

## Holistic Approach to Productivity

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### Abstract

Higher productivity is an important aspect of progress and growth at organizational as well as national level. At the organizational level, productivity is essential to profits and ultimately to the survival of the company. At the national level, productivity is the major source of improvement in the standard of living of the people. If the same efforts as before produce more things than it did earlier, it generates less starvation, more education, less disease and more leisure time among many other benefits. In a nutshell higher productivity means prosperity and peace for the people.

Many organizations have paid due attention to the sphere of productivity improvement and its related constructs, the emphasis being largely on optimizing resources like raw materials, technology, waste reduction, and minimizing rework, and reward schemes. Most organizations have developed ways and means to improve and measure productivity i.e. the efficiency and effectiveness with which a process converts inputs into outputs. Yet, organizations have failed to tap the productivity to its fullest possible extent. This shows that improvement in the external factors alone cannot enhance productivity unless and until shouldered by the most important aspect of productivity i.e. the human element. 'All business operations can be reduced to three words: People, Product and Profits. People come first. Unless you've got a good team, you can't do much with the other two.' --- Lee Lacocca (Waite 2009).

It has been studied that some sort of relationship does exist between an employee's performance and his mind-set i.e. his attitudinal and personality characteristics. The level of performance of a worker on a job is a direct outcome of his motivation to perform the job efficiently. In order to give a boost to productivity, most organizations do everything except changing the way of their employees work. It is important to understand that the measures to improve productivity are not the beginning point of productivity but the end result of one's productive attitude. Rather, productivity ends in optimization of optimization of resources and minimization of wastes, but it begins from within. Productivity lies, not so much in the outward things people do, but in what they inwardly are. Truly speaking, productivity is not an outer aspect of one's job but a true reflection of one's inner world. 'The greatest discovery of our generation is that human beings, by changing their attitudes, can change the outer aspects of their lives.' --- William James (Kalra 2010) Management must, therefore, run the company with the integrating force of a social organization, whereby every employee plays a participative and significant role in enhancing productivity. Productivity is not only a part of the job description of workers but it is something that must flow downwards from the upper and the middle management. If management is looking for an increase in the productivity, then it has to become a part of process itself. A mere directive or instructive will not produce the desired results.

Excellent companies treat 'human investment' – and not 'capital investment' – as the fundamental source of productivity improvement. Good management sees and treats every employee as a treasure chest of ideas, rather than just a tool of production in a pair of hands. Management must develop some means so as to lessen the feeling of 'low value job' among workers in order to boost their morale and consequently to raise their productivity. Periodical communication meetings and group discussions make an employee feel that he is performing an important task for the organization and ultimately for the nation.

**Key words:** Synergic-effect, Emotional-distress, Total Productivity, Empathizing

### 1. Introduction

Today, management experts are facing the great challenge of achieving the optimum level of productivity by way of introducing new work techniques, modern machines, different types of incentives to motivate employees, making structural changes in the organization. Yet, only a few organizations have tasted the sweet fruits of enhanced productivity on a sustained basis. A company today can no longer survive when run by a few people at the top, who do all the thinking. Now, organizations need to stimulate individual initiative, a sense of responsibility and commitment at all levels. If an organization is seeking unlimited growth, everyone must contribute. If organizations have to get the best from their business policies, market strategies, quality concerns, they all have to get the best from every person involved. Much emphasis has been laid on improving the external input, like raw materials, technology, working conditions, organizational structures, etc.

However, experience teaches that the success and growth of an organization is governed by the work-culture prevalent in the organization. The mind-set of employees has not been given its due place of importance. An organization cannot have high-producing machines without having high-producing employees. There is a need to look into this whole issue from a wider angle (Sirshree 2007).

Productivity is not a result just of instructions or exhortations. To be able to motivate employees to yield high productivity takes not just posters, incentives or threats. Productivity is the result of a turned-on mind-set. For sustained productivity, organizations ought to try and create the atmosphere for such a mind-set for their employees. Making this happen calls for a major shift in the very thought process of the employees. The organization that is able to do this, viz., inculcating productive attributes in its employees, is the one that will prosper and grow. The human mindset-productivity link needs to be explored further. The key to higher productivity is the 'inner attribute' that guides employees into a state of enkindled and energized being. This paper attempts to reveal such 'inner attributes' and will.

