Help! Our productivity growth is going down! Another four tips to boost your productivity (part 15)

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Pascal Pollet

Belgium is the fourth most productive country in the world, but our productivity growth has been sputtering. In this series we present four 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. 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 63: Component kitting



Kitting is a system that is mainly used in an assembly context. Kitting means that parts (possibly even subassemblies) are collected and delivered to the assembly (or welding cell) in a 'kit'. As a result, operators no longer have to think about which parts to assemble, as they are delivered neatly grouped per product.

Kitting has several advantages:

- The operator loses less time looking for and collecting the parts.
- Kitting avoids forgetting parts. A kit prompts the operator to assemble all supplied parts. A kitting board with cut-out sections for each part (as in the photo) can also prevent the kitting operator from forgetting to deliver parts.
- The biggest advantage that many users of kitting report is the space saving on the assembly cell or line. Fewer storage areas need to be provided at the workstations, as everything they need is delivered to them in groups. This leads to a more compact layout and less running.

Kitting shifts some of the work from the operator to the logistics staff. However, this does not need to be a problem. It is often easier to find an additional logistics employee than a more highly skilled mechanic or welder. Separating the part collection work from the actual assembly work also makes it possible to organise this work better and to support it with technical aids. For this purpose, it is best to set up a specific kitting zone, for example in the warehouse or near the assembly cell.

Kitting itself is subject to human error. Therefore, do not burden the kitting operators with additional tasks and make sure that they are not disturbed so that they can better focus on assembling the kits. In addition, technological solutions such as pick-to-light, picking with smartglasses, etc. can be used to reduce the risk of errors. The video below shows a good example of a well-equipped kitting zone that increases productivity and avoids mistakes.

Tip 64: Talk to your employees



In tip 51 we already mentioned the importance of observing production processes. In addition to merely improving processes, there is also a lot to be gained from simply talking to employees.

Talking to employees increases productivity for several reasons. Employees on the shop floor and in the office often perform all sorts of actions that you are unaware of. For example, we have already seen employees secretly collecting transport carts, because they had learned that the material flow sometimes stagnates. However, because of this behaviour, other employees were short of carts. By talking to the employees, such frustrations soon surface and you can take action.

The employees themselves are the experts in their own process and know better than anyone what goes wrong. Therefore, actively ask employees for their suggestions for improvement and get to work on them quickly, or even better, have them implement the suggestions for improvement themselves. All too often, we see that companies leave improvement initiatives too much to the managers and staff departments. For example, we know an organisation where the staff departments and the IT department regularly implement 'improvements' to the ERP system, without ever asking the users what they actually need. As a result, employees develop an aversion against the system they have to use every day.

Talking does not only bring improvement ideas. It also creates a sense of belonging and has a motivating effect, because people feel that they are being paid attention to. It is important that these discussions take place on the shop floor and not in the manager's office. At their own workplaces, people feel more at ease to tell their stories. Therefore, as a manager, make regular rounds of the production hall and speak to different people each time. You will see more, get more input and above all, the employees will feel more appreciated.

Tip 65: Monitor the cycle time of machines

The cycle times of machines may increase stealthily due to gradual wear of moving elements, compressed air problems, poor lubrication, incorrect settings, differences in adjustment preferences between operators or carelessness. For example, we saw a company where the operator had reduced the speed of a saw machine by 40 per cent to solve quality problems with one type of material. However, this temporary solution had never been restored to its rated speed, and as a result the machine's output had fallen sharply.

A slowly increasing cycle time often goes unnoticed, but it does eat away at productivity. Therefore, start monitoring the cycle times of the machines and intervene as soon as the cycle time exceeds the set standard value. However, you can go a step further by also monitoring the times of

individual movements. In this way, you can find out more quickly which delayed movement is responsible for the slower cycle time.

On some machines, you can read the cycle time on the machine's display. If not, ask your machine builder or your own programmer to add this reading. In addition, make the necessary organisational arrangements for monitoring the cycle times. Clearly define who is responsible and how often the cycle times are checked.

Tip 66: Reduce your waste costs, standardise your films!

Reducing waste costs is an interesting way to increase productivity. Lower waste costs increase the added value (difference between turnover and external costs) of your business, which leads to higher productivity. Many manufacturing companies have to deal with packaging films, such as the thin wrapping film around pallets, the thicker shrink-wrap film around products or components or the large bags and sleeves around semi-finished products. In many companies, films are still thrown out with the residual waste, so the company pays its waste collector to incinerate these waste streams.

By ensuring a clean stream of films, you can easily collect them selectively in bags or containers and even turn this cost stream into a revenue stream! Therefore, first of all, make an analysis of the different types of films that exist in the company. In what places do these films occur, and in what quantities? What materials are the films made of? Could the use of film be avoided?

If the use of film cannot be avoided, try to switch to a film of the same material as much as possible. If, for example, your company has many different coloured films, try to replace them with colourless ones in consultation with the suppliers. Transparent films have a higher recycling value than the coloured films that are, at best, recycled into bin liners.

Valipac supports companies in this with a premium system. Information on Valipac premiums can be found here. More information about the recycling of films can be found here.

The video below shows how Volvo in Ghent tackles film waste.

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!

We would like to thank Ludwig Cloetens for providing the inspiration for tip 64.

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

Authors



Pascal Pollet