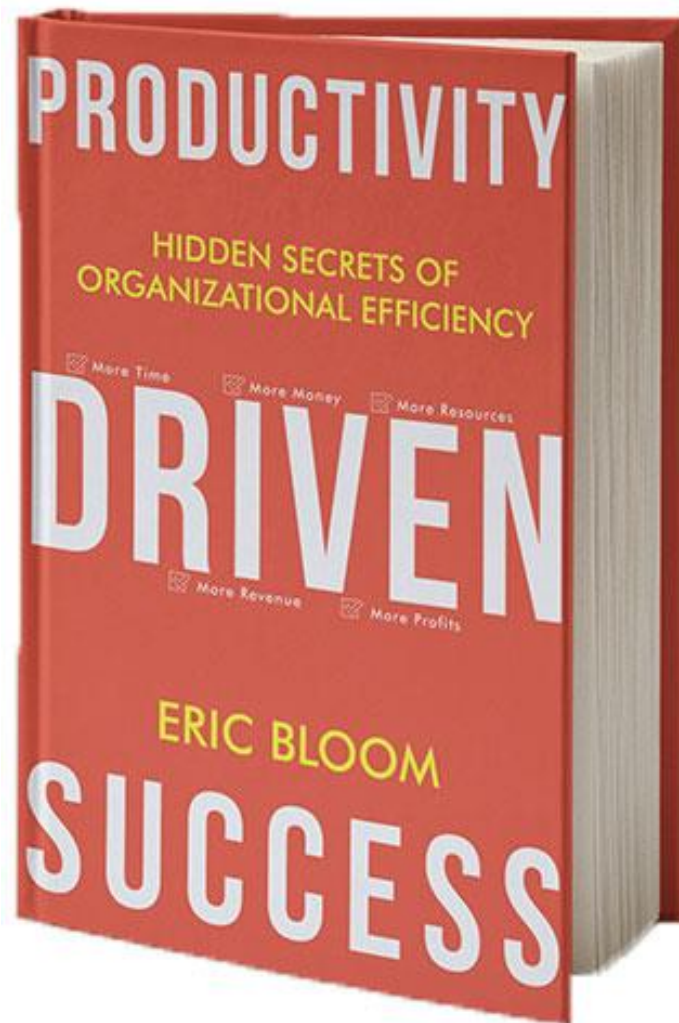# Productivity Driven Success

Hidden Secrets of Organizational Efficiency

By
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*Sample First Chapter For Your Review!*

# Productivity Driven Success
## Hidden Secrets of Organizational Efficiency

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# Chapter 1
# Igniting your Productivity Culture Enablers

*Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work in hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus.*

-- Alexander Graham Bell

As people have personalities, organizations have cultures. Some people are open to change and some are not. Some organizations embrace change as a catalyst for future growth and profitability, while some do not. Make no mistake, increasing your productivity requires change. If your organization views change as an important business attribute, then ongoing productivity improvement will be the status quo. If your company is set in its ways, refuses to streamline its processes and shuns innovation, then productivity improvement is not required. Given today's business environment, the company will soon stagger under its own weight and fade away. That being said, if you are working at this type of firm, the best way for you to be productive is by updating your resume.

> As people have personalities, organizations have cultures

Over the course of my professional life, I've seen many great companies, small and large, get too set in their ways because of their incredible success. When new technologies or more advanced products came along, these companies either couldn't, or wouldn't embrace the new industry directions. They eventually became a shell of their former greatness, where they were either bought out and merged, or simply went out of business. I always found this difficult to watch, not only because it's always hard to see a success story fade, but also because of the talented people they left unemployed in their declining wake.

Six organizational attributes can give your organizations the ability to define, accept, and implement both small and large changes that productivity enhancements require. These attributes are:

1. Cultural Awareness
2. Innovative Mindset
3. Management Focus
4. Employee Communication
5. Self and Organizational Learning
6. Conflict Avoidance and Resolution

## Cultural Awareness: ("Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast")

One of the most important business attributes is cultural awareness, or the ability to understand your organization's internal politics, idiosyncrasies, strengths and weaknesses, and how it gets things done. To make matters more complicated, organizations have multiple subcultures. For example, the Sales department may have a different internal culture versus the Internal Accounting. The corporate headquarters in Boston may have a very different culture than the satellite offices in Chicago, or London. Therefore, your productivity initiative may be very successful in the Boston office, but fail miserably in Chicago, or London.