A person's performance is an index of his mind. Productivity is popularly known as an attitude of the mind that helps to innovate, improve, and perform better. It is the 'inner matter' that matters the most. Someone has rightly said: "without good people there is no business, and the business is only as good as the people it employs." The mind is the seat of self-motivation. The most important mental attributes detailed in the paper help in better performance and a higher level of contribution from the 'average' employee.

## **2. What is Productivity?**

Productivity, simply defined, means an increasingly efficient and effective use of the resources, i.e., capital, raw material, labor and technology. It is usually measured in the ratio of output to input. Productivity is a matter of the efficiency with which inputs are used to produce outputs. Efficiency is doing a thing right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing. And, productivity is doing both. The Japanese Productivity Centre defines productivity as follows: 'Above all else, productivity is an attitude of mind. It is mentally of progress of the constant improvement of that which exists. It is being able to do better today than yesterday. It is the will to improve on the present situation, no matter how good it may seem, no matter how good it may really be. It is the continual effort to try new methods and new ways; it is the faith in making progress each day. Productivity, in a nutshell, is belief in being the best.' (Sukh 2001) When you think you have done your best, remember: your best can always be bettered, for productivity is a race that has no finishing line. Productivity denotes a constant striving towards the most efficient mode of producing goods, services and commodities needed by society. It plays a crucial role in raising the living standard of the people and the economy of a nation. Productivity is an important tool for managing inflation by lowering the cost of goods and services needed by the people. In a nutshell higher productivity means prosperity and peace for the people.

## **3. Misconception about Productivity**

Some people believe that productivity means simply producing more or working harder. To them higher productivity means working within tight schedules, more stressful situations, working beyond office hours, working harder etc. This is not the true meaning of productivity. Productivity actually means 'producing more and/or better from less and less.' It means producing more and/or better in lesser time, with lesser money, with lesser effort and/or with lesser resources. Thus, for enhancing productivity, one strives to be more efficient and effective, not just working harder or being busy. There has been a growing awareness that productivity cannot be improved without improving the human element. Today, no organization can afford to think of enhancing productivity by disregarding the importance of the human mind-set. Productivity of an organization is governed by the inner attributes of its employees. It is necessary that all employees have those inner attributes that inspire them to remain productive because after all people are the most important asset of any organization. Every organization possesses its own work-culture. This culture comprises of attitudes, dominant beliefs and mental programs of its employees. It is to the extent that these attitudes, beliefs and values are widely adopted by the personnel of the organization that its culture would be considered healthy. As for productivity, it does not lie in any job as such. It lies rather in the person who holds the job.

## **4. Why Most Productivity Movements Fail**

Facts, however, do show that despite the widespread awareness as regards 'productivity movement,' organizations/employees fail to perform up to the expectations. As a matter of fact, real productivity does not come from the head but emerges from the heart. What is uttered from the heart alone succeeds in winning the hearts of others. This can be well understood from the example of habitual smokers. On every pack of cigarettes, it is clearly written, 'Cigarette smoking is injurious to health,' yet millions of people continue to smoke day-in and day-out. Somewhere, somehow, they have

developed the notion that it is not going to harm them or that it may not be true for them, though it may be true for others. There is a great deal of difference between being aware about something at the 'thought level' and feeling or realizing it at the 'gut level.' Research in psychology has proved that awareness at the 'thought level' alone doesn't bring about any change in the behavior of the person. It is only when one starts feeling or realizing the situation that one begins to change. Training programs and seminars to spread awareness about productivity mostly remain at the 'thought level' level. Employees, therefore, never feel the need to enhance productivity. An individual who thinks productivity is necessary keeps advising others to improve but the one who feels its necessity actually starts doing it and this is the difference. But the question is how to make employees feel about it. As the famous saying goes, 'Only the person whose shoe pinches can realize the pain.' If employees are to be made to feel the 'pinch,' the management must place the employees in their shoes. This is possible when the management involves the participation of its employees in the problem-solving and decision-making process at various levels. The best teacher in the world is one's own experience. Such an experience will make the employees feel the need to enhance productivity.

