(7) Knowledge-Worker Productivity

Introduction

The most important, and indeed the truly unique, contribution of management in the 20th century was the fifty-fold increase in the productivity of the MANUAL WORKER in manufacturing.

The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is similarly to increase the productivity of KNOWLEDGE WORK and the KNOWLEDGE WORKER.

The most valuable assets of a 20th-century company were its production equipment.

The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution, whether business or nonbusiness, will be its knowledge workers and their productivity.

Work on the productivity of the knowledge worker has barely begun.

SIX major factors determine knowledge-worker productivity.

1. Knowledge worker productivity demands that we ask the question: “What is the task?”

2. It demands that we impose the responsibility for their productivity on the individual knowledge workers themselves.

   ★ Knowledge workers have to manage themselves.

   ★ They have to have autonomy.

3. Continuing innovation has to be part of the work, the task and the responsibility of knowledge workers.

4. Knowledge work requires continuous learning, on the part of the knowledge worker, but equally continuous teaching on the part of the knowledge worker.

5. Productivity of the knowledge worker is not—at least not primarily—a matter of the quantity of output. Quality is at least as important.

   ★ Productivity of knowledge work therefore has to aim first at obtaining quality—and not minimum quality but optimum if not maximum quality.

6. Finally, knowledge-worker productivity requires that the knowledge worker is both seen and treated as an “asset” rather than a “cost.”

   ★ It requires that knowledge workers want to work for the organization in preference to all other opportunities.

   ★ Management’s duty is to preserve the assets of the institution in its care.

What does this mean when the knowledge of the individual knowledge worker becomes an asset and, in more and more cases, the main asset of an institution?

What does this mean for personnel policy?

What is needed to attract and to hold the highest-producing knowledge workers?

What is needed to increase their productivity and to convert their increased productivity into performance capacity for the organization?

What does the emergence of the knowledge worker and of knowledge-worker productivity mean for the governance of the corporation?

What do they mean for the future and structure of the economic system?