

Knowledge Worker Productivity Indicators for Small Consultant Businesses: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract. Traditionally, knowledge workers can be found in large enterprises. But, current trend shows that small businesses or new ventures are developed by people with high intelligence capacity, depends on creativity of their people, and create innovation as a business model. Thus, many small businesses have knowledge workers as their business backbones. This paper aims to develop indicators to measure productivity of knowledge worker in small consultant businesses. Using qualitative method, this paper will explain the process of thematic analysis towards the result of interview. The result shows that Knowledge worker productivity consist of six dimensions, namely: systematic and structured, learning motivation, focus, output, punctuality and communication. Detail of indicators for each dimension will be discussed.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, knowledge workers can be found in large enterprises. But, current trend shows that small businesses or new ventures are developed by people with high intelligence capacity, depends on creativity of their people, and create innovation as a business model. However, the nature of small business tends to be organic. This makes it difficult to apply standard for its employee performance, especially for the knowledge worker that the job is less structured compared to manual worker. [1-4]

One of small business that consists mostly of knowledge worker, become a case in this research. It is a small business consultant. Based on feedback from clients, there are several complaints, such as the timelines (e.g punctuality in attending meeting) and the consistency of the work delivered by consultants. Thus, authors think it is important to develop performance indicators of knowledge workers to be applied in knowledge-intensive small business such as small business consultant. Therefore, this paper aims to develop indicators to measure productivity of knowledge worker in small consultant businesses.



2. Literature review

In this section, we will deliver the explanation of concepts related to knowledge worker and knowledge worker productivity.

2.1. Knowledge worker

Scholars believed that the term knowledge worker must be attributed to the work of Peter Drucker [1]–[4]. It is worker that emphasizes on thinking to make a living [5] or focus on the utilization of knowledge in doing his/her job [6]. It used to be called ‘white collar’ to differentiate it with ‘blue collar’-the worker that do ‘manual work’ rather than ‘knowledge work’ [7].

Knowledge worker conduct knowledge work that is different with manual work in some characteristics. In general, it can be seen from two dimensions, first, whether the work is more intellectual or physical in nature, or second, whether the work is more creative or routine [7]. White collar or knowledge worker tend to do more intellectual and creative work, while blue collar or manual worker tend to do more physical and routine work [7]. Other scholar believed that Knowledge work can be considered as a continuum between manual work and knowledge work using eight dimension, includes: autonomy, structure, tangibility, knowledge, creativity and innovation, complexity, and physical effort [8]. It is relevant with the ‘evolution’ of knowledge worker, which according to Frederick Taylor, the productive manual worker, is the worker that apply knowledge to the work [9]. So the work is evolved from extremely manual to knowledge-embedded work.

2.2. Knowledge worker productivity

In order to be able to identify knowledge worker productivity factors, we must first understand of how knowledge workers doing their job. Some of the characteristics of how knowledge workers doing their job are that knowledge (i) workers do not like being told what to do; (ii) put commitment into their jobs; and (iii) focus on goals rather than detailed steps[6]. Some critical aspects of white-collar tasks that are distinctive from blue-collar tasks are : creativity, discretion, learning, performance measures, incentives, and technology [7]. Other scholar suggest to consider six major factors, includes: the task nature, the autonomy, the continuing innovation, the continuous learning, the quality of the work, the organizational commitment of the workers [9].

Some researcher emphasizes on knowledge management to discuss about knowledge worker management [3][1]. In detail, it is believed that knowledge worker factors are related to knowledge management process, namely: knowledge identification; knowledge creation; knowledge capturing; knowledge application; knowledge sharing; knowledge saving and storage [6] in order to produce the final product [2]. However, despite of the weight of knowledge that is embedded in the term, it is still people management anyway.

Scholar have been trying to identify knowledge productivity dimensions, based on literature review. One of studies, has identified 13 productivity dimensions from the literature (quantity, economic factors, timeliness, autonomy, quality, innovation/creativity, customer satisfaction, project success, efficiency, effectiveness, responsibility/importance of work, KW’s perception of productivity and absenteeism), but found there is no consistency among literatures [2]. But, the conclusion is that different with manual worker [9], knowledge worker productivity is measured in term of quality[4]. The quality become the essence of the output resulted by knowledge workers[9] and knowledge workers are valued based on their innovativeness and creativity[5].

