

# Escaping The "Effort Without Progress" Trap



Accelerating Alignment So Organizations Thrive (Now).  
CMG's ThriveNumber™ is built to expose and address misalignment, impaired strengths, and the progress traps they create.

## About the Author



**Russ Lange**  
Partner

A fervent believer in the promise of human powered growth, Russ leads CMG in partnering with companies to help them become aligned, agile, customer-driven enterprises that unleash the potential of their organizations with sustainable improvements in focus, teams, culture, and process our clients.

Leaders are accountable to motivate others to take risks and challenge the status quo, inspiring new and better outcomes to be achieved. Why, then, are there so many stories about missed goals, organizational upheavals, and burned out staff? Is it the sheer amount of change, complexity, and challenge of current competitive circumstances? Or might it be something else?

From decades of experience, we've found that missed goals, exhausted staff, and organizational upheavals are symptoms of deeper issues, rarely exposed and addressed. The result is an "effort without progress trap." A trap that saps leaders of the clarity and alignment required to mobilize others and achieve enterprise goals.

CMG's ThriveNumber is built to expose and address these issues and the progress traps they create. It uniquely challenges teams to discover, map, and address two critical faultlines lurking in most organizations: misalignment and impaired strengths. Misalignment creeps into leadership teams over time as each member holds a perspective distinct from others. Without an executive framework to identify, discuss, and ultimately align different perspectives, contradictory views will undermine unity on both, which strengths need to be built and how to proceed strategically. ThriveNumber gives enterprises insights and tools to neutralize these faultlines via a repeatable approach to 'measure, expose, act, improve'. In the spirit of proven approaches like lean and agile, ThriveNumber enables a prioritized sequence to

**1 ESTABLISH**  
Thrive objectives  
and roadmap

**2 ACTIVATE**  
Thrive learning  
experiments

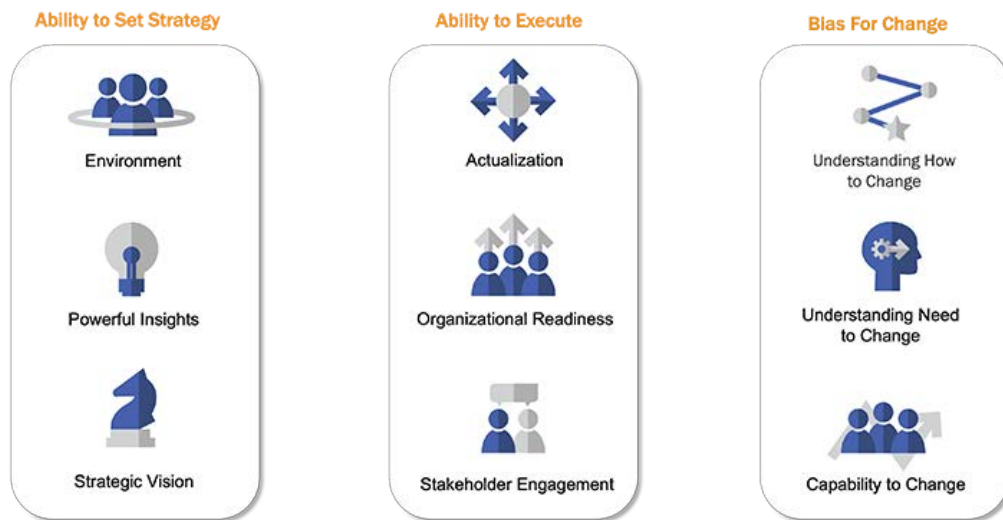
**3 SCALE**  
Sustain Thrive  
learnings

It provides the focus, capabilities, and bias for change required to achieve mission-critical customer goals.

## A Brief Overview of ThriveNumber

Key to ThriveNumber is the recognition that while every enterprise is different, internal alignment is critical to achieving desired outcomes. The need to excel at setting and executing strategy in rapidly changing times requires proactively assessing and fostering internal alignment. Organizations that fulfill both these needs effectively and efficiently are better at repeatedly converting effort into progress. This ongoing journey of delivering on strategy and embracing change is a fundamental advantage as capabilities, conditions, environments, and destinations continually evolve.

ThriveNumber begins by establishing a pragmatic baseline of the enterprise's current state. Through a simple set of questions, distilled from CMG's decades of experience helping enterprises transform and thrive, executive leadership teams and their direct reports reflect on six key drivers of market success plus the organization's propensity to change, including:



The reflections on these organizational success drivers and their contributing strengths are captured via a quick 15-minute survey. CMG's custom analytics produce multiple views of the organization that enable alignment, action, and improvement. Specifically, ThriveNumber provides leadership teams and their organizations with the identification of:

1. The presence of 30 strengths required for customer-driven market success, as perceived by a leadership team and their direct reports.
2. The degree of alignment (or not) among leadership on perceived strengths.
3. The degree of alignment (or not) among leadership on perceived challenges.
4. The organization's self-perception of its propensity to change.
5. Implicit or explicit risks and opportunities in achieving the organization's customer-driven strategic goals, based on reported success drivers and strengths.