## **5. Motivation for Productivity**

Differences in the levels of performances among workers on the same job indicate that the performances level of a worker is a direct outcome of his motivation to perform the job efficiently. High productivity is the results of one's heightened level of motivation – the greater the motivation the higher the productivity and vice versa. And, one's motivation is governed by one's emotions. If we wish to improve productivity, it becomes necessary to understand the emotions that work behind people's motivation and to raise it to the level of passion for productivity. There are four types of emotion that motivate people to perform better in their actions. These are (Gaur 2012):

### **5.1. Fear**

Some people work out of fear and perform many of their jobs out of fear. The most common fears are: If I don't work I may be fired by my boss, I may be transferred, I may lose my job, I may be dropped from the promotion list, I may be punished, I may be sidelined, I may be ridiculed by others, I may not be able to face the management etc. No doubt, fear is a great motivator but it has many drawbacks. Fear generates negative stresses in the person who is experiencing it, which is detrimental to the person's health. As a result, the person's efficiency and productivity fall after a certain period of time. Another drawback is, because fear is an external source of motivation, people won't work if there is no fear. Such people, who work out of fear, give up control of their work to external factors. And yet, another drawback is that people, who work out of fear, work under a feeling of compulsion. The feeling that surfaces at the fear level is: I have to do this otherwise... Since people don't work out of free will, this motivational force is not very satisfying and fulfilling to the individual – hence the lowest level of motivation. 'When you can perform without fear, you are near real contentment.' --- Anonymous

### **5.2. Expectation**

The second level of motivation comes from expectation of returns or rewards. Some employees perform at their work place with all kinds of expectations in their mind, the most common being: If I work diligently, my boss will be pleased with me and I may get a reward – may be get promoted – perhaps be sent abroad – or my work will be better appreciated by the management – I might get an additional increment – etc. Expectation, like fear, is also a great motivator but, like fear, has many drawbacks, too. The focus is more on the 'returns' and 'rewards' rather than on the job itself. This somehow adversely affects productivity. And, in case one's expectations do not get fulfilled, productivity takes a nosedive. Similar to fear, expectation too is an external source of motivation. Such people won't work if there are no incentive promises by the management. The feeling that surfaces at the expectation level is the same as in the case of fear: I have to do this, otherwise... Since people work under the influence of greed of returns or favors, this motivational force is also not fully satisfying to the individual.

### **5.3. Sense of Duty**

The next level of motivation emerges from a sense of duty or a sense of responsibility. The feeling that is generated in this case is: I ought to do this. People under this category work because they feel something like this: the company pays me a salary; it is not good to waste time, it is my obligation to pay back, it is 'bad' to 'cheat' my employers, I ought to work for a full day because it is the honorable thing to do, if I don't work them I am not a 'good' guy, etc. No doubt, a sense of duty is a far more fulfilling motivator than fear and expectations. Yet, the person still performs under compulsion in this case. The compulsion comes from one's value system or moral values, imbibed from one's parents and elders during one's early childhood. Thus, there is a compulsion to 'obey' one's parents or elders in one's mind. It is the 'obey me' messages that make people feel their sense of duty or responsibilities. A sense of duty makes one feel as if one owes something to the organization or society – and one feels uncomfortable unless one pays back. This way, the person is again controlled by

external factors – through his sense of duty. The biggest drawback here is that one may put in one's time, energy and mind to perform – but not one's heart. It is a sense of duty that is 'dry', with no charm or passion in it. As such, a sense of duty is still a far cry from the highest and most fulfilling level of motivation. 'Duty is a task people look forward to with distaste, perform with reluctance, and brag about afterwards.' --- Anonymous (Sukh 2001)

