The Number

One Transparent Velocity Metric Per Person

Replace multiple KPIs with one number that captures velocity, creates transparency, and drives behavior.

The Concept

One number per person that measures the speed of value delivery—not activity completion.

When everyone has twenty KPIs, nobody has real accountability. When success has a hundred definitions, failure has a thousand excuses.

The Number eliminates ambiguity. It's singular, visible, and impossible to fake.

The Four Criteria for Your Number

1. Velocity-Focused

It measures speed of value delivery, not activity completion.

✗ **Bad:** Number of protocols written per quarter
✓ **Good:** Days from protocol completion to first patient enrolled

2. Within Your Direct Control

You can influence it through your daily decisions.

✗ **Bad:** Overall market share (influenced by competitor actions)
✓ **Good:** Your process cycle time (you own this completely)

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3. Continuously Measurable

Updates at least weekly, ideally daily.

✗ **Bad:** Annual customer satisfaction survey results
✓ **Good:** Daily throughput rate of your core process

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4. Impossible to Game

The only way to improve it is to actually improve.

✗ **Bad:** Percentage of tasks completed on time (just do easy tasks first)
✓ **Good:** Time from starting work to delivering customer value (can't fake speed)

Role-Specific Examples

Clinical Operations Manager - Oncology Biotech

Old metrics (15 KPIs):
- Site satisfaction scores
- Protocol deviation rates
- Enrollment projections
- Budget variance
- Monitoring compliance

The Number:
Days from site identification to first patient enrolled

Result:
- Dropped from 127 days to 31 days in six months
- Eliminated 23 approval steps
- Shifted from 60% time in status meetings to 60% solving bottlenecks

Quote: "I used to spend 60% of my time in status meetings. Now I spend 60% solving real bottlenecks."

Data Management Lead - Phase III Trials

Old metrics:
- Query resolution time
- Data entry accuracy
- System uptime
- Cleaning timelines
- Database quality scores

The Number:
Hours from last patient visit to database lock

Result:
- Reduced from 2,190 hours to 168 hours
- Automated 85% of cleaning processes
- Team transformed from data janitors to data architects

Quote: "My team went from data janitors to data architects. We solve problems instead of processing reports."

Regulatory Affairs Director - Global Submissions

Old metrics:
- Submission completeness
- Approval timelines
- Agency response rates

- Compliance audit scores
- SOP adherence

The Number:
Days from data complete to regulatory submission

Result:
- Compressed from 93 days to 22 days
- Built templated submission platforms
- Shifted from document compilers to strategic advisors

Quote: "We shifted from document compilers to strategic advisors. Now we influence trial design instead of just documenting outcomes."

Clinical Research Associate - Multi-Site Studies

Old metrics:
- Site visit frequency
- Monitoring report quality
- Query response facilitation
- Training completion rates
- Audit preparation

The Number:
Days from site activation to first patient enrolled

Result:
- Reduced from 84 days to 23 days
- Implemented site readiness automation
- Became site performance consultant instead of compliance checker

Quote: "I became a site performance consultant instead of a compliance checker. Sites actually request my involvement now."

Biostatistician - Late-Stage Development

Old metrics:
- Analysis plan adherence

- Statistical report accuracy
- Review cycle timelines
- Method validation completion

The Number:
Hours from database lock to preliminary results available

Result:
- Decreased from 336 hours to 48 hours
- Built automated analysis pipelines
- Shifted from running standard analyses to designing novel endpoints

Quote: "I went from running standard analyses to designing novel endpoints. My statistical insights actually influence drug development decisions."

Pattern Recognition

These numbers measure the physics of flow, not the theater of activity.

They capture whether work moves faster through the system, not whether people appear busy.

Anti-Patterns: What NOT to Measure

The Scorecard Delusion

Problem: When you measure everything, you measure nothing that matters.

Real Example: 2,847 Metrics

A pharmaceutical company tracked 2,847 distinct metrics across clinical development:
- Dedicated analysts spent 40% of time updating dashboards

- Trials took 32% longer than industry average
- **Every scorecard metric was green**

What they measured:
- Weekly meetings held ✓ (But were decisions made?)
- Standard operating procedures followed ✓ (But did they add value?)
- Quality processes completed ✓ (But did work flow faster?)
- Regulatory boxes checked ✓ (But did patients benefit sooner?)

Insight: "When you can be green on every metric while losing every race, your measurement system is optimized for comfort, not truth."

Multiple KPIs = No Accountability

When everyone has twenty KPIs, nobody has real accountability.

The Number eliminates this entirely.

The Green/Yellow/Red System

🟢 Green: You're Improving Velocity Consistently

- Full autonomy granted
- No questions asked
- Resources available on request
- Keep doing whatever you're doing

🟡 Yellow: You've Plateaued or Inconsistent Improvement

- Support is available
- Coaching offered
- Resources accessible

- Additional training provided
- Still your decision how to improve

🔴 Red: You're Slowing the Organization or Declining Performance

- Intervention required
- Either fix it quickly, get intensive help, or get reassigned

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No Subjectivity

- No subjective performance reviews
- No political evaluations
- No manager interpretation of contribution
- **Your Number tells your story objectively**

Result: When everyone can see your Number, you don't need a manager to motivate improvement. You already know where you stand. And everyone else knows too.

