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HR ANALYTICS PRACTICES & PERSPECTIVES



Productivity Tools: Fitness Band for Workplace Engagement?

About the Author



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Poornima is a sales and marketing professional with hands-on experience in working with niche software product companies. She is a B.E with an MBA and a certified Digital Marketer. In her short career, she has worked in multiple facets of Sales and Marketing ranging from business development and sales, to marketing strategy and brand building; and played an instrumental role in building sales and marketing teams and processes from scratch. Currently she is associated with JaMocha Tech and manages the marketing and business development initiatives for ProHance – An enterprise workforce analytics platform for improving employee productivity and efficiency.

Productivity Tools: Fitness Band for Workplace Engagement?

Overview

For organizations to be successful, it is important for them to build a culture of highly engaged and productive employees. Employee productivity is an assessment of the efficiency of an employee w.r.t. their work output. Highly productive and engaged employees are driven by 6 guiding principles - connect, shape, learn, stretch, achieve and contribute.

As per the latest Gallup Employee engagement statistics, only 13% employees worldwide are engaged. When organizations today are devising strategies on keeping their employees engaged, as per Gallup it is surprising that these numbers haven't improved over the last few years. This is an eye opening scenario that organizations should take seriously because there appears to be a huge gap between the engagement strategies that organizations are deploying versus the expectations of the employees. Low Workforce engagement levels are a serious concern for organizations and leads to attrition, absenteeism and loss in productivity – all these being expensive costs to the organization.

Reasons for Employee Disengagement

There are many reasons why employees today are disengaged from work

- 1. Job Satisfaction and Growth** – This is the primary reason for disengagement at work. Employees may not be happy with their work profile and find it boring and stagnant. With the growing millennial workforce, creating a culture of creativeness and innovation also becomes important. Employees want their work to matter and see growth in their opportunities at work. When organizations do not pay attention to this need, it results in employee disengagement at work.
- 2. Lack of Communication** – The leadership team is responsible for defining goals and expectations for the organization and this should be communicated clearly to all the employees. It is important that employees understand how their work impacts the business. Additionally, companies should encourage a culture of 2 way communication and provides employees a platform to express their ideas and concerns. Lack of such communication methodology may lead to employees underperforming and cause disengagement.
- 3. Rewards and Recognition** – One of the most important factors that contribute to employee engagement is work recognition. Appreciating good work motivates employees to do better and these employees look for long term growth and commitment within the organization. Lack of appreciation and reward from the top management are one of the top reasons for employee disengagement.
- 4. Limited Learning opportunities** – Engaged employees look for opportunities to upgrade their existing skills or learn new skills. Organizations that do not have a concrete learning programme year on year would result in losing some of their most engaged employees.

What should Organizations do?

Effective engagement strategies should be devised to counter all these factors. The first step to tackle employee engagement and productivity issues is to understand the gaps in the organization, resulting in low productivity and engagement levels. Current processes in most organizations rely on manual collection of data or do not have mechanisms present to understand engagement levels. What organizations need is an automated tool that can provide factual objective data that helps measure engagement levels and help understand current productivity.

Workforce productivity platforms can play a key role in providing visibility and improving productivity and engagement levels. Most of the productivity platforms work on a SaaS based model that do not require

significant initial investment and have a high ROI. Productivity tools are like Fit Bits to an organization that measures all aspects of time and output, for instance productive and non productive hours, time utilization, overtime, time leakages, efficiency levels, skill and competency levels, and effort v/s results. Visibility on these parameters equips organizations to bring in required changes in their processes that lead to improvement in overall organizational efficiency.

Productivity tool scan help organizations in various ways. Some of these are:

1. **Improve Time Utilization**

All organizations have their own set of expectations on productivity depending upon their work culture. Most of the times, this expectation is not met. One of the biggest reasons why they would not be achieving this is because of time leakages and employee distractions during work. As per the Career Builder Survey following distractions at work act as productivity killers – mobile phones/texting, internet, gossip, social media, emails, coworkers dropping by, meetings, snack/tea breaks, and noisy coworkers. Unfortunately, it takes about 4 minutes for employees to recover from any of these distractions that leads to a substantial loss of time when accumulated across employees. Productivity tools provide an efficient way in understanding time leakages on various activities and its impact on the overall time spent. It also gives an idea to the top management if these leakages are justified. Hence, productivity tools provide great insights to help organizations take course corrections to improve productivity.

2. **Enable Telecommuting**

With travel taking away most of the work time, organizations are open to provide flexi working hours and telecommuting to their employees, without impacting business. Even though some organizations have taken a step towards providing employees with telecommuting and flexible hours, the others haven't been able to implement it because it comes with its own set of challenges. The main challenge is to manage remote workers and ensure the quality of their deliverable is not affected by not being in office. Hence, companies end up micro- managing work from home employees that also sometimes proves counter-productive. With productivity tools, organizations can get a real time view of their work activities and can refrain from spending significant time on ensuring that work is happening. This provides a win-win situation for employees and organizations alike as it improves employee engagement and enhances productivity.