#### **5.4. Passion for Productivity**

Here lies the answer to high productivity – sincere love for the job. The highest and most fulfilling level of motivation stems from a genuinely passionate love for the job. Such love inspires a different kind of behavior, far removed from fear, expectation and duty. In this case no harmful stresses are generated; there is no question of expectations not getting fulfilled, as there are no expectations on one's part. If one loves his job, he won't do it for anyone else. He does it because he loves to do it. As such the person enjoys his job – and one may thus have much higher chances of meeting success and satisfaction in it. One works to the best of one's capacity and capabilities – without getting tired or feeling any fatigue. The employee, who is fired with passion for his/her work, is seldom fired by the boss. Thus, love or passion for the job results in the highest level of productivity. Indeed, duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do the same things beautifully. Consequently, productivity emerges as a product of positive mental attitude and a heart full of love.

#### **6. Low Self-Esteem affects Productivity Adversely**

Psychologists have found that when a person does not value himself/herself, many aspects of life suffer. Losing sight of self-worth is very painful. If one does not value oneself, he or she will undermine his/her own ideas and actions, discount his/her own strong points, thereby making one less productive. As one becomes doubtful of one's ideas and actions, one stops projecting and/or implementing them. One feels as though one's ideas and actions are pointless and can thus make no headway in the task in hand.

People, who feel they are 'worthless' or 'do not matter', feel they have nothing to contribute they underestimate themselves and hold back from performing. One is likely to think: 'what difference will my ideas or actions make anyway?' It, then, becomes difficult for the person to concentrate, make decisions and solve problems. These aspects adversely affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the individual. Those with low degree of self esteem give up easily and settle for much less as compared to their true potential. In fact, it is pride that makes us do things well – and makes us do them to perfection, ultimately.

It is an irony of fate that a majority of people adopt the 'somehow do the job' policy, a philosophy that may appear attractive initially but which is bound to produce poor quality products, systems and services. Poor performance, recurrent failure and rework, maintenance problems, loss of precious man-hours, money and other resources are some the major setbacks arising out of the adoption of such a policy, ultimately leading to poor productivity.

Organizations interested in enhancing their productivity must, therefore, generate a healthy perception of any given job in the eyes of their employees, a perception that would, in turn, instill a sense of pride in the employees. Valuing one's job will help one to enhance one's performance on a secure foundation. They should make it amply clear to their employees as to how their efforts are serving in building a wealthy and healthy society and nation. Finally, regardless of the company you work with; remember that the most important product you are selling is yourself. When self-dignity is born within, life begins to change for the better. Valuing oneself forms the deepest and most 'hidden' dimension of one's attitude. (Gaur 2012)

#### **7. Characteristics of a self-starter**

There are two types of people: the first types are the ones who take initiative on their own and the other types are those who need to be driven by others. It is the self-driven or the prime-mover type of people who make productivity happen. A self-starter has three distinctive characteristics (Sukh 2001):

1. Owning responsibility
2. Taking the initiative
3. Working with perseverance

##### **7.1 Owning Responsibility**

Expecting someone else to take care of things, stops one from taking due action. Excuses actually are roadblocks to action. One should own the responsibility to keep things moving. The messenger is clear: Being a self-starter means owning full responsibility rather than leaving it to others. Whatever may be the work-blocks, it is up to you to remove them. If you do

not, you may be perceived as a block yourself. ‘Where the willingness is great, the difficulties cannot be great.’ --- Niccolo Machiavelli

### **7.2 Taking initiative and action**

There are always two options available in any given situation: Leave it to others and wait for things to happen. Or make things happen. In the first case, the chances of success are rather remote, whereas in the second, the chances of things happening are manifold. Self-starters prefer to choose the latter option. They realize that things do not turn up in this world until someone turns them up. So they take the initiative to improve productivity in their area of work. Self-starters believe in being pro-active. ‘I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do something I can do.’ --- Helen Keller

### **7.3 Perseverance**

‘Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated failures. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.’ --- Calvin Coolidge. In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the steam always wins – not by strength but through perseverance. Great success does not lie in never falling but in rising every time you fall. Yes, as the popular song goes: If at first you don't succeed, try, try, and try again! Taking on responsibility and initiative does not mean that one should not delegate work to others. No, it is not like that. The person who dares to own responsibility, duly delegates work to others, yet keeps track of its progress through his own persevering efforts because he knows that things need to be chased after, monitored closely and prodded on. One realizes that great tasks are performed not merely by taking the initiative but through unwavering perseverance. A self-starting quality also calls for hanging on long after others have let go. The secret of success is to move and to keep moving.

