Creating a More Productive Office Space

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Creating a More Productive Office Space

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Agenda

• Welcome & Introductions
• Warm-up activity
• Part 1
  – Making Your Office Space more Comfortable & Productive
• Part 2
  – Working in Shared Offices or Open Plan Work Environments
• Wrap-up
Warm-up Activity

• What contributes to making a comfortable and productive work space?
Our Work Space

• Where we work has an impact on how we work:
  – Ability to focus and stay focused
  – Ability to be productive
• It also impacts how we feel and how we may behave
• There are things we can do within our spaces that can have a great impact
  – We may not be able to incorporate all the tips outlined in the presentation but even some may make your work space more comfortable and productive

Productivity & Comfort

Tips for increasing comfort and productivity:
• Add colour to your space
• Minimize noise levels
• Maximize natural lighting
• Regulate temperature
• Bring in nature
• Focus on physical comfort
• Clear the clutter
Tip # 1: Add Colour to Your Space

- We may not be able to control the colour of the walls of our office spaces but we have the ability to introduce colours through decorating.
- Consider colourful accents to help brighten your space (walls and or desk areas).
- Different colours have different psychological effects and can impact the way we think or feel on a subconscious level.
  - Affects our mood
  - Impacts brain function

Blue

- Known as an excellent colour for productivity.
- Is calming and makes us feel stable and at peace – helps us focus.
- Associated with intellect.
- Too much can be cold and connote unfriendliness.
Green

- Good colour for people who work long hours
- Does not cause eye fatigue
- Helps you to remain calm and efficient
- Green has been linked to broader thinking
- Associated with growth and promotes feeling of balance

Yellow

- Optimistic colour
- Can help stimulate creativity
- Associated with confidence and extroversion
- Too much can promote anxiety, irrationality and fear
Red

- Emotionally intense colour
- Shown to increase heart rate, blood flow and also invokes emotion and passion – it can give people an energy boost
- Linked to superior performance on tasks involving attention to detail
- Stimulates appetite
- Associated with power, connotes strength, warmth, energy and stimulation. It can also promote aggression and defiance

Colour – Simple Tips

- Adding colours to your work spaces:
  - Look for opportunities to add colour in your workspace.
    - On walls (if permitted), on your desk
  - Bring in items from home that are a certain colour that inspire you and keep you focused
  - Don’t have to be expensive items. Items could include postcards, magazine cut-outs even blocks of colour
Tip # 2: Minimize Noise Levels

- Noise level in a work environment can vary greatly depending on the size of the team/department and the office design
- The noise around us:
  - Can be distracting
  - Impacts our ability to stay on task
  - Can impact our level of stress

A study conducted by Cambridge Sound Management concluded that 30% of employees are distracted by the conversations of their co-workers

Noise – Suggestions

- Explore with your supervisor:
  - getting noise cancellation headphones (particularly in shared offices and open plan offices) to block out external noise when necessary
  - Getting sound masking/white noise machine for the office space. These machines minimize conversations around you, helping to focus and protect speech privacy and confidential information
- Find out if there are quiet spaces that you can use for times you need the upmost focus
- If the office is silent, every small noise becomes a big distraction – “don’t treat your office like a library”
- Be careful with music – studies have concluded that music decreases productivity
Tip # 3: Maximize Natural Lighting

• Lighting is one of the key factors in staying focused and feeling inspired to create
• Bad lighting can cause fatigue, eyestrain, headaches and overall irritability
• Natural lighting is easier on the eyes. Position your desk so that you get lots of natural light in your space
• Dimmer work environment fosters creativity – idea generation
• Bright work environment – more conducive to analytical and evaluative thinking

Windows and Lighting

• If your office space has no windows:
  – Look for light that mimics natural light: use full spectrum bulbs to keep light soft and warm or consider getting a light therapy devise
  – Use natural elements to decorate your office to compensate for the lack of natural light: ferns and spider plants tolerate low light levels
• Indirect lighting is considered more soothing (desk lamps)
• If your space has fluorescent lighting, you should take your breaks/lunch in areas that have natural light
Tip # 4: Focus on Physical Comfort

