Help, our productivity growth is going down! Another four tips to boost your productivity (part 13)

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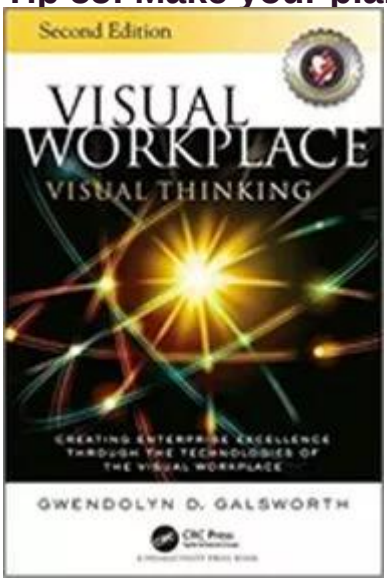
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Belgium is the fourth most productive country in the world, but our productivity growth has been sputtering. In this series we present practical tips each time to boost productivity in the office and on the shop floor.

In the first part of this series we discussed the productivity of Belgian companies. Productivity growth in our country has been substandard in recent years. What also stands out in the figures are the large differences in productivity between companies in the same sector. The 10 percent best companies are at least twice as productive as the 10 percent worst companies. If we narrowed the gap between the 10 per cent best and the rest by a quarter, the economy could grow by as much as 15 per cent. This does not even require new innovations, it simply requires the application of existing knowledge.

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 at improvements that can be achieved with little effort.

Tip 55: Make your plant visible



A lack of information leads to needless loss of time, running around and meetings, where not one, but several employees lose time. The solution, however, is often simple: don’t store the information

away in a computer or in someone's head, but make sure that all necessary information is always immediately visible at the workplace. That way, you get a talking workshop which will constantly remind employees of what needs to be done. The more visual (and therefore less verbal), the better. An image speaks louder than words. Therefore, make full use of colour indications, arrows, floor markings, photos, or use the products themselves as a means of communication (see this video for an example).

Ask yourself what your employees need to know to do their jobs and start brainstorming visual solutions. The classic questions are: "What is the next order?", "Where are the right tools?", "Where is the material?", "At which workstation should I work?", "Where should I pick up or drop off material?". For all these questions, you can develop visual solutions. Do people still have questions after that? Then ask yourself again how that question could have been avoided.

Is the information hidden in a computer? In that case, make sure the employees can access the information themselves, or even better, provide a large, clear screen where the relevant information is always visible, without having to click. (See tip 11 about using ERP on the shop floor)

The video below shows some examples of visual solutions:

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

Do you want to know more about visualisation? The reference for creating visual workplaces is the book 'Visual Workplace Visual Thinking' by Gwendolyn Galsworth. More information about visualising is also available in tip 15 about andon and tip 44 about eliminating searching.

Tip 56: Move your feet

In order to perform some operations smoothly, you sometimes need three hands: two for manipulating the parts and one for the processing. For lack of three hands, operators have to take some extra time for positioning or clamping the material, or for activating the operation. In a number of cases, the use of a mechanism with a foot pedal can result in significant time savings. Please note that safety always comes first, which is why a foot pedal is just not a good solution in some applications.

The video below shows how a simple mechanism with a rudimentary foot pedal was integrated into a production process. By the way, this video is another good illustration of tip 43: Use your head first, not your wallet.

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Tip 57: Work closely together with your supplier



The suppliers' share of the turnover is usually considerable. By lowering the costs of the suppliers, your own added value (i.e. the difference between turnover and purchase costs), increases, which will also increase your productivity. This does not mean that you should take advantage of your suppliers. On the contrary, the more you put pressure on suppliers, the narrower their profit margins become, the less they can invest and sooner or later they will run into problems. The trick is to establish a win-win relationship with your suppliers.

There are two main ways to do this. First, you can reduce your suppliers' production costs by working with them during the product design phase. By taking into account your suppliers' production capabilities during the design phase, you can save a lot of costs in your supplier's production process (see also tip 45 on welding and tip 47 on milling). The earlier you can involve them in the design, the better. You shouldn't want to design everything yourself either: you can also ask your suppliers to make design suggestions.

A second important opportunity is in the area of administrative work for your supplier. Half of the lead time and up to a quarter of the costs can often be attributed to order processing in the office. This office work essentially involves turning your information into usable information for the supplier's shop floor. By making better arrangements, you can lighten the workload both for yourself and for the supplier. We still come across companies where the purchaser requests prices from several suppliers for many orders in order to find the best deal. However, the preparation of tenders generates a cost, which has to be paid one way or another. An alternative is to work with annual contracts or price lists, whereby a volume discount may be negotiated on the basis of an annual volume.

You can also make numerous arrangements that can reduce the administrative and planning load. This includes agreements on the method of information exchange (e.g. by directly linking ERP systems via EDI), order volumes and forecasts, delivery times, transports and return flows, invoicing, quality documentation, etc.

Tip 58: Check out YouTube

YouTube not only offers hours of viewing pleasure for cat lovers, but also for people who want to boost their productivity, there is a lot to learn. Numerous channels have been launched on YouTube with tips & tricks on how to improve the productivity of all kinds of production processes. Just enter the English name of your production process, followed by 'tips', and let YouTube flood you with ideas.

The YouTube videos are also very interesting for operators. An excellent example is the Haas Tip-of-the-Day video channel where all kinds of practical ideas about machining are shared. Take the time to watch these videos with your employees. Encourage them to find interesting videos of their own, which can in turn be shared with each other. The videos can be watched during team

meetings or shared via, for example, a WhatsApp group. (See also tip 50 about making your own improvement videos). Most videos are in English, which is still a barrier for some operators, but fortunately YouTube offers the possibility to subtitle the videos automatically in another language.

Also take a look at the corporate videos of your direct competitors. You can often learn a number of things from this, for example, about the machines used, the production sequence, internal transport, layout, etc.

Finally

Do you have any tips to share? Let us know so that we can share them and become more productive together! The best tipster gets a nice gift!

Shortening lead times makes it possible to grow as a company and to reduce lots of indirect costs. The quick response manufacturing (QRM) production strategy makes this possible for companies in a high-mix, low-volume environment. From March (Ghent) we organise a next QRM training cycle (in Dutch). More information is available in our agenda!

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

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

Authors



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