

Chasing Productivity...

It's a marathon, not a sprint

We live in interesting times. The UK's departure from the European Union has bought us political upheaval and a great deal of economic uncertainty. It's also created many practical concerns to businesses at a time when we had begun to trumpet progress and future prospects for initiatives such as big data and analytics.

Business is being more cautious about large business transformation initiatives while at the same time shoring up business resilience by chasing productivity.

Should we be chasing productivity though?

Should we be chasing stability first, and have we forgotten about chasing the sustainment of productivity?

For a lot of companies' chasing productivity, means doing more in the same amount of time. This can lead to a variety of short term behaviours for example:

- Tying productivity directly to compensation
- Driving time management and focusing only on priorities and not responding to the immediate, such as emails and voicemails
- Increasing the working day, i.e. starting early and finishing late
- Driving waste out of processes
- Setting deadlines to focus on completing activities

These behaviours might be effective in increasing productivity in the short run, but are they lasting solutions?

Will these productivity improvements affect the business bottom line? And in the long term will they continue to drive productivity, or will we revert to our norms?

Productivity is all about working steadily towards a goal and not about burning out, if we focus our efforts in the right places we will get a better return on our efforts.

So, how do we realise benefits whilst sustaining best practice?

For any of the above techniques to work and deliver lasting benefits, firstly we need to understand our business and have stability in the way we work.



Dependant on the nature of your business or the processes you are looking at, stability could be defined in the following ways:

At a business level you might look at an Operational Excellence model with clearly defined vision and values to focus your efforts on and drive sustainability. You may take the Value Chain approach to look across your business activities define the current processes and focus sustainable improvements to benefit the entire value chain.

At a functional level you may look at Process Mapping, A3's and SIPOC Analysis to understand and define a common way of working before applying a Value challenge to drive efficiency and creating new processes with the appropriate controls to imbed sustainment.

At a project level you could look to Collaborative planning to create stability and then drive efficiency through collaborative programme challenge and the application of production control techniques to realise the benefits.

Conclusion

All too often, and with the best of intentions, we try to take 'short cuts' in the process of driving productivity. Yes, this may well yield some results, but only in the short term. We shouldn't therefore, be surprised when improvements diminish over time and fail to lead to cultural change.

Perhaps, if we start by creating stability and then apply the appropriate rigor to improvements during the process long term benefits will be achieved.

If you have a question about Lean or Six Sigma, or if you're looking for support with a specific situation, or maybe you'd like to develop your own coaching/mentoring skills – feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at info@bourton.co.uk.