- Your chair, desk and computer screen need to be designed for comfort and wellness (ergonomically designed)
- Standing desks is a new trend to increase comfort
- Be aware of your posture:
  - When you sit up straight and type = higher work output
- Take breaks from seating
- Do stretches regularly

Check Your Posture

- The top of your computer monitor should be level with your eyes
- The head and neck should be aligned with your body
- Elbows should be supported and close to the body
- Lower back should be supported
- Wrists and arms should be in line with forearms
- Feet should be flat on the floor
Tip # 5: Bring in Nature

- We are affected by our access or lack of access to the natural world.
- It is important for our psychological and physiological functioning which impacts our ability to be productive
- If you don’t have windows near your workspace:
  - Keep a picture of something natural as your screensaver and/or desktop wallpaper
  - Hung pictures of the outdoor
  - Have a plant in your office/space

Get a Plant

- Studies have illustrated how beneficial the presence of plants is to an office environment
- Plants are great at filtering the air and providing clean purified oxygen
- Plants makes people more productive, happier and less stressed
Tip # 6: Regulate the Temperature

- The most common complaint in offices is temperature
- Performance and comfort peak at 21-22 degrees Celsius (69.8-71.6 F)
- Warmer rooms make people more productive
- Since we may not have control over the thermostat, have a space heater (if permitted), bring a sweater to keep you warmer

Tip # 7: Clear the Clutter

- Keep clutter to a minimum
- Clutter is not helpful for focus and productivity
- Keep the environment around you clean from clutter
- Spend 10 minutes either in the morning or at the end of the day:
  - Putting items away
  - Filing
  - Ensuring things are organized and out of sight
Your Desk

• Your desk should be like a cockpit
  – you should have fingertip access to the things you use and do often and enough surface area to do your work

• Everything at your desk falls into 2 categories:
  – Permanent: equipment (only what you use every day), supplies (only what you need, store the rest), decoration and reference
  – Temporary: input to be processed, action reminders and support materials (only for items you are working at that time)

Your Desk

• The desk is for doing work not for storing work or reminding you of work that needs to be done
  – Create action lists
  – Put the supporting materials in a pending file or a project shelf

• Everything that comes to you is either trash, information or action
  – Read it and file it - don’t let clutter grow
  – Put the action item on a list and file the supporting document in your pending file
Your Desk

• Create work centers on your desk, desk drawers and file drawers
  – Desktop: phone centre, computer centre, work centre
  – Drawers: writing centre, filing centre, etc
  – File drawers: Pending, projects, operations, reference and archive
• Add personal mementos such as pictures. They can help give motivation and warm feelings while you are working

Other tips….

The following tips are not space related but have an impact on productivity and comfort:
• Plan your day
• Use an idea storage
• Hydrate and eat regularly
• Address interpersonal conflict with colleagues/supervisor as they arise (have respectful conversations)
• Role model respectful interactions
• Look for opportunities to add fun into your day
Part 2

Shared Offices & Open Plan Work Environments

Pros and cons

• Researchers have identified many pros and cons associated with shared/open plan work spaces.
Examples of “Hot Button” Issues
Open Plan/Shared Spaces

• Noise
• Confidential Conversations
• Distractions
• Clutter (including personal space and belongings)
• Odors (particularly food)

Due to diversity of roles and individual style – what is a “hot button” issue to one person may not be to another.

Source: https://www.knoll.com/media/984/571/1S_open_office.pdf

How to address these issues?

Have discussions about hot issues
Brainstorm potential solutions
Agree on the solutions
Write them in the form of guidelines
Communicate them
Hold each other accountable

Can be done formally as a department or informally as individuals sharing the space
Developing Open Plan/Shared Office Guidelines

- The guidelines should:
  - Be sensible
  - Raise awareness
  - Be practical
  - Encourage collaboration
  - Promote respect
  - Promote the professional image of the office

“Hot Button Issues”

Activity:
For the hot issue assigned to your group identify example guidelines that could be implemented to minimize the issue.

