Help! Our productivity growth is going down! Five new tips to boost your productivity (part 3)

13 May 2019, 02:00

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Belgium is the fourth most productive country in the world, but our productivity growth has been sputtering. In this series we present five practical tips each time to boost productivity in the office and on the shop floor.

In the first part of this series we discussed the productivity of Belgian companies. The productivity growth in our country is currently in bad shape. Last year, labour productivity in Belgium even fell by 0.1 percent (source: Conference Board), which is particularly surprising during a period of economic growth.

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

Tip 11: Use your ERP system on the shop floor as well

Most production companies now have an ERP system, although in many cases only limited use is made of this expensive system.

A typical problem in many production companies is the poor information flow between the shop floor and the planning department. On the shop floor, for example, the order status is often registered on paper notes. These notes are collected with a certain delay and then inserted into the ERP system by an employee. However, this is double work, which is also prone to errors. Based on the information entered in the ERP system, the planning department creates new order lists, which are distributed by the supervisors on the shop floor. However, by the time the lists are consulted, the information is often already out of date. This in turn results in an interruption of started orders, manual adjustments and final chaos on the work floor.

By using the ERP system on the shop floor, a large part of these problems can be overcome. Let employees look up what they need to make directly in the ERP system and let them report their output directly in ERP. In this way, delays can be excluded, duplication of registration work and a great deal of time lost by supervisors due to order processing can be avoided. Even though ERP systems are not always the most user-friendly tools, experience shows that it is also possible to teach low-skilled employees how to work with an ERP system, provided that good work instructions and good training are provided.

Tip 12: Measure the lead times at the office



(Source picture: Pexels)

In office environments, productivity is rarely monitored. This is in stark contrast to the numerous attempts to measure productivity on the shop floor by recording daily quantities, the times worked on orders, the scrap ...

Monitoring productivity in office environments is not easy. There is often a great diversity of work, which makes it difficult to define a productivity indicator, and employees hate productivity measurements.

A simple alternative is to monitor the turnaround time in the office, for example from the receipt of an order to its release to production. When you analyse the office turnaround time, you'll find that typically more than 95 percent of the time is taken up by waiting times and only 5 percent is taken up by the actual processing time of an order. These waiting times have several causes: incorrect and missing information leads to unnecessary back-and-forth communication and rework, the work accumulates for bottleneck processes that are not relieved in time ... By focusing on shortening the turnaround time in the office, you can tackle the underlying productivity problems and improve the cooperation between employees. This allows you to shorten turnaround times and improve office productivity.

Tip 13: Handle your packaging waste better



Many companies treat their waste streams rather carelessly. Waste often has value, and by handling it well, you can even tap into a new revenue stream, which is a lucrative way to increase productivity.

Does your company have a lot of cardboard waste? Make sure to offer it in a way that makes recycling easier. With a better sorting quality, you might be able to get a better price from your collector. A few tips:

- Do not tear the cardboard into small pieces. Sorting machines do not recognize cardboard that is smaller than an A4. The longer the fibres, the more often the paper mills can recycle

the paper and cardboard.
- Store paper and cardboard in a sealed container that will protect it against rain. Recycling is easier with clean and dry paper and cardboard.

Do you have large quantities of the same type of packaging material? Ask your supplier if he can take his packaging back. This creates a win-win situation: you have a solution for your waste and the supplier saves on his materials.

More tips on waste management can be found on the website **Cirkeltips**.

Tip 14: Work with warm transfers



(Source picture: Unsplash)

Passing on work from one person to the next always involves a certain risk that things will go wrong, which may result in mistakes and the necessity to start over. This risk is particularly high in the case of more complex assignments (such as project-based work).

The transfer between employees often takes place in a ‘cold’ way, such as via e-mail, where there is no direct human contact between the parties. A simple solution for this is the introduction of a hot transfer. In case of a ‘hot’ transfer, both parties will sit down briefly to go over the order. It minimises errors and problems with missing or incorrect information. In addition, such a warm transfer is also an excellent learning moment for both parties, because during the consultation moment you can learn what the other one needs.

Tip 15: Use andon

Address problems as soon as possible after they occur. Visual and auditory signals (also called andon) can be of great help in these cases. The red-orange-green light towers on top of machines to indicate the status is a traditional tool. This principle can also be used for project-based work. For example, we recently saw a visual management board of an engineering team with a sad smiley next to the ‘Specifications available’ indicator. This made it clear to the entire company that marketing had fallen behind with the delivery of an important deliverable.

In this way, you can quickly find out whether there is a backlog, and you can intervene in time. The aim of these systems is not to control people more and encourage them to work harder, but to stimulate the supporting services (maintenance, team leaders, etc.) to support first-line employees better by responding more quickly to problems. It is important to clearly communicate and convey this insight. If not, you will definitely come across unnecessary resistance.

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

Click here for an overview of the other parts in the series.

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