

OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY



We all hear the word Productivity from time to time.

- but what is Productivity ?

Google “Productivity” and you will be bombarded with articles and definitions.

I found the following two “definitions” which explains Productivity the best

#1

Productivity is more than just the measure of how effectively resources are used to produce outputs. It is all about using less to create more – to work smarter, not harder.

Productivity is a mind-set that continuously aspires to better ways of accomplishing tasks and conducting business. At the heart of productivity is the individual.

An organisation can only become more productive through continuous upgrading of knowledge, skills, discipline, effort and, collaboration - **(Productivity SA)**

#2

Productivity is really what you don't do. One of the most critical aspects of working efficiently revolves around getting rid of what no longer works for you.

Make a list of the processes, tools, and habits that DIDN'T work and set up a strategic game plan for eliminating them.

Again, this plan needs to be actionable. Set measured goals and completion dates right from the start. - **(Jocelyn K. Gleij)**

In summary,

- Productivity is using less to create more
- Productivity is to work smarter, not harder
- Productivity is the efficient use of time

Now, let us get to the nitty-gritty - the basics which impact productivity in most businesses.

Change your Habits

Like it or not, we all have some bad habits.

Habits can be changed but it takes time and a lot of patience

- An Informal Study in the 1950s by Dr. Matlz found that it takes a minimum of 21 Days to adapt to new changes.

People forgot that Dr. Maltz said a minimum of 21 Days and started to believe that a new habit is formed in 21 Days.

- Phillippa Lally (a Health Psychology Researcher) however did in-depth research and found that it takes 66 Days for a Habit to become automatic.

So, Please be patient for 66 Days !

**Persistence is what makes the impossible possible,
the possible likely,
and the likely definite.
- Robert Half**

To-Do-Lists

What is a Business ?

A business is Customers + Customers + Customers

You just cannot make money by providing a service or selling goods if you do not have enough customers, and if you do not provide a quality service or product to them.

A business needs Customers – you need to get them and retain them. Retention is cheaper than acquisition

- 70% of customers will keep on doing business with you if you deal fairly with them
- 80% of your profits will come from 20% of your customers
- 92% of all daily activities are directly attributed to customers

The Covid-19 (Corona) pandemic has had a serious influence on most businesses worldwide and demanded a rethink of some operational issues of some businesses.

Many businesses now have employees working from home, and controlling the activities of the team members require a different approach to the usual Whiteboards, Spread Sheets, Diaries, Sticky notes, etc. used in the Office environment.

There are many Online Task & Contact Management applications available to manage the To-Do-Lists of employees

The evaluation of a suitable system should include the following:-

- It must also operate from Smartphones
- The system must be Practical and User-friendly not requiring official training
- It must cater to all Recurring and Non-Recurring Task options
- Contacts (categorised) must be integrated into the system allowing for quick access to contacts associated with the main contact

- Does it have an Unrestricted Free Evaluation Version ? and for how long ?
- The cost per user
- Adequate Security and User permissions

We need to adapt or die.

Schedule your Priorities - not Prioritize your Schedule

There is no improving the future
without disturbing the present.
- Catherine Booth

Prioritise Important Tasks

The majority of people are most productive in the morning when energy and willpower are at their highest.

You should thus schedule the important tasks first every morning.

It is easy to spend time on all the easy, minor tasks, that we run out of time and energy to do the difficult, more important tasks (which are often lengthy, scary, or generally unpleasant).

Delegation

Let us first look at a definition of a Manager as stated by Wikipedia

A Manager is a person who *manages* or is *in charge of* something. Managers can control departments in companies, or guide the people who work for them. Managers must often make important decisions.

According to Henri Fayol,^[1] a French management theorist, managers must be able to do:

1. planning
2. organizing
3. leading
4. co-ordinating
5. controlling

The manager is responsible for overseeing and leading the work of a group of people in many instances. The manager is also responsible for planning and maintaining work systems, procedures, and policies that enable and encourage the optimum performance of its people and other resources within a business unit.

As a manager, delegating is important because you cannot and should not do everything yourself. Delegating tasks empowers your team, builds trust, assists with the professional development of team members, and increases overall productivity.

Use your authority and assign the responsibility of tasks to others in the workplace –

do not be an "I can do it better" manager. To be an effective manager, though, it's important to learn the art of delegation.

Effective delegation is good for your team's productivity as well as yours and can even help your team learn new skills while establishing a culture of trust.

Delegation Guidelines

1. Delegate Tasks to Qualified / Trained Staff
2. Invest in a practical Task Management Application e.g. Avitus Cascades, Asana, etc.
3. The assignee to whom a task has been delegated must accept responsibility to execute the task within the stipulated deadline.
4. The Assignee must report back to the Manager

Procrastination

Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished by a certain deadline.

Intentional delay is a serious Bad Habit and will stay with you all your life unless you change it now.

Remember

- you can change a Habit in 66 Days !

**Self-discipline is the ability to make yourself do what you should do,
when you should do it,
whether you feel like it or not.
- Elbert Hubbard**

Distractions – Emails

Emails have become the primary communication tool for businesses but Emails can be a serious productivity killer if not dealt with responsibly

Shut-off Email Notifications.

Some alerts will just awaken our curious nature to have a quick look and this is where your productivity takes a knock.

Turn-off Notifications -

If you use Outlook

Select File

> Options

> Mail

> Message Arrival

Untick “Play a Sound”

Untick “Display a Desktop Alert”

Remember

- you will never get a mail if something is of a serious or urgent nature. That person will call or visit you.

Deal with emails at specific times

Your position in the business will dictate the frequency you need to attend to emails. Attend to your emails when you arrive at the Office and then set a schedule when you will look at them again.