1. Noise
2. Confidential Conversations
3. Distractions
4. Clutter (including personal space and belongings)
5. Odors (particularly food)
Creating a More Productive Office Space

Notes

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General Tips

• Be positive about your situation
• Try your best to get to know your co-worker(s)
• Personalize your share of the space
• Keep your area modest and organized
• Look into getting noise cancelling headphones or a white noise devise
• Set guidelines

Examples of Guidelines

• Be aware of the volume of your voice when on the telephone or during in-person conversations. Make a conscious effort to keep the volume of your voice down as loud conversations can disrupt those around you or broadcast your conversation across the work area.
• Take confidential in-person or over the telephone discussions to a meeting room if available or to a more private location.
Examples of Guidelines

• When approaching someone’s work space, don’t assume that they are free to talk, simulate a knock, and ask if this is a good time to have a brief discussion. If possible sit down when holding a conversation to minimize noise travelling or move the conversation to a meeting room, if available.
• Use a headset to block out sound when you need some quiet time.

Examples of Guidelines

• Respect headphones, and “do not disturb” systems. These signal that the person does not wish to be disturbed. Return to your desk and send them an e-mail/instant message to schedule a time to meet.
• Do not hold impromptu or scheduled meetings/discussions in your work area or lengthy telephone conversations. Move your discussion to a meeting room.
Examples of Guidelines

• Protect confidentiality by closing the computer screens when away from your desk, using privacy computer screens and putting away confidential papers.
• Minimize noise level by keeping personal cell phones on vibrate, not shouting across the office / building to get someone’s attention, sending calls to voice mall when away, setting the ring tone of your phone to the lowest volume and refraining from using speakerphones.
Fostering Respect in the Workplace – Guidelines for Employees

It is everyone’s responsibility to foster respect in the workplace. An integral element of this responsibility is valuing the diversity of roles, knowledge and skills present in our teams and across campus. It takes a wide range of roles and skills to make the University of Windsor the best it can be.

The following are some guidelines:

1. Reflect and increase self-awareness

Enhance your awareness of how the words you use, your tone of voice and actions may be perceived by those around you.

2. Make a commitment to foster a culture of respect

Advise your colleagues about your commitment to respect in the workplace and give them permission to approach you should they witness you engaging in behaviours that could be considered disrespectful. Emphasize that you are looking for constructive criticism.

3. Be a role model of respectful interactions in the workplace

Model the type of behaviour that you would like your colleagues to also demonstrate. Be mindful of the words that you use, your tone of voice and the message that you send through non-verbal cues.

The following are some guidelines:

- Treat your co-workers, peers and supervisors with respect.
- Before speaking or acting, consider the impact of your words and actions on others.
- When an issue or conflict arises, talk to the other person directly rather than behind their back.
- Be open to feedback, suggestions and constructive criticism. Don’t take these as personal attacks.
- Be careful about making assumptions about another person’s behaviours/actions and their intent based on your values/perspective. Remember that some of these differences may be due to a variety of factors such as culture, religion, social class, gender.
- Understand your “triggers” and “hot buttons” (the things that make you angry and frustrated). This enables you to manage your reactions and respond in a more appropriate manner.
- Be willing to give a sincere apology when you did or said something that others may consider disrespectful.
- Use active listening techniques when discussing issues (pay attention, show that you are listening, provide feedback, defer judgement and respond appropriately).
4. **Make a commitment to resolve disrespectful behaviours**

Make every effort to resolve issues informally with the person who is engaging in such behaviour. Remember that the person may not be aware of the impact of his/her behavior on you or others.

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**Fostering Respect in the Workplace – Guidelines for Supervisors**

Supervisors play a critical role in fostering a culture of respect in the workplace. The following are some guidelines:

1. **Don’t find excuses for bad behaviour**

As a supervisor, it is critical that you address disrespectful behaviours as they occur (reported or observed). If left unaddressed, these behaviours often lead to the creation of a culture of conflict and resentment. It also sends a message that it is acceptable to be disrespectful in the workplace.

