

# PRODUCTIVITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND LEADERSHIP FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANKIND

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## **Abstract**

This essay unpacks the concepts of productivity, sustainability, leadership and motivation which can be used as strategies to benefit organizations. In the volatile of the competitive manufacturing landscape, these strategies are critical to organizational sustainability. This essay also identified the necessity for productivity, sustainability, leadership and motivation as strategies to benefit organizations. The essay provides strategic insights and practical thinking to encourage organizational management to look at productivity enhancement interventions to ensure the sustainability of organizations.

## **Keywords**

Productivity, sustainability, motivation, competitiveness

## **Introduction**

The world post COVID-19 continues to suffer the aftershocks of the pandemic disruptions that have revolutionized how businesses operate worldwide. This global shift, resultant from health and economic crises forced businesses to evolve or perish. However, the pandemic has also interestingly augmented the 4IR adoption process by businesses. Businesses anticipate that adopting the 4IR can deliver superior results, such as decline in labor costs and increase in productivity and can lead to better resilience. Nevertheless, businesses markets are not invulnerable to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity brought about by the disruptive ability of the 4IR. Henceforth, productivity and sustainability in the 4IR has become a research topic of interest to many researchers. It is essential to elaborate on the necessity for productivity measurement and enhancement for the subsequent sustainability of organizations.

According to Lings (2014), there is apparently a very high rate of business failure among small to medium enterprises (SMMEs), in South Africa. Within the South African context, estimates indicate that 40% of all new businesses fail in their first year of existence, as much as 60% in the second year and an exceedingly high 90% within the first 10 years from inception. The 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report supports these statistics regarding the poor survival rate and confirm that the survival rate for SMMEs in South Africa is low in comparison to global standards, (Bushe, 2019). This trend cannot be allowed to continue as the non-sustainability of organizations and subsequent job losses impact an economy. So, what are the repercussions of job losses for employees? It has been stated that for every one job loss, an average of four individuals in a household go hungry. The industrial and business environments are continually changing and seeking efficient methods of working. This can be credited to several factors, namely, competitiveness, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), globalization and the latest technological advancements in organizational processes. It is common knowledge that organizations can grow and increase their profitability by enhancing their productivity, thereby ensuring their sustainability.

## **Unpacking productivity**

Productivity improvement entails measures output per unit of input, such as labor, capital, or any other resource (Kenton, 2018). Singh (2018) very aptly defines productivity as the transformation of available materials and workforce resources into essential goods and services within an organisation. According to (Mohammed et al., 2013) shows that human capacity development involves both organizations and individuals as an investment process that allows them to realize their full potential for increased productivity. This speaks very eloquently our topic which alludes to productivity and sustainability. Working smarter and working fewer hours may have a positive impact on productivity. However, working longer hours does not necessarily result in increased productivity. Less fatigue occurs

among workers or if employees work harder during the shorter number of active hours. Organizations must attempt to reduce the consumption of resources, thereby reducing cost per unit output through utilization of proper methods, ultimately ensuring their sustainability.

The United States (US) has long enjoyed the world's highest productivity. Over the last one hundred years, productivity in the US has increased approximately four percent per year. In the past two decades, the US rate of productivity improvement has been exceeded by that of China, at 13.4%. Unfortunately, South Africa (SA) is far behind their first-world counterparts. In 2017, SA's economic performance was ranked 58th out of sixty-three countries. This requires urgent management interventions to ensure that productivity is improved in individual organizations which, in turn, automatically improves the overall productivity of a country, again, ensuring their sustainability. It is incumbent on organizations to improve their productivity, which also contributes to competitiveness and their sustainability. Increasing employee productivity should be on the forefront of any managerial mind.

### **Towards sustainability**

An organization's processes may be sustainable and continue to operate, but their work processes might not be productive. Will this eventually lead to the organisation not being sustainable? The major challenge which organizations face with manufacturing is the tendency for many managers to merely evaluate manufacturing primarily based on cost and efficiency. Seminal works by Drucker, who is widely regarded in the West as the father of the management discipline, held the view that "it is important for managers to ask the right questions rather than to get the right answers for the wrong questions". However, Cohen (2018) cautions about asking questions, as Drucker wrote that "asking the wrong question, even if you get the right answer to that question, can be worse than not asking any question at all".

For a performance measure to mean something, it must be compared to some kind of target. One of the main weaknesses of current performance management systems used by organizations is that efficiency reporting systems contain standards which are unrealistic and unachievable. To compete effectively in the marketplace, it is incumbent on organizations to outdo their competitors with superior operations. Despite these challenges, few organizations have systematic processes in place to ensure that their performance management systems continue to reflect their environment and strategies.

This places organizations under tremendous pressure to reduce their costs, increase the quality of service and provide goods of superior quality to challenge their competitors. To meet these goals and remain more competitive and sustainable, organizations embark on the use of many different strategies to make their production processes efficient and provide an output that meets customer satisfaction. In addition, organizations should always be searching for ways to optimize business processes so that they can reduce manufacturing costs. Setting standard times for operations are not just a major challenge for today's performance improvement personnel, it is critical.

### **Leadership and motivation regarding productivity**

The productivity and sustainability of an organization is closely related to effective leadership, and motivation. Productive and sustainable organizations usually have leaders who can lead, provide clear direction, and motivate team members. Motivation is also a key factor to enhance productivity and sustainability. Motivated employees work harder and produce better results. Motivation can come from rewards, challenges, and opportunities to grow and develop. Productive and sustainable organizations usually have leaders who can lead the team, provide clear direction, and show confidence in team members. Motivation is also a key factor when it comes to productivity and organizational sustainability. Motivated employees work harder and produce better results. Work motivation can be enhanced by encouraging employees with remuneration, who feel supported and have a place in the organization and leads to higher performance. Intrinsic motivation pushes employees to help them achieve the goals or tasks set. When a person is highly motivated, he/she will do his/her job to the fullest. If a person demotivated, they cannot innovate to achieve the goals of

the organisation. This motivation is required because each individual employee is expected to work effectively and full of enthusiasm to achieve high work productivity.

### **Conclusion**

Organizations in South Africa are affected annually by labor unrest with employees in constant demand for increased remuneration. "Strike season" seems to have become a norm on the South African calendar year. The author is of the opinion that an increase in remuneration must be combined with a simultaneous increase in productivity to allow for a "win-win" situation between the employer and employee. Productivity and sustainability are crucial to economic growth as the spinoff is that these strategies benefit organizations by assisting to raise the living standards of people. It is common knowledge that enhancing productivity subsequently results in higher output, reduced costs, improved employee morale, better customer service, and increased overall profitability. It also positions organizations for sustained growth. Productivity and sustainability are key to an organization's profitability and long-term success. It measures how much output an organization can produce from resources such as labor, capital, or raw materials. If an organization improves its productivity, it can generate more output from its resources, and subsequently enhancing its sustainability.

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