

Critical Productivity Goals Take On Even Greater Significance in Today's Economy

An aim of every organization is to maximize employee productivity. In the face of today's economic climate and shrinking budgets, this goal takes on even more meaning. Employees often have to accomplish the same amount or more work using fewer resources. Instrumental to achieving this is giving staff the tools to collaborate more efficiently, uncover new business opportunities, close deals faster, and better serve customers.

For decades, organizations have turned to the latest technologies to boost their bottom lines and improve overall operations. The widespread adoption of intuitive word-processing and graphics software, as well as e-mail, transformed how employees create, process, share, and collect information. And today, people are more connected than ever, with smartphones, laptop computers, and other devices. By combining these technologies with advances in tools for collaboration, organizations are bringing new efficiencies to how coworkers, partners, and customers worldwide work with one another.

Improving the quality of work

While today's technology-saturated environment helps employees work faster, it is not a panacea. Many employees regularly collaborate with extended teams to get their jobs done. While technology supports this process, it can also present challenges to employees wanting to make stronger contributions and be team players. The reality is that the tools at their disposal do not always work in their favor.

An important part of working efficiently is getting things done right the first time. This is as true for product development teams looking to accelerate product time-to-market as it is for financial service staff processing customer applications or for government agencies responding to citizen requests. And while many existing solutions are good at distributing content, people might still have to resort to manual processes when it comes to collaborating on and processing information.

For instance, an architect may use sophisticated drafting software to produce detailed 3D designs only to have to print and mail hard copies to team members because they don't have compatible software. Similarly, financial analysts may send spreadsheets with confidential information back and forth within their company, but the relative lack of document security presents real problems if that same spreadsheet needs to travel outside corporate boundaries. Sharing information with dispersed teams and enabling people to work together effortlessly are essential elements of doing business today, but many companies lack the proper technology and security measures to facilitate the process.

Supporting efficient collaboration

Collaborating with distributed teams can take up much of an employee's day. Employees may request feedback on project plans, draft documents, and other content by e-mailing documents to multiple people, and waiting for replies. The replies may come back by e-mail, marked-up paper copies, phone calls, digitally edited documents, or even via instant messages.



The person who initiated the contact has to assimilate all comments and send revised documents to ensure feedback was interpreted correctly. When looking at this in the context of engineering review cycles or creative processes on a deadline, it is evident that these disjointed, manual processes can be frustrating, time consuming, and costly.

In contrast, adopting more automated collaborative processes that enable entire teams to view and respond to documents as comments are made can dramatically streamline review cycles and keep projects on track. As a result, individuals work smarter and organizations can make informed decisions using timely information.

TVS Motor Company, the third largest two-wheeler manufacturer in India, used to engage in a complex process of manually sharing engineering drawings and designs. In a predominantly paper-based environment, production engineers had to wait for hard-copy drawings before commenting on them and sending them to suppliers across the country or abroad via courier. Integrating communication across all functions involved in new product development was challenging.

To improve operations and enhance collaboration among cross-functional teams and external suppliers, TVS Motor began delivering engineering documents as platform- and application-independent digital files. Extended teams view the PDF documents and use commenting and editing features in Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Reader software to share feedback on the 3D designs. Previously, sharing and mailing designs was a cumbersome process that took as long as a month, creating bottlenecks and substantially lengthening turnaround times. Today, document review cycles can be completed in a week or less by delivering materials for review in 3D PDF—reducing review cycles by more than 75%.

The Sony Corporation Atsugi Technology Center is realizing similar efficiencies by using PDF to streamline the review and approval cycle for Process Modification Records associated with product development. Sony's semiconductor laser is a key component in many digital equipment devices, including in Blu-ray disc players in the popular PlayStation 3 consoles sold worldwide. To keep up with diverse consumer needs and each product's short lifecycle, the company wanted to reduce the development and production lead time for the semiconductor laser.

The company found that delivering and reviewing Process Modification Records in PDF could accelerate approvals by as much as 80%. Reviewers need only free Adobe Reader software to comment on and approve or decline process modification requests. Reviewers can apply virtual seals, add comments, and easily share materials with colleagues for further review. The more automated processes are far more efficient than previous paper-based workflows, with the time to approve requests dropping from a week to a day or less. Also, digital PDF documents can be archived and searched for fast reference on future projects.

Keeping a lock on information

The rise of electronic communications presents greater security concerns when it comes to information sharing and collaboration. Inadequate security policies combined with the volume of content exchanged in electronic documents, spreadsheets, and presentations can often add up to unexpected data breaches. Compromised data can take the form of confidential earnings, competitive positioning data, product design details, marketing plans, and other sensitive information critical to a company's operations.



Losing control over information can cost businesses real money and lost time year after year. To help mitigate risks, companies often try to minimize document distribution, which can be challenging in today's digitally connected world. Communication strategies that rely on face-to-face meetings and limited sharing of printed documents can fail to adequately safeguard documents and are unrealistic when considering today's global economy. Organizations need a way to better protect sensitive information and manage risk, compliance, and governance without placing obstacles in front of employees.

