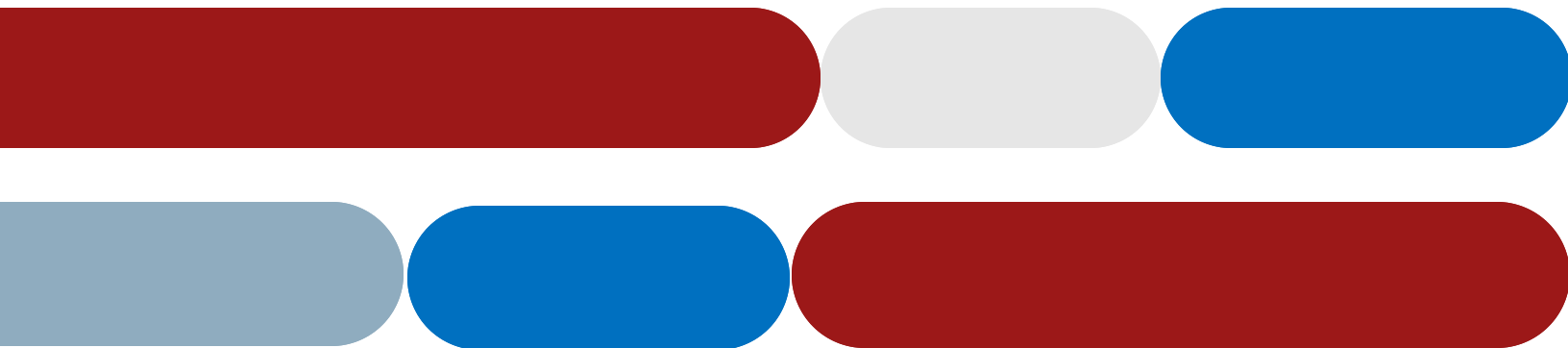


Leading from the Middle: Why Managers Are Key to Canada's Productivity Future

Deep dives into productivity futures



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01

Executive Summary



Canada's productivity challenge can't be solved by strategy alone. It must be lived, led, and embedded, one team at a time.

This white paper explores how frontline and mid-level managers hold the key to improving national productivity. Positioned between vision and execution, they translate plans into systems that work.

By redesigning the way managers lead, through clarity, coaching, and systems thinking, organizations can unlock measurable gains in efficiency, engagement, and innovation.

The Context: Canada's Productivity Imperative

Canada continues to face a persistent productivity gap compared to other OECD nations. In 2024, labour productivity rose by only 0.6% after three consecutive years of decline ([The Daily — Labour productivity, hourly compensation and unit labour cost, fourth quarter 2023](#)).

The OECD's 2025 Canada Report highlights that productivity shortfalls are not isolated to one industry — they are systemic, influenced by slow technology adoption, weak management practices, and siloed decision-making ([Raising business sector productivity: OECD Economic Surveys: Canada 2025 | OECD](#)).

The missing lever: Middle managers, the everyday architects of productivity.

They connect leadership intent with team reality, ensuring strategy flows into sustainable action.



02

The Productivity Role of Managers



2.1 Translating Strategy Into Systems

Effective managers convert strategy into structure. They take organizational goals and redesign them into clear workflows, routines, and expectations that their teams can execute confidently.

“A manager’s true output is not their own productivity, but the productivity of their team.”

— Andy Grove, High Output Management

2.2 Holding the “Middle Space”

Managers operate in a complex zone, balancing executive directives, operational demands, and human factors. In Canada’s hybrid and distributed workplaces, this role now requires deeper communication, trust-building, and systemic problem-solving.

Why This Matters

- According to a global study by McKinsey (2024), organizations with strong middle management practices report 30–40% higher operational performance and significantly better retention.
- Yet in Canada, investment in management training remains uneven, especially outside major corporations.

03

Five Leadership Behaviours That Drive Productivity



Drawing from CPC's Manager's Toolkit resources and national best practices, these five habits consistently differentiate productive leaders:

Leadership Habit

What It Looks Like in Practice

1. Define Outcomes, Not Outputs

Set purpose-driven goals; focus on value, not volume.

2. Empower Clarity Over Control

Simplify processes and roles so people can self-manage.

3. Run "Flow Conversations"

Weekly 15-minute check-ins focused on blockers, not blame.

