Help! Our productivity growth is going down! Five new tips to boost your productivity (part 2)

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Belgium is the fourth most productive country in the world, but our productivity growth has been sputtering. In each part of this series, we offer you five practical tips to help you boost productivity in the office and on the shop floor. This is part 2.

In the first part of this series we discussed the productivity of Belgian companies. Over the last three years, labour productivity in Belgium has increased by only 0.3 per cent, while productivity growth in our neighbouring countries was 1.9 per cent over the same period (source: Conference Board). The economic growth we have seen in recent years is therefore mainly due to more work, not smarter work.

In order to support Belgian companies with their productivity improvements, we collected a number of tips that we will publish in the coming weeks. These tips deliberately focus not on implementing advanced technologies, but on things that can be achieved with little effort.

Tip 6: Do not trust round numbers



(Source picture: Unsplash)

Production speeds are often round numbers such as 1,000 strokes per minute, 20 metres per minute... But what are the chances that the optimal cutting speed is exactly 20 metres per minute, and not 21 or 22 metres per minute? Round figures point at unoptimised production rates. If you see a round number in the production, ask if the speed can also be set to 21, and a day later to 22, etc. until you notice that the highest achievable speed has been reached. Before you know it, you may have increased the output of a bottleneck machine by 10 percent or more.

Tip 7: Invest in cross-training



(Source picture: Pexels)

In tip 2 we already discussed the impact of training on productivity. A special form of high-impact training is cross-training. There are several unacknowledged advantages to cross-training.

Many high-mix-low-volume production environments are characterised by varying bottlenecks. Cross-trained employees can easily be moved to another workstation, allowing the bottlenecks, and therefore the entire company, to process more orders.

Cross-trained employees have more insight in the work of their colleagues and can often contribute to the improvement of another work post. By providing information in the right format or by packaging materials in the right way, the work of a colleague can often be made easier.

Tip 8: Provide correct and complete information right from the start

In order processing, a lot of time is often lost collecting the necessary information. Missing information often leads to messaging back and forth between engineering, sales and the customer, or even worse, to errors and, therefore, rework. You can avoid this by placing the responsibility for correct and complete information as close as possible to the source of the information (customer/sales). The further down the chain the problems are discovered, the more time is wasted. This implies that people often focus on creating standardised order forms, check lists and sales training. For complex sales processes, it is advisable to involve engineering at an early stage when defining the order. This sometimes requires some extra effort on the part of the engineering department, but it avoids a lot of problems afterwards and is often an excellent learning moment for the sales people involved.

Tip 9: Use slewing cranes where possible

Roller bridges are often used as a means of transport in the industry. An excellent means of transport, were it not for the fact that this bridge usually hangs on the wrong side of the production hall or is already in use. Slewing cranes often offer a good solution for smooth local transports around workstations.

Tip 10: Reduce intermediate stocks on the shop floor



(Source photo : Pexels)

A high intermediate supply feels good to many production employees, because it gives the impression that there is enough work to be done. However, high intermediate stocks are wasteful: intermediate stocks take up a lot of space and result in greater walking distances, large intermediate stocks also typically result in more searching, and the longer goods remain on the shop floor, the more likely they are to become damaged or obsolete. By reducing those intermediate stocks, you can eliminate these wastes and often significantly increase your productivity. For example, Werkhuizen Landuyt was able to increase its productivity by 20 percent by reducing its intermediate stock by about 80 percent.

There are many simple ways to reduce intermediate stocks. If you use an MRP planning, you can simply reduce the lead time parameters in the system to ensure that orders start later, thereby reducing the lead time and the intermediate stock. Another way is the introduction of POLCA, a production control system for complex environments.

Do you have any tips? Let us know so that we can share them and become more productive together!

*In production companies, a great deal of time is lost in planning, replanning and following up on orders. POLCA is a production control system that makes it much easier to plan and monitor production. On **5 June 2019** Sirris organises a **Masterclass on POLCA** with the initiator, Rajan Suri. Read more about it in our agenda!*

You can find an overview of the other parts of this series with tips here.

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