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## Feature

### Barriers to productivity

*Vinita Gupta focusses on some of the common problems that prevent optimum workforce performance and the efforts being made by organisations to tackle these issues.*

A company's success is visible in its annual revenue figures, which also shows the dedication with which its employees work. To get the best from one's employees it is important for them to be a happy workforce in order to perform well. However, it is not easy to achieve optimum productivity as there are various factors that act as hurdles for an employee to give his best. It is therefore essential for the management and the HR to locate these barriers and remove them as soon as possible.



Some of the barriers to productivity are: lack of trust among employees for exceeding the productivity targets; lack of co-ordination, cooperation/ communication among the employees and the management; improper training and infrastructural problems like out-of-date tools/equipment.



"If people do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and roles, they end up doing each other's jobs leading to a lack of accountability"

- Sowjanya Reddy  
VP-HR  
Microland

Sowjanya Reddy, VP-HR, Microland, believes that the biggest barriers to productivity are a lack of vision or business direction, role clarity and poor infrastructure. She adds, "If people within the organisation do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, they end up doing each other's jobs leading to a lack of accountability. With no clear business direction, they do not understand what the bigger picture is and how they can contribute to it."

Satish Venkatachaliah, VP-HR, SAP Labs India feels that lack of communication, especially when it comes to expectations setting, shortage of relevant skill sets, cross-cultural barriers, work-life imbalance and inability to draw parallels between the organisational and self goals hamper an employee's productivity at the workplace.

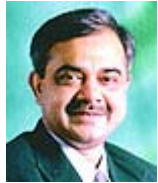
According to him, in absence of these, it becomes difficult for employees to comprehend how their efforts will contribute to the larger cause of the organisation and vice versa, resulting in a decline in productivity levels. He says, "We at SAP Labs India strive hard to keep the quotient of these barriers at the minimum possible level by constantly engaging with our employees, helping



"Lack of communication and the inability to draw parallels between self and organisational goals hamper an employee's productivity"

them overcome the problems and taking their feedback into serious consideration to make our company a better place to work.”

- Satish Venkatachaliah  
VP-HR  
SAP Labs India



“The foremost barrier to productivity is poor implementation of strategies and improper productivity measurement”

- Surender Jeet Raj  
VP-HR  
Newgen Software Technologies

Surender Jeet Raj, Vice-president, HR, **Newgen Software Technologies** points out that the foremost barrier to productivity is poor implementation of strategies and improper productivity measurement.

### Addressing the problem

Different organisations have different approaches to understanding and tackling issues that hamper productivity, such as conducting employee satisfaction or engagement surveys for identifying the problems. At Microland, employee satisfaction surveys are conducted every six months to gauge the barriers that could be a hindrance to their productivity. They organise regular surveys to understand what employees think and feel about the company. Reddy says, “We analyse the data of the survey and then identify the issues, find solutions and put a corrective action plan in place. We communicate the survey findings to our employees and involve them in finding solutions.”

At Microland, each business unit has an HR manager to ensure that they have a finger on the pulse of the employees within each line of business. They regularly analyse exit interview feedback and take appropriate action.

SAP Labs India conducts an employee engagement survey every year to gauge the barriers that could be a hindrance to their employees’ productivity. “It gives us a broad perspective of issues faced by our employees and helps us come up with solutions to address the same,” says Venkatachaliah. He further adds, “For a micro level of understanding, we engage deeply with as many employees as possible to understand their concerns and take feedback from their line managers to address the need gaps, if any. Both these combined, gives us a good understanding of the problems faced by our employees and how best to reduce them.”

For instance, at **Newgen Software** the company has a performance measurement system, which enables the appraiser (team leader/HR manager) and the team members to jointly set performance standard and assessment parameters. It urges the employee to take ownership of his/her performance. Raj adds, “We use feedbacks and reports of the above mentioned systems, conduct management audit, project reviews and set task forces/committees on regular basis to check and control the barriers to productivity.”

### An engaged employee

An engaged employee who believes in the systems and values of the company is likely to be much more productive in comparison to others. In fact, he generates positive energy at the workplace. Reddy says, “As part of the performance management process, a manager needs to look at where an employee is in terms of technical, functional and leadership competencies required in the current role or the next level role. By identifying the gaps and developing a plan to bridge these handicaps, employees will be engaged in their career growth.”