I first witnessed this subculture phenomenon very early in my career, while I was working for a large computer manufacturer. I was a computer programmer working to automate the general ledger portion of their accounting system. I worked with people from the Accounting, Sales, and Manufacturing groups. I actually kept three sets of clothes in my car. The accountants dressed business casual. The sales people wore suits and the manufacturing people wore jeans and t-shirts. If I visited a group wearing the wrong clothing, they wouldn't take me seriously. Given it was a large company, these three organizational areas luckily were housed in different buildings. So, I actually kept three sets of clothes in my car and found myself continually changing my clothes in local restaurants, or my

> To make matters more complicated, organizations have multiple cultures, called subcultures.

car, as I went from business unit to business unit. Perhaps if I'd been older or more experienced, it wouldn't have been an issue. However, my point is that the perceptions and biases of each subculture had to be recognized and taken into account if I wanted to succeed.

Before moving forward with a productivity initiative, you must first ask yourself: "Does this operational change require cultural change first?" The answer may depend on whether the proposed changes are aligned and consistent with the current organizational culture.

Peter Drucker was known for saying: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." The idea behind this is that you can define a great strategy, but it isn't consistent with your organization's cultural norms, then it will most likely fail. You must take your organization's culture into account when selecting which project to undertake. For example, if your company's culture believes that all work should be done physically at the office, a productivity initiative that includes allowing people to work from home will be difficult, if not impossible to implement. Once a project is selected, it must also be designed and implemented in a culturally appropriate way. For example, if the company is very email laden from adding too many unneeded people on each email, you must first change the cultural belief that this is of value, before implementing procedural steps, such as removing the "Reply All" button from the email input screen.

## Innovative Mindset: (Think Different to Solve Problems)

Opportunities to innovatively enhance productivity come in many forms. It could be successful creation, implementation, reuse and/or improvement of an existing business process. It could be sales technique, or cultural factor that reduces costs, which enhances productivity, increases company competitiveness, or provides other business value.

Finding these innovative solutions requires a willingness to look at your existing processes with a critical eye, even if you were the one who originally designed them. Albert Einstein had a quote saying that: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." That is to say, you must think about your processes from new perspectives in order to improve them. I bring this up for two reasons: first, to encourage you and your staff to be willing

to think outside-the-box and have the courage to look at old issues in new ways; second, given the fact that this is a book on productivity, efficiency, and innovation, it should have at least one Albert Einstein quote to make it official.

There are ten questions you can ask yourself that may help you drive innovation within your organization, even if it's is only you:

1. How are other industries using technologies that my company currently owns?
2. What technologies are my competitors using that are giving them an edge against my company?
3. How can I combine two, or more, of the same technologies that my company owns to solve business problems in creative ways?
4. What open source software can be inexpensively and securely added to our list of tools that helps organizational productivity?
5. If budget was not an issue, what could I do to improve/enhance my technical environment? How can I do it less expensively?
6. Are there any business processes that could/should be done more efficiently? If so, how?
7. What technologies are we currently using that should be phased out to make budget dollars available for new innovative initiatives?
8. What can I personally do to help foster an innovative company culture? Can it be started today?
9. What measurements can I use to show the return on investment of my innovative ideas?
10. If I knew I would not fail, what innovation would I try to implement at my company? Then, is there a way I can minimize the risk of failure on the project?

My next challenge to you is to expand on this list based on your job, your technical profession, your job level, your areas of ability, and your areas of interest. Then ask yourself these questions continuously. With a little luck and a great idea, you can make an incredible contribution to your company, and in turn, your own professional future.

