



Maintaining employees' productivity levels at work can be a challenging issue in organisations. What are the causes of these roadblocks and how can employers overcome them? **HRM** finds out



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Employee productivity is one of the key factors that contributes to an organisation's success.

Inevitably, employers want to get the most from their employees.

However, despite having a positive working environment and competitive salaries, workers may still find themselves in trouble when it comes to delivering high

productivity levels throughout the work day.

According to the 2015 *Work Management Survey*, 33% of employees feel "very productive" on a daily

basis, while 54% stated they felt only “somewhat” productive.

“There is no denying that all of us are in pursuit of instant gratification in our daily transactional activities,” says Christina Ho, Head of Executive Development Services, Marketing Institute of Singapore (MIS).

“This puts constant pressure on companies, as well as employees, to reinvent work processes and get more from the same amount of resources in shorter periods of time.”

“Being productive is essential to get things done faster, better and smarter, and to meet the the demands and increased expectations of customers.”

On a personal level, Alex Linh, Professional Certified Coach, Executive Coach International, notes that productivity reflects an individual’s fulfillment and job interest.

“If the job gives enough values and learning, employee productivity goes up as a reflection of their interest and creativity in the job,” says Linh.

On a smaller scale, productivity reflects how well a team works together and how well they are managed.

“Productivity becomes the best indicator for effectiveness and workability among team members,” he says.

Productivity roadblocks

Having too many different responsibilities was listed as the top factor that derails an employee’s productivity at work.

This was a key finding from the same survey by Wrike, which saw 60% of employee respondents stating this reason.

Other contributing factors also included the rate of workflow (49%), e-mail responses (40%), unclear priorities (31%) and procrastination (30%).

Gathering from his experience, Linh says there are three predominant reasons that affect an employee’s productivity.

The first is a non-conducive workplace. “The physical environment where one works determines a lot about their productivity. It is similar to a person hiding in a cave at work where one is comfortable enough to give their best,” he shares.

“Messy, noisy, intrusive workplaces and tense social environments can become a great distraction that reduce an employee’s productivity.”

Bad management was also identified as a key cause.

“Every management style has its own shortfall,” he explains.

“Hence, it is essential to recognise and work on your own management style accordingly.”

Additionally, individual job scopes can also pose some problems for certain staff.

“Too narrow a job scope does not allow an employee to learn and grow,” Linh says.

“Too big a job scope will overwhelm an employee.”

Ho has a different perspective.

According to her, the many

factors that drive productivity can be categorised into “company-driven” and “employee-led”.

“Through our many projects working with numerous companies, we realised that the root causes are usually weak corporate cultures, poor technology infrastructures, and more importantly, a mismatch of an employee’s skillsets to the tasks on hand,” she explains.

“These factors reinforced each other, which led to poor performances and a lack of motivation among the employees.”

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Source: Survey by Wrike

Who is your source of motivation ?

Seventy-five percent of employees who have a “best friend” at work believe they are able to take anything on, a survey by O.C. Tanner Institute has found.

This is in comparison to 58% of those who do not have a good friend at work.

In fact, 72% who have someone they connect with at work are more satisfied with their jobs than those who don’t.

According to the report, millennials are most prone to feel this way when compared to other generations in the workforce.

“Having a best friend at work is indicative of a larger social wellbeing,” said Gary Beckstrand, Vice President of the O.C. Tanner Institute.

“That wellbeing means you’re having mostly positive interactions with other people and often relate to subjects that are not.”

“In turn, it helps to relax work environments and make the job more fun, even when tasks get stressful.”

Steering progression

Aside from boosting functional competencies and skillsets, the courses at MIS seek to instill mindset and behavioural changes in employees.

Some of the institute’s programmes include courses that target increasing sales productivity and performance, speed thinking, time and stress management, as well as knowledge management strategies for increasing organisational performance.

MIS also takes an individual’s career development into account.

It offers personal leadership programmes where participants are coached on how to motivate themselves and others to reach peak performance.

“By providing tips, tools and templates which are practical and easy to apply, participants are able to experience positive results immediately,” Ho explains.

“This ‘instant gratification’ reinforces the change in the employee’s behaviour and mindset for continuous improvement – a mutually beneficial and rewarding outcome for the company and the employee.”

Executive Coach International, takes on a different approach.

Training and workshops there are customised according to the different group sizes in a bid to enhance communication, leadership skills and self-direction.

They also offer one-on-one coaching sessions which are catered to individuals who have a clear picture on their required areas of improvement.

Executive Coach International also implements the “Courage to Create” programme. This is conducted in a group setting that allows individuals to understand their own values better.

Monitoring productivity

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to measuring productivity, as employees are engaged in performing different functions and activities with various levels of complexities.

This is a key point Ho stresses upon.

“The conventional methods of monitoring productivity through the use of key performance indicators are no longer sufficient, while 360° appraisal systems are proving to be more resource-exhaustive than is worthwhile for their purpose,” she says.

“If it is not executed properly, the latter can do more harm than good.”

“Performance indicators need to be simplified, yet kept robust enough to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of employees’ multi-dimensional skills across the entire value-chain.”

One of the strategies which companies can adopt – in addition to

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what they already have – is employee engagement strategies, she adds.

Aside from key performance indicators that are measured at the individual-contribution level, companies are advised to take a step further in assessing the engagement level of their employees.

In this way, highly-engaged employees are more motivated to seek ways to raise productivity, value-add to their jobs, and align themselves to

achieve business goals.

Linh suggests employers should be more open to direct communication.

This can come in the form of checking in with employees and asking them how well they are doing in their jobs.

“Ask your employee how they are and they will give you the most honest feedback about their productivity and enhance good relationships and positive behaviours at work,” he shares.

Companies are also advised to measure each employee’s individual skill set.

They can do so by creating an objective scale that allows them to understand how an employee is moving and growing in their role.

“Assessing their learning and skill sets allows managers to understand what motivates individuals in the team and their commitment to the job and the organisation,” he adds.

Additionally, Linh emphasises on the importance of keeping track of traditional performance indicators.

“At end of the day, it is still about getting the job done,” he concludes.

“If your employee constantly does not hit their targets, you have a huge problem to handle.”

Perks of a mobile workforce

Workers that don’t need an office to get their work done are usually more productive.

According to a survey by Workmobile, 72% of workers have claimed to be more productive when working mobile.

Fifty-two percent of companies confirmed that this approach has improved their workforce’s productivity.

However, working mobile does not mean working less.

Some 63% of respondents claimed that this meant longer working hours although 26% said they did not mind the overtime.