



CLOSING THE PRODUCTIVITY GAP

Every organisation produces something in exchange for a price or fee to generate income. The levels at which they produce is dependent on several factors and definitions of productivity differ within all types of organisations.

In order to improve whatever it is that is meant by productivity at the organisational level, it is necessary that individuals within the organisation know what their own productivity involves and how that fits into and helps achieve organisational productivity. When employees and organisations are at their most productive level, profit margins increase, the customers are happy and so are the managers. However, when productivity at work is low, the tell-tale signs usual reflect dissatisfied customers, insufficient profits and managers who reactively initiate sweeping changes. Productivity is so important that the productivity of individuals and collective productivity have to be measured. Managers need to measure productivity and find ways to close the gap between what the organisation is currently performing and what it might do in the future. Closing this gap increases productivity.

There are many performance management tools that help to close the productivity gap. Generally, these tools are designed to help employees work smarter (not necessarily harder) and make better use of valuable time. Most people intuitively want to be productive, because they want to achieve more from their work. Therefore it is important for employers to assess what barriers to productivity exist within the workplace.

Training and Recruitment

Employees should be seen as a long term investment rather than an expense and this investment begins with recruitment and training. The right candidate has to be selected

from the onset. No matter the conditions of the labour market, there are always suitably qualified people available for a reasonable compensation. A proper search and selection process will find them. Employers should not be too quick to fill the empty slot with persons who do not meet the criteria. Once the right candidate is selected, the investment continues further with training to reinforce and advance their skills and attitudes. All too often, organisations recruit poorly and fail to provide proper training and this results in the employee leaving the organisation in less than a year and the vicious cycle begins all over again.

Working Relations

Enhanced working relationships can generate heightened productivity for any type of organisation, whether public or private and the most important relationship is the one between the employee and his or her immediate supervisor. Good relationships can speed up progress and less favourable interactions slow it down. In the worst scenario, some relations can cause a complete halt. Interpersonal and “people” skills are of great importance for any supervisor promoting healthy human relations. The aim here is to generate happy employees who produce more. Managers and supervisors must use their personalities and a charismatic leadership style to motivate employees to achieve greater productivity.

Motivation

As organisations implement changes, unsettlement and distrust can sometimes occur between employee and employer, mainly because the channels communication and the implementation of the change did not include any prior form of consultation with the staff. If employees are given the opportunity to buy into the change process by allowing them to put forward their ideas and suggestions, the change is more likely to be accepted.

A collaborative approach motivates staff to make a contribution to the organisation and at the same time they achieve an understanding of their role in making the change effective. Communication is vital in giving employees a sense of belonging to an organisation,

enabling them to contribute to an organisation's productivity, especially when they may be the best source of ideas for improving productivity.

Recognition

In the public service, managers are not always able to motivate employees through pay and bonuses like managers in the private sector. It is essential that the public sector find, use and promote other motivational methods. Recognition is one of the easiest to implement. It costs nothing to show recognition. A verbal thank you for an exceptional job well-done indicates that the employer cares about the staff and notices their actions. Some managers believe that they do not have to acknowledge or even say thank you for the extra efforts of staff members, because they believe that it is just another part of the job that they have to do anyway. These are the managers who will realise that employees are already saying that it does not make an ounce of difference and wonder what is the point in going the extra mile if no one recognises? American motivational author, Bob Nelson once wrote, "Compensation is a right. Recognition is a gift." Organisations have to do more than issue salaries and wages to get the best effort from staff. There is nothing to stop an organisation from implementing an "Employee of the Month" incentive or some other form of recognition to motivate employees. Some private and public sector organisations promote this type of recognition on an ongoing basis with much success.

Reward

A large assortment of global research indicates that reward is the biggest motivator for an employee. There are managers who confuse reward with pay and feel the two are the same, failing to recognise the difference between the intrinsic value of wages and the extrinsic value of additional benefits and rewards. The employee perspective is that the reward has to be worth striving for or for it to be motivational. It must be granted that there are employees who are motivated by money to boost their performance and would prefer reward schemes like variable pay bonuses and performance linked benefits.

Conclusion

A practical approach to productivity suggests that it is about improving the efficiency of the organisation through the use of various motivational and human resource techniques. It is understood that if public employees are motivated and are accountable for what they do, productivity will be improved making way for an efficient and effective public service. We must understand that employee performance depends on both motivation and the ability of the employee. Productivity depends on employee performance. There is a wide gap between the way employees prefer to be recognised and rewarded and the way organisations like to reward and recognise. The Barbados Government has risen to the challenges posed by performance management in the public service, which includes projects like the Performance Review and Development System (PRDS), the Job Evaluation Exercise, the Revised Qualifications Order and the introduction of the computerised SmartStream human resource module. These projects deal with performance issues like recruitment, performance assessment, training, time and financial management.