

10 steps to improve productivity

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Introduction

The general level of efficiency in this country is around 35-45% this leaves great potential for improvement. Efficiency levels should be 75 -85%, and if achieved the industry will be impregnable. With a short span before China's quotas are lifted real productivity improvements are essential!

The 10 steps:

1. Management commitment.
2. Training and empowerment
3. Fabric saving
4. Work Study
5. Times and methods
6. Measuring performance
7. Line Balancing
8. Quality
9. Personnel Management
10. Better equipment

1. Management commitment

Productivity improvement schemes require discipline and co-operation from all concerned, permanent improvements will be maintained only with Top Management involvement and support. Management cannot be allowed to "sit on the fence" they MUST commit, performance levels are too low, there is a comfort level that must be broken. If management is prepared to accept 45% so will the operators.

2. Training and empowerment

Without sufficient skills and knowledge your main asset, the people who work for you will not be effective. Real, in depth productivity improvement will only be achieved by improving the skill base in the business. For productivity purposes we recommend that Production Managers, Supervisors, Work study and Quality controllers undergo training courses and that their performance in the training is monitored and decisions made as a consequence of their results. Allow these people to make decisions and to learn by their mistakes. Training must start at the top, teaching people **communication skills** is vital – it's a fact that **people do not listen** and this of course will immediately delay any planned improvements

“Training is expensive?” – Try ignorance!!!

3. Fabric saving

Fabric represents 55% to 70% of the product cost, it is imperative to have total control of all issues. Fabric reconciliations must happen at the end of each P.O. The results of these calculations should be shown in VALUE, to establish how much profit or loss was made in every order. Width measurement shade and shrinkage grouping is essential. There is a premise that if we can save 2% in width we will save 2% in length. This is not really true in every case, but additional width can sometimes have a significant effect on marker

length. Fabric reconciliations are no simple task, it is detailed and time consuming, but the object is to attempt to **save up to 4% of your fabric** this money will reflect directly on your bottom line profits

4. Work Study

To improve factory floor productivity you need a “Work Study Department” Get a qualified Production engineer to head up this department and then create a team of ATDC students to work in pre-determined areas of the factory (ATDC Teach a workstudy course now) you should also train a few of the intelligent qualified machinists since they understand how to sew and will give considerable help with the introduction of new methods since they will be able to show the operators how. The techniques we teach are quick to train, easy to learn and provided the students are chosen well, extremely effective.

5. Method and Time Study

It is amazing that Supervisors and Managers do not “**see how**” the job is being done they are only interested in the hourly score. There is a huge improvement potential in teaching work study people to **SEE** what the operator is doing, many operators waste huge amounts of effort doing their job, 85% of most sewing operations is handling, looking at the way this is done can lead to great improvements. It is essential to teach people to see in detail how the operator is doing the job what actions can be eliminated or at least reduced to make the operator “**Work Smarter not harder**”

We ran a ‘Methods Study competition’ in one factory with a prize for the best improvement, the improvements varied between 37% to 259% and this from students who had only been in the industry for 2 months

It is important to know how the standards the efficiency are measured, unless your standard times are set using international standards then the whole exercise is pointless. You cannot judge yourselves on “past experience” you cannot judge yourself on times set by timing an operator over a few garments or by using a stop watch in the sample department or by timing a few garments on the line. Times must be set after developing a good method, the way the operation is done creates the time. There are specialised systems to produce accurate times, these are quick to learn and easy to apply. Time and Method study go together, there is no point setting a time without looking at how the job is being done. Better methods and making work easier is worth good efficiency / productivity improvements.

6. Measuring performance

It is vital that operator performance is measured continuously, we recommend every two hours; do it by scanning bar coded tickets. Operators performing at less than acceptable efficiency levels are investigated by the Work Study team. The key to success is acting on the information which must be accurate and easily available

7. Line Balance

Step 1. Calculate the line balance efficiency this will indicate to you how well the line is balanced. Great care should be taken whilst doing the balance since it will dramatically affect the output of the line. . A skills matrix should be developed and maintained and should be used to allocate the best people for the job

Step 2. The line must be continuously monitored to ensure that bottlenecks are minimised. Supervisors must have the ability to see problems in advance and take the action. They need constant training to become good at this. Work in progress levels have to be sensible and visible Supervisors must have time to react to the situations that continuously occur during the day.

8. Quality

Quality personnel must be included in all method changes there is no point in changing the method if the quality fails. The cost of quality must be established and monitored, quality should be expressed as a number it is then possible to measure improvements. An overhaul of the quality systems is necessary in most of the factories we have seen in India

9. Personnel management

Absenteeism is a huge cause of loss of productivity. Many companies address this problem by offering an attendance bonus and they don't seem to work. The Personnel team must be given goals to achieve regarding absenteeism and Labour Turnover, they should be made responsible for departments and suggest solutions to limit absenteeism and turnover. Labour turnover is also a big problem in some areas of the country and this again is the responsibility of the HR department. I feel that this department should be much more pro-active and more involved with the day to day consequences of absenteeism, labour turnover and operator motivation. Production managers have to deal with the consequences and there is no doubt that they need all the help they can get.

10. Better Equipment

There are some cases where specialised equipment and work aids will assist in improving productivity but cost justifications and payback calculations must be done before new purchases are made. It is also necessary to ensure that you are using your current equipment as efficiently as possible before new investments are made.

Conclusion

As can be seen, there are many factors that are involved with productivity improvements, it is not an easy road to follow, it needs commitment of the highest level to achieve real improvements. Many companies are increasing their capacity to produce more, but there is a huge need to improve productivity, this is where the real future is.