

Editorial

Do-it-yourself productivity

Everyone agrees that increasing productivity is the only real way to beat inflation. Few stop to examine how to increase *their own* productivity, or even pause to define the very meaning of productivity in their own work and lives. Managers are no different in this respect, but their failing is more blameworthy because managers define their function to include maximizing efficient utilization of scarce resources.

The middle manager (most of us) must consider the problem of managerial productivity in two contexts. First, from above: How does the attitude of top management (reflected in corporate policy on recognition and compensation) destroy the incentives of the middle manager to be more productive? Second, from below: How do the middle manager's own attitudes inhibit and limit the productivity of those under his span of control?

In short, I believe that we must tackle the problem of managerial productivity by examining ourselves and the reward system in which we operate: How are we 'incentivized' and how do we 'incentivize' others? We must begin by recognizing that productivity is not a thing but a way in which people behave ... or fail to behave. The root of the problem is quite trivial, almost tautological. Productivity is falling because people are not rewarded for their productivity but for their unproductivity. People increase their share of the pie not by providing goods and services but by withholding goods and services. The surest road to penury for an individual or an industry is to produce, freely and unstintingly. To make more money, you limit production: organize strikes, cartels, trade and professional groups, unions, etc. The suppliers of goods and services (including labor) are better organized than the consumers of these goods and services. Manipulation of the supply side has been largely successful. More and more players are learning that the way to win is by balking, extortion, and sabotage.

Whatever true commitment to productivity remains is found largely outside the workplace and the marketplace. Each of us can look at his own life and see which hours are actually spent productively and which are not. Then compare this reality to the social reality: which hours are deemed worthy of compensation ('billable' to society) and which are considered as 'squandered' on leisure. In a given social context, certain activities earn us the right to other activities, but it's quite arbitrary which is which. It's curious that if I go to the office and spend a day talking on the phone to one client, take another to lunch, and in the afternoon run my computer awhile, that's considered productive. But if I stay home, sweep the floor, polish my shoes, and paint the bathroom, that's not considered productive.

It is within the constraint of these attitudes that the problem of managerial productivity must be analyzed, from above and below. From above, managers are judged on appearance and style, rather than on the nature of their actual output. Real contributions go unrecognized and become invisible. Form is everything. Content is nothing. The facade of observing business protocol and jockeying for position takes all the manager's time. An insidious distinction is created between working and managing. And a good manager would not be caught dead working. He knows where the real payoff comes from in modern society.

Increasing productivity seems to mean that somebody will be working harder, which is fine as long as that somebody is somebody else. Therefore, the manager is amenable, even enthusiastic, when it's a question of improving the productivity of his line or staff workers. But try and get him discuss *his own* productivity. He will send secretaries to learn the latest in word processors but will sabotage the potential of the electric office by refusing to learn to operate the machines himself. Management is words, whether written or spoken: the right words in the right order. Increasing managerial productivity means

getting the right words (and numbers) in the right order faster. It is clear that automation can eliminate the traditional clerical and secretarial roles with their drudgery, monotony and subjugation. It is clear that using a human being in a mechanical fashion is grossly inefficient, aside from questions of social equity. It is clear that only when the manager personally masters the technology himself that the man/machine interface achieves fullest integration. It is clear that a truly efficient managerial office would be one staffed almost entirely by professionals with little or no 'support personnel'.

Why then do managers balk? Because it's beneath their dignity to be seen in front of a typewriter or anything that looks like a typewriter. Prestige and status first, profits and productivity second. The truth is that managers care more about massaging their own egos than making money. By putting their own comfort factor ahead of productivity, they have undermined the managerial system they claim to support.

The solution to the bottleneck in managerial productivity will come only with humility on the part of

managers. They must gain a willingness to work *and* manage in a truly collegial atmosphere, utterly devoid to the subjugation and hierarchial tyranny that characterizes most managerial environments today. What will induce management, especially top management, to make these changes? Not an appeal to their better nature or even their good business sense. Pleas for change fall on the deaf ears of the privileged. Fear is the only motivator. Arouse their fear for their own survival and then they will listen.

The message is this: in the new technology, there are few economies or diseconomies of scale. In any industry with reasonable ease of access, new firms built from the ground up according to the new principles will spring forth and attack the market shares of old-line firms sticking to unproductive and inefficient methods. No firm, however successful today, or how secure its niche, has a lock on the future. The competitive pressure of a free market, given time, will sweep clean.

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