by phone or web. Each person's conversation stays theirs.
- **Shared priorities.** Strategy changes shape every time it is retold. Baryons gives people a common working vocabulary for their priorities, and Team Resonance returns, in aggregate, the themes resonating across the team, so leaders can close gaps before they show up as rework.
- **Privacy first.** Team Resonance is fully anonymized and aggregated, with no names in any section. Leaders receive patterns, never individual conversations.
- **No new system.** No new meeting and no integration project. Baryons does not need access to email, meetings or task systems.

What this brief does not claim

- The Gallup figures describe employees in general. They are not specific to Scaling Up companies and do not show that any one company has this gap.
- The example is hypothetical. It is not a Baryons customer, and its details are invented to show the mechanism.
- Research on shared understanding shows a link with team performance. It does not show that any one practice or tool will change results in a given company.
- Baryons is independent of Scaling Up and its coaches. Leaders never receive individual scores or conversations.

A NEXT STEP

Pick one 90-day priority that crosses two functions.

Run the first three checks this week; they fit into a weekly meeting or the next quarterly session. If the answers line up, you have your confirmation. If they do not, and a focused discussion about that one priority would be useful, we would be glad to have it at baryons.com.

SOURCES

References

1 **Leadership & Management (indicator, U.S. employee data as of August 2026).** Gallup, accessed November 2026. https://www.gallup.com/404252/indicator-leadership-management.aspx

2 Beck, R. J., and Harter, J.. **Why Great Managers Are So Rare.** Gallup, March 25, 2014. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231593/why-great-managers-rare.aspx

3 DeChurch, L. A., and Mesmer-Magnus, J. R.. **The cognitive underpinnings of effective teamwork: a meta-analysis.** Journal of Applied Psychology, 95(1), 32-53, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017328

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