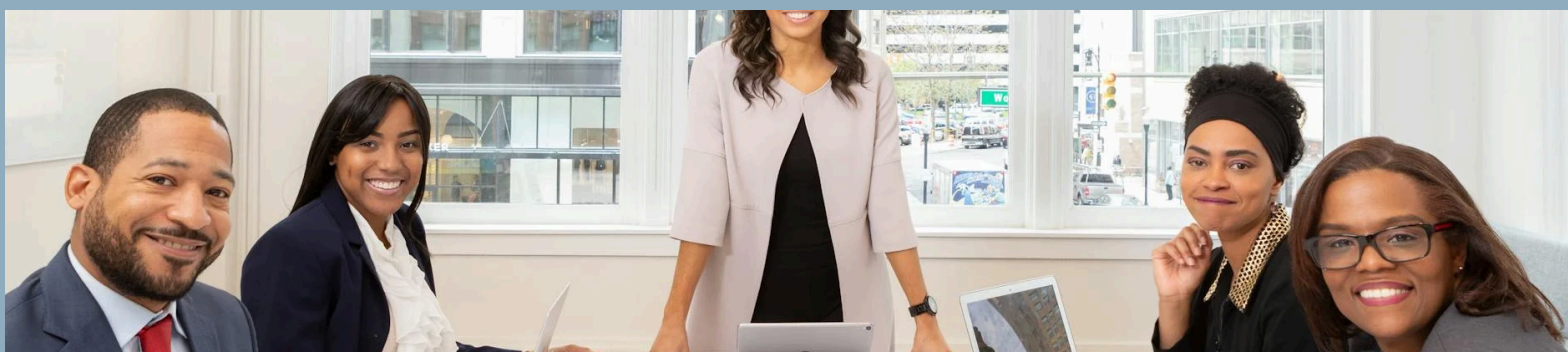
4. Coach for Growth

Build skills and confidence, not dependence.

5. Model Focus and Reflection

Demonstrate time discipline and visible prioritization.

These practices turn managers from "task controllers" into system designers — leaders who design the conditions for productivity to flourish.



04

Case Example: From Supervision to System Design

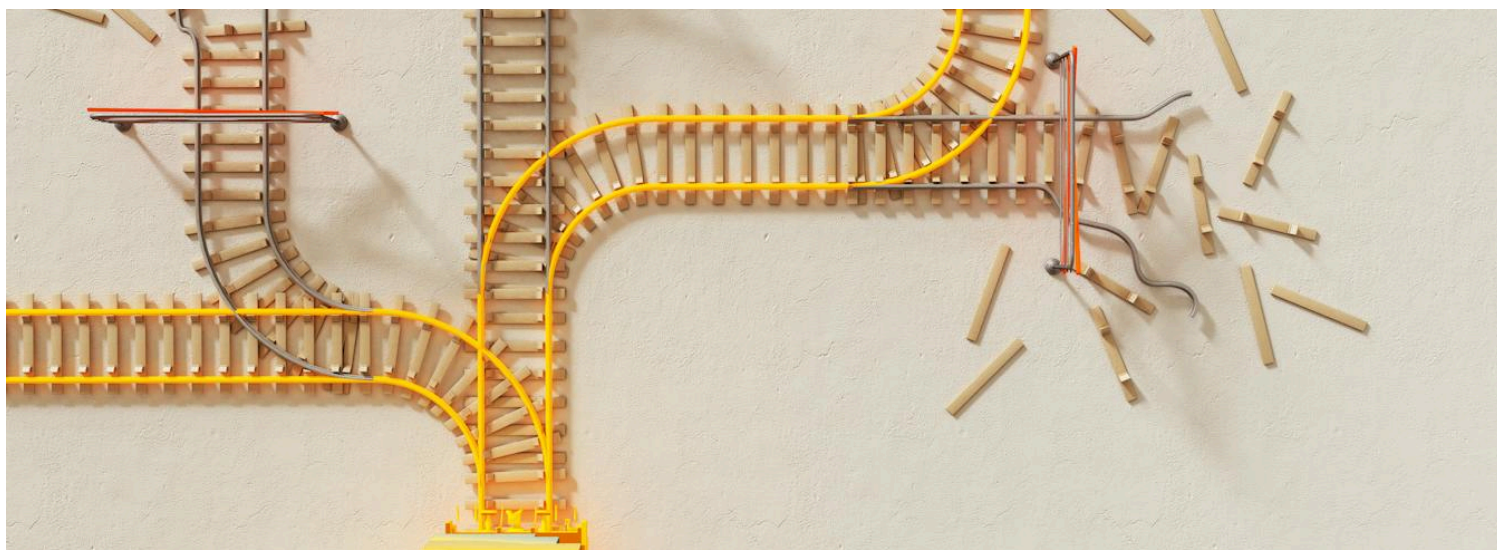


A municipal department trained 25 frontline leaders using CPC's Weekly Productivity Tracker and check-in framework.

Within six months:

- Project delay rates dropped by 35%.
- Managers reported a 50% increase in confidence to address workflow issues early.
- Staff engagement ("clarity of expectations") rose by 22 points.

"Once managers started focusing on removing barriers instead of assigning blame, productivity took care of itself."





05

System-Level Implications

For Organizations

- Embed manager enablement in strategic plans, not just HR programs.
- Integrate productivity coaching into leadership development frameworks.
- Use system mapping tools (like CPC's Audit Worksheet) to uncover process friction.

For Policymakers

- Incentivize management training as a productivity investment.
- Promote data-driven management capacity building through partnerships with industry associations and councils.

For Managers Themselves

- Treat weekly check-ins as productivity design sessions, not performance reviews.
- Shift from "time spent" to "value created."
- Use CPC's Productivity Toolkit to develop repeatable routines for continuous improvement.

06

Conclusion

Canada's productivity renewal starts in the middle, not at the margins.

When managers are equipped to lead through design, they become catalysts of organizational flow, engagement, and innovation.

Empowered managers create systems that work better, and when systems work better, so does Canada.

07

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www.productivitycouncil.ca



+1 (825) 556-4040



solutions@productivitycouncil.ca