By cost-effectively simplifying corporate policies related to document security, storage, and archival, organizations can make it easier for employees to meet security requirements, while connecting with the coworkers, partners and customers they need to reach. An important step is giving staff the tools to apply protection at the document level through passwords, setting permissions, and permanently redacting sensitive information. The result: staff can do a better job of keeping confidential information private and spend less time doing so.

An example is U.S.-based Procter & Gamble (P&G), which enhanced the security of its research and development (R&D) processes that are critical to the company's competitive market position. Previously, researchers used paper notebooks to record experiment information. Each page was numbered, signed by the researcher, and then by a witness. Using an electronic notebook (eLab Notebook), Acrobat, and PDF, P&G enabled researchers to use digital signatures to help ensure secure and trusted communication throughout R&D.

The company anticipated an overall productivity gain of 5% using the eLab Notebook, but early adopters actually increased productivity by 10%, or by as much as four hours per week for each researcher. This savings—as well as the ability to more easily and reliably reuse knowledge across experiments—added up to millions of dollars in savings per year for the company.

Addressing form and function

The ultimate benefit of technology is limited by the value of the initial input. People are responsible for entering and interpreting information and, unfortunately, they oftentimes make mistakes. These errors can result in rework, which impacts efficiency and may even jeopardize customer satisfaction.

Within many organizations, internal forms remain paper-based. A bank customer may fill out an application by hand, and then employees must input or re-key data into electronic forms and then forward the forms to the appropriate managers for review. The process is labor-intensive and the likelihood of errors that may impact the customer relationship can be high.

Giving employees the ability to create forms that can be filled out and saved electronically can help ensure more accurate information collection, management, and tracking. In addition, organizations can tie forms to existing IT systems to automate form completion and data capture, resulting in enhanced collaboration, faster form completion and processing, and lower administration costs.

At insurer Allianz Private Krankenversicherungs in Germany, Acrobat is used as part of an electronic form process that enables agents to capture customer data in PDF and rapidly create customized plan quotes during customer visits. The goal was to speed the application process, provide customers with more personalized offerings, and better engage customers with brokers to maximize sales.

Since implementing the solution, 14,000 field employees and agents access the PDF forms from the company's download center. Customer service has been improved because data can be entered into PDF forms in real time during customer visits in a simple and easy-to-understand process. In addition, agents make a stronger impression on customers because the process is handled more professionally.

Ensuring content quality and high availability

Time lost by employees due to misinterpretation of materials, missing files, or incompatible technology formats is incalculable. Engineering teams send drawings that recipients can't open due to software incompatibility. Creative teams share ideas that are misinterpreted due to formatting issues or missing fonts or graphics. And the progress of legal cases is slowed due to the inability to combine the array of case documents in an ordered, cohesive format.

One way employees can avoid these pitfalls and improve efficiency is by combining all relevant content into a single, easily navigable digital file. One method for doing so is to use a PDF Portfolio to communicate content to colleagues and customers in a way that is easy to understand and follow, enabling authors to package and present information exactly as they intended. Content can include text, spreadsheets, presentations, and even rich media, such as video, audio, or 3D models.

Using this method to share ideas with teams in different locations also better ensures that everyone will have the access to the same information as they work together to complete projects. By distributing documents in an interactive, searchable PDF Portfolio, companies can eliminate the need to print and overnight documents and can improve the quality of the materials they deliver, which means a more cost-effective, successful experience for everyone involved.

Dividi Projects in the U.K. creates interactive, rich-media documents, e-brochures, and presentations for corporations and organizations. The company helps clients unlock their digital assets and improve communications by using Acrobat to combine virtually any type of media asset into a universally accessible PDF Portfolio for easy viewing. The dynamic, interactive documents enable users to easily navigate through materials to reach the content that is most pertinent to them.

With the use of these interactive files, Dividi helps ensure that clients maintain the highest levels of branding and graphical design to engage and communicate more effectively with their target audiences. Dividi clients realize added value and return on investment from the multimedia content they already possess.

Strengthening collaboration to remove productivity barriers

In an attempt to maximize their efficiency and output, many employees are putting in extra hours to complete work and collaborate with colleagues around the globe. As highlighted, organizations frequently look to technology to support elusive productivity goals—but what's clear is that it is about more than providing technology to workers and expecting them to double their output.

Organizations must arm employees with solutions that remove barriers to success and to each other. For some, this may mean a way to more professionally package and share ideas, while for others it might be providing a faster and more efficient collaboration tool that shortens project cycles and enhances information accuracy. Solutions exist today to enhance everyday tasks, such as getting team feedback on a brochure, or to transform entire processes, such as gathering, managing, archiving, and securing customer account information. By taking the steps to implement the cost- and time-saving solutions available today, organizations can reap the rewards far into the future.