## **8. How to Kindle Creativity**

As productivity is an adventurous journey, calling for enormous experimentation on the part of employees, management must encourage risk-taking. It must reward successes but must overlook failures at the same time to encourage ‘risk-taking’ behavior. Management of companies whose hallmark is excellence know how to hold the reins of the organization in their hands – not so tight that employees can't be creative; and not so loose, either, that things go out of control. They wisely encourage ‘risk-taking’ and support the generation of good ideas. It is often rightly said: “Do not judge those who try and fail. Judge only those who fail to try.”

Management must stimulate creative thinking among its employees in order to enrich work with vibrant creativity. Creativity is not a trait that is found in a select few; it is there in everyone. However, some are found to be more creative than others. Creativity stems from encouragement, appreciation and an environment where mistakes and failures are accepted as part of the job. The best way to manage creativity is not to manage it at all – just let it happen freely. There can be employees in the organization having good ideas but who may not be able to express or present them effectively. Management must help such employees, and in the process let the employee take full credit for their ideas.

Creativity is not a trait that is found in a select few; it is there in everyone. However, some are known to be more creative than others. Creativity should be practiced more often in work situations. A lot of imagination should be used in search of alternative systems, procedures, material, layout, etc. Here are some guidelines for improving creativity:

- The key-words for a creative person would be: adapt, include, delete, use, change, substitute, combine, reverse, better, different, who, what, when, where, how, why, etc.
- Feel free to ask questions even at the cost of sounding ignorant.
- Never check or control your impulses. Set yourself free from the routine way of thinking.
- While attempting to arouse your creativity, do not be disheartened if no new ideas come to your mind initially. Creative people can face dry weather sometimes, i.e., go on for days without experiencing any bright sparks.
- Crazy ideas are not always necessarily impractical. In fact, most creative ideas may not even seem practical at the outset but may be worth looking into.
- Keep in touch with your customers. Your customers are the best source of creative ideas. Hidden in their needs and problems are the seeds of your ideas. Never drop an idea if you feel it is not appropriate at any given moment. There could be a time in the near future when you could en-cash on it.

Creative minds have the knack of looking at everyday things – things that most people would take for granted – from

constantly changing new angles. There is always a sense of curiosity and wonder at even the most mundane objects.

### **9. How 'Emotional Distress' Affects Productivity**

A high degree of anxiety leads to fear, frustration and withdrawal among employees, thus reducing their productivity efficiency, even rendering them dysfunctional. Employees, who cannot manage their negative emotions, eventually become frustrated. Those who are anxious, angry, or depressed, do not even take in information accurately or deal with it efficiently. They are unable to maintain their performance, thus ultimately reducing their level of productivity. A gloomy personality never produces bright results! On the other hand, productivity champions are known to have the ability to keep themselves motivated to pursue their targets relentlessly, even in the face of setbacks. The measures in which our emotions enhance our ability to think, plan, act and solve problems determine the degree of our output. Hence, the ability to handle one's emotions and keep oneself motivated profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them. In a nutshell, one's productivity is a sheer reflection of one's motivational level.

### **10. Creating a Synergic Effect**

In order to promote productivity, the emphasis must shift from individual excellence towards effective team work. One way of encouraging such team work is the formation of cross-functional teams – with the customer as the main focus. Looking to the cut-throat competition everywhere, employees need to upgrade their work methods, as also technical and managerial skills in order to keep themselves 'fit' to face the challenges. Organizations must sow the seeds of an individual's developmental progress and continue to nurture the sapling that will bear fruit in the years to come. "God gives the nuts, but He does not crack them."