This creates peer accountability far more powerful than hierarchical pressure.

How Transparency Drives Behavior

"What's Your Number?"

This becomes the universal greeting.

The Transformation Arc

Initial Shock (Days 1-7)

- Transparency feels violent
- People who've hidden behind activity stand naked before results
- Resistance: "This is too much pressure!" "What about context?" "Numbers don't tell the whole story!"
- Comfortable ambiguity evaporates

Competitive Awakening (Weeks 2-4)

- Nobody wants the worst Number on their floor
- Conversations shift from defending current performance to seeking help
- Energizing competition emerges

Collaborative Evolution (Weeks 5-12)

- Teams stop hiding problems and start solving them together
- When everyone's Number is visible, helping others improve their Number improves yours
- Silos crumble because bottlenecks can't hide

Cultural Lock-in (Month 3+)

- New employees ask about their Number before asking about benefits
- Teams celebrate Number improvements like product launches
- Visibility becomes primary source of pride and motivation

The Psychological Safety of Clarity

Counterintuitive Insight:

When everyone's Number is visible, people feel safer, not more exposed.

Why?

✓ Clarity eliminates the anxiety of ambiguity
✓ You know exactly where you stand
✓ You know exactly what's expected
✓ You know exactly when you're succeeding
✓ No more wondering if your manager secretly thinks you're underperforming
✓ No more political maneuvering to appear valuable
✓ No more anxiety about surprise feedback

Critical Requirement:

Transparency without support is cruel.

Transparency with Development Support is the highest form of organizational care.

The Number must be paired with:
- Resources to improve
- Coaching when needed
- Clear paths to success
- Removal of organizational barriers

Define Your Number Worksheet

Step 1: Identify Your Core Value Delivery

What is the primary value you deliver to the organization?

_____

What is the end-to-end process from when you start to when value is delivered?

_____

_____

Step 2: Test Against the Four Criteria

Potential Number: _____

Is it velocity-focused?

- [ ] Yes, it measures speed of value delivery
- [ ] No, it measures activity completion → Revise

Is it within your direct control?

- [ ] Yes, I can influence it through daily decisions
- [ ] No, external factors dominate → Revise

Is it continuously measurable?

- [ ] Yes, updates at least weekly
- [ ] No, only measured periodically → Revise

Is it impossible to game?

- [ ] Yes, only way to improve is to actually improve
- [ ] No, I can manipulate without improving → Revise

Step 3: Set Your Baseline and Target

Current baseline: _ __ (measure over last 4 weeks)

Industry benchmark (if known): _ __

90-day target: _ __

12-month target: _ __

Step 4: Identify Barriers to Improvement

What would need to change to improve this Number by 30%?

Process changes:

- _____

System changes:

- _____

Resource needs:

- _____

Approval/authority needs:

- _____

Step 5: Make It Visible

Where will this Number be displayed?
- [ ] Team dashboard
- [ ] Weekly pulse meeting
- [ ] Real-time monitor
- [ ] Company-wide scorecard

Who needs to see it?
- [ ] You
- [ ] Your team
- [ ] Your manager
- [ ] The entire organization

Update frequency: Daily / Weekly / Real-time

Common Questions

"What if my role has multiple important deliverables?"

Pick the one that represents your primary bottleneck to velocity. If you have multiple, you lack focus.

"What if my Number depends on other teams?"

Good. That makes collaboration essential. When everyone's Numbers are visible, helping others improves your own Number.

"What about quality? Won't this encourage speed at the expense of quality?"

The Number measures **value delivery**, not just speed. If you deliver fast but break things, your Number won't improve—you'll just be fixing problems repeatedly.

"Isn't this too much pressure?"

Ambiguity is more stressful than clarity. The Number eliminates wondering where you stand. Pressure comes from uncertainty, not transparency.

Success Criteria

- **Time from problem identification to resolution drops 90%**
- Employees actively surface problems knowing support will follow
- Your Number becomes your professional identity

- Improvement in your Number = improvement in organizational velocity

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Getting Started

Week 1: Define Your Number

- Use worksheet to identify and validate
- Get manager alignment on definition
- Establish baseline measurement

Week 2-4: Track Privately

- Measure weekly
- Identify improvement opportunities
- Test visibility with immediate team

Week 5+: Go Public

- Add to team dashboard
- Report in weekly pulse meeting
- Track green/yellow/red status
- Request support when needed

Remember: Your Number isn't a performance judgment—it's a velocity diagnostic. It exists to help you move faster and identify where you need support.

From The Velocity Framework: Breakthrough Biotechs @ Breakthrough Speed