3. Methodology

In this study, we use case of one small business consultant that was established in 2013. The company (X consultant) engage quite different version of business consulting services. More than just a business consultant for clients, it is also serve as a partner for its clients. Its clients are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that want to develop business in order to survive in global business

competition. X consultant focused on improving the efficiency and standardization of the manufacture of a Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in order to create the effectiveness expected by the company to reach multiple destinations development idea or existing business, business expansion strategy, corporate restructuring, or even an increase in profit. X consultant has 35 employees as a key enabler of the company in achieving its goals. All employees can be categorized as a knowledge worker, because in conducting its operational activities X consultant depends on the skill and creativity of the use and development of knowledge of its employees to solve client problems. There are two main jobs in X Consultant: Junior analyst, whose tasks to do the technical things that have been directed by the head of X Consultant and associates; and Associate, who is responsible for providing strategic directives in more detail for each client that is held to a junior analyst.

This paper used qualitative data obtained from interviews with informants. Informants in this study consisted of six people, consisting of one head of X Consultant, two associates and three junior analyst. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing qualitative data derived from the interviews.

4. Result and Discussion

The thematic analysis resulted in six dimensions of knowledge worker productivity, namely: systematic and structured, learning motivation, focus, output, punctuality and communication. Works in a systematic and structured way, identified as a factor that perceived by informants as a variable instrument knowledge worker productivity. Based on the interview, informant perceived that knowledge workers are expected to work in an orderly, logical, and tidy. In addition, knowledge workers in the consultant company are also expected to describe and formulate in advance the problems faced by the client on every project faced, sort the problem where the most important or most urgent to be solved, mapped on the timeline, and then planning a way out of what will be offered to clients.

The willingness to gain and use knowledge in the job done by knowledge workers also perceived as one factor of productivity. It is relevant with the definition of knowledge worker it-self, as a worker that utilized knowledge in doing his/her job [6]. In other words, the ability to learn independently is absolutely necessary for the knowledge worker. If knowledge workers feel their knowledge is not enough to solve the problems of the client, the knowledge worker is expected to be able to search for data, information, and knowledge of the sources or references that have been tested for its precision and accuracy.

Focus when working also perceived as one of productivity factors for knowledge workers. Based on the interview, some informants assume that a knowledge worker who in this case is a consultants are expected to put all his thoughts entirely to the tasks they are doing on that day.

Produces output in accordance with objective is one factor that is identified as a knowledge worker productivity. Based on the interview, informant assume a knowledge worker who in this case is a consultant are expected to achieve the target that has been mapped on the timeline. The targets used in determining what is required input and output such as what should be resolved. The result must be accurate in term that their supervisor does not need to revise the report. In addition, knowledge worker who in this case is a consultant is expected to provide output that corresponds to the needs of clients and can facilitate client's business processes.

Punctuality is considered as one of productivity factor because informants consistently (all informant) assume that a consultants are expected to be optimal in the utilization of working time, have discipline in the use of working time, so that they can complete the task in hand in a timely manner. If the task is not completed on time, it will damage the critical path of the project.

Informants also perceived that people who have done their job well are those who can communicate well. A consultant is a problem solver where the primary task is to alleviate and solve client problems. In order to alleviate and solve client problems, a consultant should be able to listen attentively to what the problem of the clients. In addition, a consultant should also be able to discuss with the client to determine what the best solution would have to solve the problem.

No.	Dimension	Indicators
1	Systematic and structured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees can define the core issues of the client • Employees can sort the urgency of the task based on the timeline • The output of the work is logical and tidy • Employees can achieve the goals that have been mapped on the timeline
2	Learning motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees have a general knowledge related to client characteristics • Employees proactively search for data, information, and new knowledge or references that have been tested precision and accuracy
3	Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees can complete the list of daily tasks
4	Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is relevant to the work of employees of client problems • The context of the work of employees according to a template that has become a standard enterprise • The results of the work of employees can solve the client's problem • Clients use and apply the results of the employee's job • No complaints or revision from the client or the supervisor
5	Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees optimally use the working time • Employees completing the task in accordance with the deadlines
6	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees can communicate easily with clients and other employees • Employees can submit news or information as expected by clients and other employees

5. Conclusion

This paper have identified six dimension of knowledge worker productivity. Based on single case used in this paper, this result is expected appropriate for measuring the productivity of knowledge workers in a small business consultant. However, further research involving more cases of companies, will give generalization in the development of instrument for measuring the productivity of knowledge worker.

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