2. **Be a role model - promote a respectful work environment every day**

Model the type of behaviour you would like your employees to demonstrate. Your behaviour sets the tone for the department. As a supervisor, it is critical to take the time to become more aware of how the words you use, your tone and non-verbal cues affect your team. Assess your behaviours and actions from your employee’s perspective. Determine if any of your words/actions could be perceived as disrespectful.

Be mindful of your words and your body language particularly at times when your stress level is high or when you feel disappointed about the work or service provided by your team.

Take the time every day to demonstrate the type of work culture you would like to foster. The following are some examples:

- Take the time to greet employees.
- Be visible within your department and take note of interactions among employees.
- Take the time to engage in conversations with employees. Show genuine interest and concern for their wellbeing.
- Listen to employees, including their concerns and suggestions for improvement.
- Recognize a job well done.
- Don’t criticize in public. Take the time to provide constructive criticism.
- Exercise your authority fairly and when appropriate get input/feedback from your employees.
• Look for opportunities to bring people together to share ideas, discuss issues and problem solve.
• Don’t overreact to mistakes that happen inadvertently. Take the time to explain the mistake to the employee to avoid repetition. A loud, condescending or rude tone promotes disrespect.
• Make employees feel that they count. Take the time to express how their contributions contribute to the University’s success.
• Don’t flaunt your authority. Be careful with statements such as “Do it this way because I say so”. These statements show disrespect for your employees’ skills and abilities and impact morale.

3. Establish expectations and hold your team accountable

Discuss with your employees the importance of having respectful workplace interactions and engage them in the development of guidelines for working together. Ensure that employees are aware that disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated.

Be on the lookout for characteristics of an unhealthy work environment and act immediately when disrespectful behaviour is reported to you or is observed by you.

The following are some examples of characteristics that could indicate that issues/conflict may exist:

• Lack of communication among employees. Employees come to you with questions that could be answered by their colleagues.
• Increase in e-mail communication among employees.
• Existence of cliques and social groupings that exclude others.
• Increase in negativism or negative comments about colleagues or the work environment
• Ineffective meetings
• “Turf” issues

4. Support employees as they work through issues/conflict

Part of creating a respectful work culture requires that employees address issues collaboratively as they arise. Encourage your employees to address issues informally and advise them that they can come to you for support and guidance as needed.
Guidelines for Having Difficult Conversations

Having difficult conversations to address issues and resolve conflicts provides an opportunity for all parties to have a better understanding of each other’s perspectives/interests and to identify opportunities for enhancing the working relationship. The following are some guidelines for having respectful conversations:

1. **Don’t approach your colleague when you are angry**

   Do not engage in a conversation with your colleague when you are angry. Being angry impacts your ability to use rational, problem-solving skills. It is important to take the time to cool down, reflect on the situation at hand and identify actions for moving forward.

2. **Analyze the situation**

   Determine the issue(s) from your perspective and also consider the situation from the other person’s perspective. Determine your and the other person’s interests (needs, fears, wants, concerns about the issue). The following are some examples of questions that you may consider before engaging in these conversations:

   - What do you hope to achieve by having this conversation?
   - What assumptions are you making about the person’s intentions/behaviours?
   - What is your perception of the situation?
   - How would the other person interpret the situation?
   - What are your needs and fears related to the situation and the conversation?
   - What are the needs of the other person?
   - Have you contributed to the situation? If yes, how?
   - What might be some examples of options to explore to solve the situation at hand?
   - What “buttons” of yours are being pushed?
   - Does your attitude towards the conversation influence your perception of it? If so, how?

   The answers to these questions will enhance your awareness of your needs, wants, assumptions and perceptions.

3. **Schedule a time to discuss the issue**

   Meet at a mutually agreeable time and place to have the conversation. Let him/her know that you wish to discuss the working relationship. Express your desire to have a good working relationship and to tackle issues that emerge jointly. Do not try to resolve these issues via e-mail.
Active listening requires that you not only hear the content or the “spoken word” but also acknowledge the other person’s emotional response. For example: “I can see that you are surprised about my reaction to the music”

d. Use non-verbal encouragers

The gestures we make, the way we sit, how fast or how loud we talk, how close we stand, how much eye contact we make send strong messages. Ensure that your body language sends a positive message. The following are some examples:

- face the person
- make culturally appropriate eye contact
- nod your head as the person is talking
- lean towards the person slightly to show interest

e. Summarizing

Summarizing provides an opportunity to check for understanding and to review the progress made.

