

Productivity starts with your people



Optimal productivity is not always easy to quantify, and the yardstick differs from industry to industry. In a mining environment, 'productivity' tends to be too 'soft' a term – we prefer hard metrics and generally look at two things to measure how efficient a mine is: availability and utilisation.

Our ongoing fight is to improve availability and utilisation, specifically in mechanised mines. If our plant is operating on 60% availability, how do we increase that to 75% – 85% (outside of maintenance shutdowns)? And if we have a delivery vehicle that is available for 80% of the time but is only utilised for 20% of that window, how do we make it more productive? How can we dig out more? How do we make it cost less?

But we *do* need to consider the softer side, otherwise we will never deliver on these tangible targets. If we push people too hard, we create burnout, fatigue and stress. If we don't push hard enough, we start to see complacency rear its head, which, in turn, presents a safety risk. These are all things that compromise our productivity and ultimately our bottom line.

If we want to find the productivity sweet spot, we need to look first at our supervisors. If we want to improve productivity, we need to build their competency, because they're our first line of defense. In 2019, we entered one of the world's deepest mines, which was well into its golden years, South Deep. The mine had been running at a loss for over a decade; it consistently struggled to meet mining and production targets, it had poor equipment reliability, and its labour productivity was well below the industry standard. Despite numerous operational interventions, our client was unable to lift production

and improve profitability. *So, what did we do?* We looked to their supervisors.

Usually, when we're attempting to redress productivity issues, two things stand out: Poor processes and siloed thinking/behaviour. Processes with many holes cause inefficiency, while siloed thinking is a symptom of a faulty culture, where individuals don't consider the full value chain, and just think of the task assigned to them.

On the culture side, if don't have an engaged workforce aligned with our organisational strategy, people don't know where they going or what they are working towards. This is when they start to lose focus. Through a three-prong focus on culture (aligning people to the organisational strategy), capabilities (focusing on the competency improvement of supervisors) and practices (implementing operational anchors and management routines), we can change mindsets while equipping workers with appropriate skillsets and toolsets. On-the-floor coaching allows us to embed these new behaviours, driving sustainable change.

We work with the people, and by developing their competency and confidence, we can start to meet those hard targets.

The results are in evidence: a few short months after our programme commenced at South Deep, there was a sharp uptick in those hard metrics we use to assess productivity: we saw a 193% increase in measured gold recovered, 86% increase in tons per rig, 42% decrease in mean time between failure and a 26% decrease in absenteeism. Overall, there was a 41% increase in gold production and a 30% increase in gold mined. These results were achieved with 28% less staff than before, and now – almost four years later – the mine continues to perform well, demonstrating a sustainable turn-around.

Ultimately, if you want to move the needle on your targets, you need to pay attention to what will move the needle *inside* your people's heads and hearts.