Building the Muscles of Your Workforce

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Running improvement projects in a wide variety of service organisations over the last couple of years, I had to relearn what I thought I had a good grasp of already. I had to restudy the basic drivers of productivity. Yes, productivity can certainly be driven by process changes. Yes, IT can help to boost it even further. However, people often greatly underestimate an important source of productivity that is frequently left untapped – humans. It is not about making your staff run faster to produce more in a certain amount of time. Rather, it is about what your team members do in that same amount of time.

Only 57% Spent on Core Activities

An analysis of the working pattern of a group of scientists in a lab revealed that they spend only 57% of their working hours on what they are hired for. If they would not work overtime to catch up with their core work, this percentage would be drastically lower. What do they do the rest of the time? Time study showed that they spend 18% of their time on secondary activities, i.e. support activities that are crucial to the core analysis work but could be done by someone less qualified. The remaining 25% is spent on administrative activities that could be done by someone you can hire from the next bus stop.

After introducing a small admin team and some job redesigning activities, scientists gained time to catch up with their work and deliver higher customer satisfaction. Greater motivation was a side-effect, too.

Team of Four Delivers Job of 1.6 FTE

A team of four officers who process applications were surprised to see the result of their process map: They actually spend only 1.6 FTE (Full Time Equivalent = workforce of one full-time staff) altogether on their core activity – processing applications. Sure, they have other important things to do. Looking deeper into the balance of 2.4 FTE, they discovered – supposedly similar to any other organisation – that a significant portion of their non-value-added time is spent in meetings. Often, all of them participate in the same meeting. This happens multiple times a week.

If each of them would only dedicate 10% more time on core activities by cutting down one to two meetings a week, they would together generate 2.0 FTE manpower, i.e. equivalent to one more person with the same working pattern.

Conclusion

Driving productivity is and will always be each manager's task. Before investing in IT solutions, redesigning processes or even hiring more staff, it may pay off to look into redesigning jobs after carefully analysing what your team members do with their time.

As a result you will gain productivity by enabling your workforce to add more value to your customers and your organisation.