3. **Drive Lean Transformation**

Many organizations today are driving lean initiatives to create a high performance culture and position themselves as a competitive player in the market. This can be done by minimizing inefficiencies and creating baselines for work processes. Productivity tools can play an important role in discovering and providing great insights into performance analysis, churn analysis, work pattern analysis and competency analysis. Organizations can use this powerful data to optimize their processes and remove inefficiencies.

4. **Predict Absenteeism and Attrition**

Any organization would like to retain their top talent. Productivity tools can give visibility on productivity patterns and trends that will help organizations understand if an employee has started showing signs of disengagement. Such employees may show high levels of distraction and absenteeism. With productivity tools, organizations can discover such behavior early on and devise their retention plan accordingly.

5. **Improve Work Life Balance**

More hours at work does not always mean high productivity. A 2015 report by OECD shows data on the 35 most productive countries. It is surprising to note that Luxembourg that has only 29 average work hours in a week is the most productive contributing \$93.4 to the country's GDP on a per hour worked basis while Mexico that had the longest workweek of 41.2 hours contributed to only \$20.3 to the country's GDP on a per hour worked basis. With visibility on time and productivity parameters, organizations can work towards improving these KPIs instead of encouraging a culture of working late. This helps in establishing a culture of accountability and engagement; and improves work life balance.

Prior to implementation, organizations should take required measures to ensure that employees are aware of the business objective for deploying such a tool and address their initial biases and concerns. Some of the things to be kept in mind are:

- Be Transparent with your employees – if you are monitoring them, let them know. Ensuring transparent communication on the objective of implementing the tool will go a long way in contributing to the acceptance of the tool within the organization
- All employees don't work alike – hence expecting a common work pattern across will be unrealistic. Instead of looking at data points individually and highlighting gaps, look at the time spent w.r.t. work output. This will give a more meaningful analysis on the performance of the employee
- Set clear objectives and goals and what is to be achieved in the stipulated period of time.

While it is key for organizations to realize the benefits of deploying a productivity tool, it is equally important to choose the right one as well. There are many time tracking tools available in the market that allows only manual time capture, data from which cannot be measured and analyzed to understand trends. A productivity tool should encompass aspects of both time and productivity measurement. Having a system that is automated helps capturing meaningful data that helps managers and top management understand current lags and take business course corrections. Productivity tools cannot work in silos and should be closely integrated with other enterprise solutions like HRIS and Work flow management systems to ensure holistic data presentation. Most importantly organizations should look at tools that are non intrusive and keeps employee data privacy in mind. The productivity space is an evolving ground and tools that keep pace will continue to maintain relevancy and add value to organizations. Some of the trends that we are seeing are – Gamification (individual goal setting and designing reward programs around it), Predictive Analytics and Forecasting (predict work patterns to empower managers to understand what to do next), and Automation (identify processes that can become efficient by automating).

How ProHance has Helped Organizations

ProHance is one such productivity tool that provides rich insights to managers and top management on employee work style and work patterns. It helps organizations understand and improve employee productivity and performance. Spread across more than 50 customers in 9 countries, ProHance customers have experienced an improvement of about 15 – 30% in their overall productivity in less than 6 months. Most of our customers lacked visibility to understand how productive and engaged their employees are and did not have any factual data to set such bench marking standards.

At the time of ProHance implementation, it was observed that most of our customers were getting only about 4-5 hours of productive work as against the norm of 7 – 7.5 productive hours. This gap was because of time leakages, non conformance and lack of schedule adherence. Through ProHance, organizations were able to drastically cut down on all the gaps and gain time to improve productivity and efficiency. After ProHance deployment, our customers experienced the following improvements:

- 30 – 35% increase in work time.
- 15 – 20% reduction on time leakages and distractions like unplanned meetings/sessions, work reviews and breaks
- 25 – 30% time utilization improvement which meant that employees were able to manage their time and prioritize their work better and
- 50 – 75% reduction in overtime

We have seen that these improvements over a period of time have positively impacted organization profitability by 5-10%. ProHance's user friendly dashboards provided our customers global visibility on employee work pattern and output, helped improve time efficiency, allowed better capacity and utilization planning, provided real time insights to enable decision making and helped gain financial and competitive edge in the market.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that productivity and engagement go hand in hand – achieving one will lead to the other. A highly engaged employee would be – someone who understands the business objectives and aligns their work to that, contributes back by putting in the stipulated hours of productive work, knows how to prioritize their work that matters to the business most, shows high levels of time utilization, low levels of distraction, and high quality of work. Even though organizations may find it easy to spot their high productive and engaged employees, what will be tough would be to maintain these engagement levels, retain such employees and spot disengaged ones.

It is important to note that engaged employees are not born overnight. It is a continuous process and a successful amalgamation of a good business and a good talent strategy. So to summarize, organizations should as a first step understand current levels of workforce engagement, select a productivity tool that meets their business objective and can play a part in their journey to improve productivity and engagement, and use this as a basis to strengthen their future employee engagement strategies.

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