6. Work together to solve the problem

Respectful relationships at work emerge from working cooperatively and collaboratively to identify and implement solutions. After you and your colleague had an opportunity to share your individual perspectives and interests related to the issue, start brainstorming possible solutions for moving forward. Assess the options identified and reach agreement on the one that would work best.

7. Make a commitment to “check in”

Conclude the discussion by making a commitment to meet in an agreed period of time to “check in” and continue working on enhancing the relationship. Thank your colleague for his/her co-operation.

These guidelines have been designed to encourage respectful conversations. If at any time during the discussion your colleague starts yelling, name-calling or threatening, politely stop the conversation and report this to your supervisor. Such behaviours cannot be tolerated in the workplace and they could be a symptom of a conflict that has escalated and therefore requires a different intervention.

For complex issues, it may be helpful to involve a neutral third person such as a supervisor or trusted colleague. A neutral party can assist you and your colleague to have a productive conversation.
4. **Use positive and non-blaming communication techniques**

Effective communication skills are critical when trying to address interpersonal issues with colleagues. The following are some guidelines:

a. **State your concerns using “I” statements**

   Statements that begin with “I” make it clear to the other person that you are speaking for yourself. These statements help position the conversation as “non-blaming”. Sentences that begin with “You” often make the other person feel blamed and judged and usually escalate the conversation.

   Example: I have difficulty concentrating when there is a lot of background noise including music.

b. **Use tentative language**

   Ensure that your behavioural observations are brought forward as perspectives and not facts. Use tentative language such as “it looks to me” or “it appears to me”.

   Example, “It appears to me that you may not be aware that the music coming from your office is impacting my ability to do my work”

5. **Be ready to listen actively to the other person**

As you share your perspective, you need to be open to hear the other person’s perspective and adjust your conversation accordingly. Understanding the other person’s perspective does not necessarily mean that you agree with it. Resolving the conflict effectively involves understanding each other’s perspectives and interests.

The following are some examples of active listening techniques:

a. **Ask open-ended questions to encourage further discussion and explanation**

   Open-ended questions invite people into the discussion. They often begin with “What” or “How”. For example: What are your thoughts about using headphones or closing your office door when you play music?

b. **Paraphrase to ensure the accuracy of message heard**

   Miscommunication happens when we assume we understand, but haven't confirmed that assumption. For example: “What I hear you saying is that the music helps you manage stress.”

c. **Listen for content as well as feelings**
Guidelines for Fostering Respect at Work and Having Difficult Conversations - Sources Consulted:


EAP Solutions. Supervisor’s Role in a Respectful Workplace., 2009.


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University of Alberta, Faculty of Nursing Healthy Workplace Committee. Civility in the Workplace, April 2012.

University of Calgary. Respect in the Workplace Program. Downloaded from: http://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/respect_workplace_program

University of Victoria. Building a Respectful Workplace. Downloaded from https://www.uvic.ca/hr/services/home/manager-support/.

Vancouver Island University Human Rights Office. Managing Workplace Conflict. Downloaded from https://www.viu.ca/conflict/
Productive Work Space Presentation – Sources Consulted

Below, please find the titles of the online articles and blogs that were reviewed to design this presentation. These articles highlighted tips outlined in the presentation and many of them included links to research reports/data in support of the tips brought forward.

- How to set up your desk to increase productivity at work
- How to set up an ergonomically correct workstation
- The perfect workspace (according to science)
- The Perfect workspace: How to Design an office that boosts productivity
- 15 Office design tricks that will increase your productivity at work
- Open-office backlash: seeking productivity in a noisy world
- Tips for sharing a small office with co-workers
- How to survive sharing an office
- How to set-up your desk: basic principles
- 8 tips for creating a more productive office space
- Best practices for setting up your office to maximize employee productivity
- How colors affect office productivity
- How to create a productive office space
- Your office space influences your productivity