These insights equip leadership teams and their organizations to convert effort into transformative progress. Using traditional discovery and diagnosis approaches, such insights historically require four to six months of effort and six-to-seven-figure financial investments with a limited record of success. Using ThriveNumber, the financial investment in discovery is significantly reduced and the wall-time for the effort can be dropped to six weeks or less. The culmination of this phase is a single-day leadership workshop to evaluate the insights, gain alignment, and commit to action.

ThriveNumber provides a change leadership methodology that organizes, orchestrates, and optimizes its improvement work over time. By periodically renewing the assessment of ThriveNumber success drivers and strengths, leadership can enhance both the transparency and honesty needed to engineer an escape from the trap of “effort without progress” for the enterprise.

## Five Real-World ThriveNumber Use Cases

While ThriveNumber can be adopted by C-suite leaders and their enterprises to address a wide variety of challenges and opportunities, five of the most common use cases are:

- **Focusing Leadership and the Broader Organization on the Right Things.** Misalignment on organizational strengths and challenges will hamstring any strategic initiative and undermine the pursuit of transformation. ThriveNumber allows for hidden differences of perspective to be made explicit and debated. Ultimately, leadership alignment is an accelerant to any change agenda, so the clarity of purpose brokered at the start of the transformation is a rallying flag for the broader organization.
- **Accelerating and/or De-risking Achievement of Annual and Long-term Plan Objectives.** The scale, speed, and complexity of a modern enterprise frequently result in doubts about achievement of annual plans. ThriveNumber helps leaders balance objectives and organizational capability, improving the enterprise’s ability to effectively set and execute strategy. This balance makes outcomes more predictable and sidesteps “effort without progress” traps. With the squeezed timeframe of an annual plan, improvement initiatives need to show results and payback quickly enough to positively impact goal achievement, reducing reliance on improbable end-of-year heroics.
- **Optimizing Performance in the Face of Recessional Headwinds.** Whatever the cause, in periods of resource scarcity (whether money, people, or time), leaders and their teams need to remove organizational friction quickly and consistently to achieve their goals. Misalignment, missing or underutilized strengths, and inability to rapidly change all sap the enterprise’s ability to “do more with less.” ThriveNumber economically zeros in on the sources of these issues so they can be resolved, and better progress made.
- **Improving Employee Engagement.** It’s hard for employees to be engaged and effective when they’re exhausted. While ongoing digitalization may offload some of their work, too many team members feel they are caught in the “effort without progress” trap. Their path to escape the trap is hidden, exacerbating frustrations. ThriveNumber, used effectively and supported by change leadership, can increase employee fulfillment while the drive company performance.

- **Improving Organizational Readiness.** Amid the third decade of the 21st century, many of our organizations remain stuck in 20th century behaviors, yet to be fully ready for current and future realities. Our human sensibilities can interfere with today's needs for effective and efficient cross-functional teams, rich in expertise of innovative experimentation and possessing a relentless drive to improve outcomes. In environments where complexity and scale rule, ThriveNumber provides insights needed for the ongoing orchestration and optimization of these teams, their ways of working, and their outcome objectives.

## Moving Forward:

It is easy to feel that the only realistic path forward is to hunker down and tough out the challenges. Many leadership teams hope, somehow, this time the organization will miraculously break out of the “effort without results” trap.

Leaders rationalize that improvement “right now” is not really a possibility. They will project that the organization just needs to survive this (whatever this is) and then might consider doing things differently. Right now, there is too much to do, too little funding, and little time to make meaningful changes. Further, the questions are asked, “How much would really change? How would we ever get everyone to agree on what needs to change?” Deep down, leadership may even feel the enterprise is too broken to think about thriving.

This organizational reality is why ThriveNumber exists. It provides leaders and their organizations with the path to better outcomes. Starting with a pragmatic and effective way to escape from their “effort without progress” trap. It does not depend on perfect conditions, just leadership's commitment to get started. ThriveNumber generates a clear-eyed view of the organization's current state, which leaders and their teams can utilize to tailor a plan to progress towards a thriving future. The plan will be pragmatic, iterative, agile, believable, and suitable to the particulars of any specific enterprise.

To learn about how your organization can evaluate and adopt ThriveNumber to escape your “effort without progress” trap, visit our dedicated ThriveNumber page at [cmgconsulting.com/thrivenumber](https://cmgconsulting.com/thrivenumber) and schedule a discussion today.