Reddy feels that to ensure that employees are engaged, they need to be given learning opportunities, not just in the current role, but in the role that they aspire to be in. Their managers must outline how the company as well as they themselves can enable the employee to reach the aspired position.

Microland has aspiration discussions that has to be documented as part of the performance evaluation process. This information is then utilised to create career plans. Raj agrees that employee satisfaction has an impact on productivity. He says, "If employees in an organisation feel committed to their job and take their responsibilities seriously, their engagement in the organisation is high. They can see themselves as adding value to the company and to its clients and receive appropriate appreciation from their superiors. All these factors result into high motivation of the employees and in turn leads to greater productivity."

Venkatachaliah agrees that a company needs to map the skill sets of its employees against the present and future need gaps and train them accordingly. A mismatch in doing so can have serious implications on the growth of the organisation as well as the employee. He adds, "Active employee engagement helps in laying the foundation of a more productive employer-employee relationship that goes a long way in achieving collective goals."

SAP Labs India holds discussions on aspirations of employees and documents them as part of the performance evaluation process/development. This information is then utilised to create career plans.

<b>What handicaps performance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Poor business strategies</li><li>● Lack of trust in employees for exceeding the productivity targets</li><li>● Lack of vision or business direction</li><li>● Lack of coordination, cooperation/communication between an employee and the management</li><li>● Lack of relevant skill sets</li><li>● Improper training</li><li>● Improper infrastructure</li><li>● Unsatisfied employee</li></ul>

### **Infrastructure management**

Apart from the above mentioned issues, workplace infrastructure also has impact on employee productivity and hence most organisations are investing in ergonomically designed interiors that enhance employee performance. SAP Labs India provides employees infrastructure that can help them continue their work optimally. Their campus building has been designed in a way that allows maximum usage of natural lighting to keep the stress level down and water fountains have been placed to create a soothing effect.

Venkatachaliah believes it is more about addressing the softer/human aspect of those barriers that can bring a difference in an employee's productivity levels.

Reddy adds, "The lack of infrastructure and automation will hamper productivity. For example, if you sit in an uncomfortable chair, have a slow computer or a dingy cubicle/cabin, it impacts your performance/output. If processes are not automated, a simple task of generating a report will take hours instead of minutes." Hence, she feels, a strong IT backbone will go a long way in contributing to employee productivity.

Raj albeit feels that the impact of infrastructure on employee productivity is much smaller than the impact of de-motivation; poor attitude of staff, lack of teamwork and unawareness of the purpose of work/assignment has on productivity.

### **Role of management and HR**

The role of the top management, immediate boss and the HR department is important for motivating the employees towards the company's vision. Reddy and Venkatachaliah concede that the top management of an organisation needs to ensure that the vision, mission and values of the company are clearly articulated to its employees at all levels. He adds, "The management should explain to the employees how they could contribute to the growth of the organisation by aligning their individual aspirations to that of the company. Such understanding of the scheme of things and where they fit in, acts as a catalyst in boosting the productivity levels."

The immediate manager plays the most critical role in helping his team members stay focussed on their deliverables and hit their highest level of performance by taking care of their professional needs. Reddy says, "The immediate boss has the most critical role because as it is rightly said that 'employees don't leave companies they leave managers'. It's the manager's job to ensure his/her team is engaged, is clear about what is expected of them, works off their strengths, identifies areas of improvement, understands their aspirations and enables them to achieve the same."

HR is the facilitator that enables all of the above to happen. According to Raj the HR can help by attracting the best talent in the industry compatible with the organisation's requirements, value system and culture; by making each employee understand his/ her role and encourage a positive environment; execute well-planned system of reward and promotion for exceeding the productivity targets and introduce training to facilitate the concept of teach me, show me and let me try.

It is necessary for organisations to adopt certain measures like proper recruitment; good infrastructure and understanding of the purpose of work/assignment; communication with employees; performance appraisals; reward schemes and training programmes that can help them in removing the barriers to productivity.