A number of years ago, I headed up the IT group of a financial services firm. We had a computer program running nightly that analyzed the portfolio performance impact of each stock and bond held within each portfolio. This program ran for almost five hours each evening. It was very well written and accurate. However, it took too long to run. For those in the asset management business, it was a portfolio attribution program.

I hired a person with a very strong mathematical background and light programming experience to analyze this portfolio attribution program to see if he could discover a way for it to run more quickly. My thought was that it would expose him to professional quality software development practices. About two weeks later, he came into my office and said the

> The diversity of thought created by hiring a wide variety of people brings new problem solving perspectives to an issue.

program could now be run in five minutes. Given his newness to the profession, the complexity of the software, and the enormous amount of data chugging the program required, my first thought was that he had made a mistake that skipped major portions of the software from running. However, the program actually did run in five minutes. Given his strong math background, he was able to define a more efficient algorithm to perform the calculations.

The point I'm making is that diversity brings innovation. What was outside the box thinking for the computer programmers, was inside the box thinking for a mathematician. By nature, the diversity of thought created by hiring a wide variety of people brings new problem solving perspectives to an issue. My suggestion is to embrace diversity of all types in your hiring practices because it will facilitate an innovative mindset.

## Management Focus: (Senior leadership is required)

All organizational initiatives must have management support. If not, then they probably will not get funded. If they do, they will wither on the vine. If you are the project's executive champion, then great. However, if you are not the executive in charge, then you must find one who can provide you with the resources and political clout needed to move you from an idea to an ongoing business practice.

If an executive of this type cannot be found, then it may be worthwhile to move inward and ask yourself the following questions:

1.  If implemented, can my idea actually provide the productivity gains I'm proposing?

2. Is my idea consistent with the organization's culture?

3. Does the company have the financial resources to fund productivity improvement initiatives?

4. Is my idea consistent with the company's future direction, goals, and objectives?

5. Did I present my idea to senior management in the best possible light?

6. Is it a great idea that should be proposed again at a later date when the company has more time, money and/or other resources to give it the priority it deserves?

Over the years, I have worked on projects that for one reason, or another, were not favored by senior management. It was always an uphill battle to get resources, cooperation from other groups, and/or recognition for our hard work. If your productivity projects are not favored by your leadership, even if they are initially funded, then their effect will most likely not be long lasting.

## Employee Communication: (Clarity, Consistency and Human Connection)

Remember that virtually all productivity enhancements are a form of change; therefore, the change must be communicated to those affected by it in the following ways:

- Be clear about what you want to say.
- Be consistent in your messaging.
- Be aware that varying audiences have different needs and worries.
- Explain rationale that is relatable to the issue.
- People are persuaded more by human dimension than statistical facts.
- Your genuine passion and enthusiasm can activate similar feelings in your listeners.

Each of these communication truisms views employee communication from a different perspective:

**Be clear about what you want to say**

If you are not clear in your own mind as to what you have to say and how you want to say it, it will come across as either insincere or unclear about the goal you are trying to achieve. Neither of these will gain employee support and/or motivation.

> Productivity enhancements are a form of change; therefore, the change must be communicated to those affected.

**Be consistent in your messaging**

If you are consistently changing the reason, process, or expected outcome of your proposed productivity gain, then it will confuse those you are trying to convince. In turn, this confusion will reduce their motivation to provide assistance and worse, cause them to believe you have a hidden motive that isn't being communicated. When suspicious, people tend to think the worst. They begin to fear that it could be reductions in staff, or outsourcing. If people believe this, they will fight your productivity initiative at every step. People have a hard time understanding a concept that will reduce their pay.

**Be aware that varying audiences have different needs and worries**

This statement basically means that you must know your audience. For example, you wish to implement new software that will make the Finance Department more efficient. If you present this software enhancement to the Finance staff by saying it will make them so efficient that half of them will be losing their jobs, then it will be problematic to gain their support. Alternatively, if you say this new software will increase the amount of time they have to service their internal clients and perform advanced financial analytics, they will be much more likely to adopt the new software platform.