The inner attributes helps in improving productivity at the individual level. But an organization is not an individual. Organizational productivity is a complex process; as such, it is difficult for anyone to do it all alone. All productivity oriented manager would know that he is not supposed to have the answer to all the problems – at some stage or the other; he has to rely upon others for solutions. Hence, there is a need for teamwork. Teamwork is a major source for effecting quantum improvement. In an organization, each individual may be an excellent productivity 'player' but when it comes to team play; the whole team can feel as if it is in shreds. A well-knit team is not only a source of high productivity but also that of immense pleasure. Productivity champions, therefore, realize the need for building strong teams. They also know how to build one (Morrison 1999):

- a) Allowing others to be themselves
- b) Handling others' negative emotions effectively
- c) Empathizing with others
- d) Co-operating with others

It is important to know some basic guidelines for building a team with sound inter-personal relationships. The following guidelines can be taken as a foundation upon which a well-knit team can be built:

1. Democratic behavior should replace autocratic behavior.
2. Consider every individual an important member of the team.
3. Individual's creativity must find a place in work area instead of slavish compliance to organizational rules and precedents.
4. Every employee is to be trusted.
5. Every member is to be fully informed.
6. Everyone's problems must be paid due attention.
7. Encourage authentic behavior of juniors and subordinates.
8. Freedom of working and decision-making must shift to employees down the line.
9. Team spirit and holistic approach must be suitably rewarded.

Many people fail to grasp the very concept of productivity in the sense that productivity does not mean just the improvement of one's own division of department, but that of the whole organization or the nation. Many sections or units use productivity as a means for advancing their own profitability rather than for the overall betterment of the organization itself. For them, the individual division's profit is the only guiding principle, if there must be a principle at all. There is much confusion between 'departmental' or 'divisional' productivity and 'organizational' productivity. If it may be pointed out, each is quite different from the other. A department or division may gain but, in the long run, the organization may lose. Unless there is some substantial gain or benefit to the organization or to the nation, it cannot be termed as productivity improvement. Productivity in reality ought to be holistic in approach, rather than individualistic. The individualistic

approach is "I take care of my department, you take care of yours." And the holistic approach is, "Let us take care of the organization". In the individualistic approach, self-interest or department's interests are uppermost in one's mind, whereas in the holistic approach 'organizational interests' are of paramount importance. Productivity champions forego short-term benefits in order to achieve long-term returns.

## 11. Conclusion

In an age of increasing globalization, developing nations have to upgrade their skills very quickly to 'play in the game.' The world today is characterized by constant and rapid change. In such a competitive world, when the very survival of an organization is at stake, higher productivity provides the answer. Productivity, simply defined, means an increasingly efficient and effective use of the resources i.e. capital, raw materials, labor and technology. Some people believe that productivity means producing more or working harder. To them higher productivity means working within tight schedules, more stressful situations, working beyond office hours, working harder etc. But this is not true. Productivity actually means producing more and/or better from less and less time, money, effort and with fewer resources. Thus, for enhancing productivity, one strives to be more efficient and effective, not just working harder or being busy.

As is clearly evident, the role of an employee in an organization is pivotal. This cannot be replaced by any kind of technology, method, system or resources. The non-performance of employees can lead to disaster whereas quality performance to the sweet fruits of productivity. Organizations are consequently required to adopt a totally integrated and holistic approach to productivity movement. The real challenge before the organizations today is not the acquisition of newer technologies or machines but the development of a new and different kind of manpower – manpower that knows how to function effectively and efficiently so as to achieve the ultimate goal i.e. higher productivity which in turn lead to the creation of national wealth. Productivity should lead to the creation of national wealth. Productivity can no more be perceived in a piecemeal manner. It has become necessary to make a conceptual breakthrough via the promotion of a 'Total Productivity' concept, covering the whole organization, the nation and humankind. Productivity is to be seen as a way of life for the benefit of society as a whole. For productivity champions, prosperity and betterment of human life becomes the ultimate goal. They endeavor to fulfill man's most noble task, i.e., to create a world of happiness and prosperity for all. That indeed is the ultimate objective of productivity improvement.

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## Bibliographical Notes

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