



Creating a Culture of Productivity

Do you and your organization possess these six crucial attributes?

By Eric Bloom

What does productivity mean to you? To many, it means more time, money, and resources to get other things done. For example, if you have five people working on a task and can find a way to complete it using only four people, you can have the fifth person working on something else. Productivity is the art of doing more with what you have at your disposal.

Make no mistake, productivity requires change. If your organization views the ability to change as an important attribute, then ongoing productivity improvement is likely. If your organization is set in its ways, refuses to streamline its processes, and shuns innovation, then productivity improvement isn't required. Given today's environment, an organization that doesn't progress will soon stagger under its own weight and fade away. Conversely, an internal culture that continually strives for optimal efficiency positions the organization for future growth and success.

There are six cultural attributes needed to give your organization the ability to accept the small and sometimes large changes that productivity enhancements require.

“An organization that doesn't progress will soon stagger under its own weight.”

1. Cultural Awareness

One of the most important traits of people leading the productivity charge is cultural awareness. This is the ability to understand how your organization gets things done – its strengths, weaknesses, internal politics, and idiosyncrasies. To make matters more complicated, organizations have multiple cultures, called subcultures. For example, the Help Desk may have a different internal culture than Software Development. It's essential to be aware of these subtle variations.

Before moving forward with a productivity initiative, ask yourself: “Does this organizational change require cultural change first?” The answer may be yes or may be no; it will depend if the changes being made are aligned and consistent with the current organizational culture.

2. Innovative Mindset

Innovative opportunities to enhance productivity come in many forms. Such options include the successful creation, implementation, reuse, or improvement of existing processes. Finding these creative solutions requires a willingness to look at your existing operational processes with a critical eye – even if you were the one who originally designed them. Only by thinking about your processes from different perspectives can you improve them.

3. Management Focus

Like all organizational initiatives, productivity-related projects must have management support. If not, they most likely won't get funded. If they do get funded, they'll eventually wither on the vine. If you're the project's executive champion, great! If not, you must find such a champion – someone who can provide the resources and political clout needed to move your productivity innovation from idea to ongoing practice.

4. Employee Communication

Virtually all productivity enhancements are a form of change. Communicate this change to those affected by it in the following ways:

- **Be clear in your own mind** about what you want to say.
- **Be consistent over time** in your messaging.
- **Be aware that varying audiences** have different needs and worries.
- **Explain your rationale** so that listeners can relate to the issue.
- **Remember that people are persuaded more** by the human, emotional dimension than statistical facts.
- **Show your enthusiasm!** Your passion has the potential to create similar feelings in your listeners.

5. Self & Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is born through a combination of formalized education and experience, both of which are driven (or suppressed) by the organization's internal culture. Educationally, different employees need different types of training in order to grow. Technologists need to learn new technologies. Senior executives need to keep abreast of trends and best practices. All employees need to maximize their interpersonal abilities, business proficiency, and emotional intelligence. These skills collectively help employees identify organizational efficiencies and find ways to streamline processes for more effectiveness.

Professional curiosity causes people to be introspective and also more aware of their external environment. They ask, "How can I improve?" and, "What can I learn from my surroundings that can move my organization forward?" Both questions lead to innovative thought and help drive productivity.

6. Conflict Resolution

Productivity drives change, and change drives conflict. The ability to resolve this conflict helps facilitate change, which in turn, drives productivity. Your personal and organizational ability to deal effectively with conflict can make or break your ability to enhance organizational productivity.

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If your project is being slowed or stopped by a specific individual, remember that 99% of the time people aren't against you, they're for themselves. This means that if you can understand the reason behind someone's objections, you can very often turn a presumed adversary into an ally.

Step into the Future

When you gain an understanding of your organization's internal culture with respect to these six cultural attributes, you can enhance your entire organization's productivity. With this knowledge in hand, analyze the impact these factors are having on your organization's ability to foster innovation, communicate internally, expand knowledge, and implement change. Devise a plan to slowly move toward a true productivity culture. This culture, in turn, will be your steppingstone toward continuous improvement, change management, and the bounty of resources your organization needs to grow and prosper. 

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Don't miss the next in our series on productivity, ***Accomplish More by Climbing the Productivity Pyramid***, coming up in our next issue.

Nurture These Traits in Yourself & Your Organization

For more on the six essential attributes, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Eight Steps to Managing Conflict (Vol. 20, No. 4)

Not Taught in Business Schools: How to Cultivate Creative Leading (Vol. 24, No. 5)

Take Your Training into Your Hands (Vol. 29, No. 6)

Creating a Climate for Innovation (Vol. 29, No. 4)

How Do Effective Nonprofit Leaders Communicate? (Vol. 13, No. 1)

Organizational Culture: It's in the Walk, Not Just the Talk (Vol. 29, No. 6)