**Explain rationale in a way that listeners can best relate**

Here you must also know your audience, but from a different perspective. In this case, you must present your message in a way they will best understand. If you are speaking to the Accounting Department, craft your message from an accountant's perspective; when you are speaking with the Human Resource department, use HR terminology. Of course, it must be the same message, just delivered slightly different based on the listeners' lexicon and point of view.

**People are persuaded more by human dimension than statistical facts**

Tell a story; don't just use facts and figures. People have been using storytelling as a form of communication for thousands of years. The reason for its longevity is because it works so well. As the expression goes, "if it isn't broke, don't fix it."

**Your genuine passion and enthusiasm can create similar feeling in your listeners**

Lastly, if you are not passionate about what you are trying to do, then why should anyone else? The best way for you to motivate others is to first be motivated yourself. When you are truly

motivated with the goal you are trying to achieve, then people will innately feel your energy. That's why people love to be near entrepreneurs who are passionate about their companies. Their passion and energy are infectious.

As described above, communication is an essential part of productivity based change. It's also a key component of good management. Regardless of profession or topic, I have found communication with my staff, peers, boss, and clients/customers was the right thing to do. As managers, we have two functions: communication and decision making. Productivity projects aside, properly communicating with others and making good managerial decisions can easily become your most effective productivity driver by enhancing employee morale, reducing attrition, and fostering employee empowerment.

## Self and Organizational Learning: (Advancement Through Acquiring Business and Leadership Skills)

For an organization to grow, it must continue to learn. This acquired knowledge, whether through formal training, or business experience, provides insights that facilitate growth and improved processes. Personal learning greatly enhances your ability to think outside the box because you can do so from a position of enhanced knowledge, combined with innate cleverness.

Organizational learning is also developed through a combination of formalized education and business experience, both of which are driven (or suppressed) by the organization's culture. Different employees need different types of training in order to grow. Technologists need to learn new technologies. Senior executives need to keep abreast of industry trends and corporate practices; therefore, all employees need to maximize their interpersonal skills, business skills, and emotional intelligence.

> Different employees need different types of training in order to grow.

Professional curiosity in both individuals and organizations causes them to be both introspective and more aware of their external environment. Introspection causes people to ask the question: "How can I improve?"

External awareness causes people to ask "What can I learn from my surroundings that can help me and/or my company successfully move forward?" Both of these questions lead to innovative thought and drive productivity.

I didn't truly understand the importance of training until I started a training company specializing in leadership, soft/business, and productivity skills. I'm not saying this as a way to bolster my industry. I'm saying this because I believe if I had taken this type of training more seriously earlier in my professional life, then it would have moved my career forward more quickly/easily. As a technical professional by education and background, I discounted the importance of such skills because of my technical abilities. Yes, my technical abilities opened the door to my managerial career, but it wasn't until my business and leadership skills evolved that I was able to move into the senior managerial ranks.

## Conflict Prevention and Resolution: (5 causes of conflict)

In short, productivity drives change and change drives conflict. The ability to minimize 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.

Work done by Christopher Moore suggests that all conflict is caused by five factors:
- **Data**: Information is lacking, differently interpreted or withheld
- **Interest**: There are scarce resources, such as money or skilled workers
- **Value**: Different ways of life, deeply rooted goals or varying criteria on how to evaluate behaviors
- **Relationship**: Strong emotions, stereotypes, and/or poor communication
- **Structural**: Inequities in control, ownership, power, authority or geographic separation.

Certainly, conflict resolution can easily be a full book by itself. I'll simply say here that if you identify the reasons causing the conflict, then it will make it easier for you to solve and move your project forward.

A good thing to remember: if your project is being slowed or stopped by someone remember that 99% of the time people are not against you, they are for themselves. If you can understand the reason behind their objections, then you can very often turn enemies into allies.

Next time you are having an issue with a fellow employee impeding your project's progress, give this concept a try. Attempt to analyze the reason he/she is blocking your way. Then try to gain their support by explaining how your project's success has value to him/her professionally.

**Ending thought**

Whether you are a CEO or the newest college intern, being the agent of change that enhances your organization's productivity will be of great value to your organization and has the potential to bring your career to new heights.