Help! Our productivity growth is going down! Another five tips to boost your productivity (part 6)

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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 to boost productivity in the office and on the shop floor.

In the first part of the series we discussed the productivity of Belgian companies and found that the productivity growth in Belgium is quite restricted in recent years. In order to support Belgian companies with their productivity improvements, we collected a number of tips that we will publish at regular intervals. These tips are deliberately not aimed at implementing advanced technologies, but on improvements that can be achieved with little effort.

Tip 26: Go for preventive maintenance



(Source picture : https://unsplash.com/)

No one would even dream of not changing the oil in his car on a regular basis. After all, a car is too valuable to neglect its maintenance. However, strangely enough, we find that many companies do not schedule any preventive maintenance for their machinery. For example, 80 per cent of hydraulic system failures are due to avoidable oil quality problems.

Therefore, make sure you have a maintenance plan for each machine. The machine manufacturers can often help you with this. The first step in introducing preventive maintenance is simple: regularly clean your machines. A clean-up makes it possible to detect problems such as oil leaks at an early stage.

The impact of maintenance goes far beyond avoiding breakdowns. Good preventive maintenance allows you to replace machines less frequently, thus reducing the resources spent on replacement

investments. This makes more capital available for new investments, which increases prosperity in society. We owe this last insight to Robert Solow, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1987 for his research on this subject.

Tip 27: Optimise the dead movement in your machines

Many machines are characterised by cyclic movements, in which the actual process step is executed in one part of the movement, after which the machine is brought back to the starting position for the next product ('the dead movement'). Machine builders typically pay a lot of attention to determining the optimal speed of the process movement, while the dead movement is often sub-optimal.

To improve the dead movement there are typically two improvement strategies. First of all, the dead movement can sometimes simply be accelerated. Secondly, it should be checked if the trajectory of the motion can somehow be shortened. We have seen machines where the trajectory of the dead movement was determined by the size of the largest product. If a smaller product was made, the dead movement could be reduced, which greatly shortened the cycle time.

Below is a video showing how this can be applied to tapping.

Accept marketing-cookies to watch this video. For FireFox users, disable the 'Enhanced tracking protection' of your browser to view this video.

Tip 28: Only count small stock volumes



(Source picture: https://www.pexels.com)

In tip 21 we discussed cycle counting as an alternative to annual stock counting. In traditional cycle counting, a small part of the stock is completely counted every day. However, you can go one step further to reduce the counting load. In the case of cycle counting, you can also systematically select locations where, according to the stock system, only a small stock is available. This reduces the time spent counting and also reduces the risk of counting errors.

In one company with a large stock of spare parts, the warehouse operators received a hand scanner that indicates with each picking whether or not counting is necessary after picking. If there are less than four items, the system will tell you that you need to count. With such small volumes you do not really have to count, because you can immediately see how many are left.

Tip 29: Keep your containers dry

By lowering the costs of the suppliers, your own added value (= the difference between turnover and purchase costs) increases, which also increases your productivity. Better waste management opens up quite a few opportunities.

Many companies collect their waste in an open container which is collected by a waste processor. In a year's time, and with average rainfall, up to ten tonnes of water can end up in a container. Rainwater seeping into the containers makes them heavier, meaning that you are paying for water instead of waste. In addition, the value of the waste streams may decrease. Therefore, you should place your waste containers under a roof or hang a tarpaulin over them.

More tips about waste management can be found on Cirkeltips.

Tip 30: Limit the number of transfers



(Source picture: Pexels)

Office processes are typically characterised by a lot of transfers. From the sales field service to the sales back-office, to accounting, back to sales, to planning, to the work preparation, back to the sales for a question, to calculation ... With every transfer, an employee has to dig into a case again information is often lost in the process, which can lead to errors and rework.

The number of transfers can often be limited by cross-training of employees (e.g. a credit check can also be carried out by the sales department, see also tip 7), standardising information (e.g. standard price tables) and eliminating unnecessary information. A good first step is often tagging a few orders. Put a note on each order for a period of time and have the employees write down the start time, end time and the problems encountered. In this way, you will get a clear picture of the complex path that many orders follow and the problems that exist.

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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