How to Respond to Emails

- If a reply will take less than a minute then do immediately
- Add a Task to your To-Do-List If a response requires more than a minute
- Immediately Unsubscribe to promotional emails
- Delete any other emails which do not require any action - some people are in the habit of mailing you “Thank You” when you mailed them something – what a waste of time !
- Create Folders for your “Pareto” Customers and Suppliers and move all emails into these Folders

Distractions - Social Media

Social media is a **HUGE** productivity killer.

Do you realise that the productivity of the business has already suffered no less than 10% over the past number of years due to distractions from Social Media?.

The following are extracts from recent studies that could help you in your decision to implement a Social Media Policy in the business.

“20% of full-time workers say they work less than five hours per day”

“30% of workers whose companies have an at-work social media policy say they use social media while on the job to take a break from work, compared with 40% of workers whose employers do not have such policies”

“Organizations that allow unrestricted usage of social media are risking somewhere between 15% to a whopping 45% drop in productivity of their employees”

“Corresponding through social media, text messages, making phone calls and emailing, ranks as the 4th biggest workplace distraction behind food and bathroom breaks, and talking with co-workers”

“According to TeamLease World of Work Report, an average of 2.35 hours is spent accessing social media at work every day and 13% of the total productivity is lost owing to the social media indulgence alone. Indulgence in social media and the resultant slacking is a testimony of pastimes getting more interesting than work.”

“Out of the 62% of employees who accessed social media during working hours, nearly 83% of them spend significant time browsing Facebook.”

“The use of social media at the workplace and resultant slackening has become very rampant”

“Mobile devices are the biggest distraction during the workday. Workers waste an average of 56 minutes per day, or nearly five hours a week, using their mobile devices for non-work activities”

Cellphones should, unless used for Business, always be on Silent,

It is also suggested that most App Notifications are also turned off i.e. Whatsapp, Messages, and Emails.

Distractions – Incoming Phone Calls

Allowing incoming phone calls to dictate how you spend your day will mean you do a great job of putting out fires--but that may be all you accomplish

Employees at a managerial level generally require more periods of greater concentration.

Your productivity will get a massive boost should you block out incoming calls for certain hours every day.

Inform the receptionist, your secretary, or assistant of the times they must take messages and what times you will accept incoming calls.

Perfection

Perfection is an illusion – the reality is that nothing is ever perfect.

Do not spend 10 minutes to find an R20 difference in a Bank Reconciliation.

Do a write-off to Bank Charges – the difference, more often than not, pops up at a later stage.

Perfection does not guarantee success;
if anything it's a hindrance.
- Dr. John Maxwell

Complete a task and then, should time allow for it, you can go back and improve it

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

Meetings are one of the biggest time-sucks around, yet somehow we continue to unquestioningly book them, attend them and, inevitably, complain about them. Some research reported that the average office worker spends over 31 hours each month in unproductive meetings.

The biggest problem with meetings is having them when they are not necessary.

You could use the **What, When, Who**, and **How** approach to ensure meetings are necessary and that they have a positive contribution to productivity

What Determine which topics demand regular meetings
The more common meetings should be
Annual Budgets
Monthly Management Accounts
Salary Reviews
Cash Flow
Marketing & Sales

Productivity Meetings, which is sadly ignored by too many businesses

When Determine the frequency of such meetings

Who Determine who the important stakeholders are to attend each meeting.
And add it to their To-Do-Lists

How The following should be the minimum policy requirements for all meetings

- Regularly scheduled meetings should take 5-10 minutes with a maximum of 15 minutes
- Attendees must honour the starting time of a meeting
- Ban email, messaging, and phone calls during meetings.
- Insist that discussions are limited to what is on the Agenda
- Ensure you have an adequate follow-up system to control that agreed actions are executed and executed on time.

Meetings would be a total waste of time if decisions are not executed

Learn to Say No

People will inevitably disrupt you to get your help on something. It's so easy to say yes and take on more things, but it can be counterproductive, wear you out and even cause exhaustion, burnout, and mistakes.

The danger in saying yes is that they will keep on interrupting you – sometimes just due to laziness.

Saying No helps you establish healthy boundaries and guard your time for your highest leverage activities.

No is not a dirty word and you do not need not feel guilty for saying no.

Just say no, if you cannot help or do not have time, and give a genuine reason.

e.g. “I am sorry but I cannot help you. I am under pressure to finish this task.

Speak to Mary - I am sure she should be able to help”

Frequent Breaks

Research indicated that most people are only able to concentrate effectively for short periods.

You should therefore avoid working for any period exceeding 50 minutes without taking a break. Anything beyond 50 minutes without a break could be a total waste of your time.

- We recommend that you first use the 25/5 Method
Work for 25 minutes and take a 5 Minute Break.
- Then test the 50/10 Method
Work for 50 minutes and take a 10 Minute Break.

Get your mind on anything else during the break – Walk around, speak to someone, drink something, and reply to any messages on your Cell Phone.

Avoid taking too long breaks.

Multitasking

Multitasking is a perceived ability to productively perform more than one task or activity at the same time,

Multitasking seems like a great way to get a lot done at once. Multitasking is not a talent – it is a myth.

Research has shown that humans just aren't good at it, even when they think they are and it can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on a new task when switching between tasks – so the more you multitask the more time you lose.

People who think they can split their attention between multiple tasks at once aren't getting more done. They're doing less, getting more stressed out, and performing worse than those who concentrate on single-task.

Research also indicated that our brains are not nearly as good at handling multiple tasks as we like to think they are. Multitasking can reduce productivity by as much as 20%.

The bottom line is that multitasking just results in time wasted and can cause errors due to insufficient attention. Trying to split your attention between tasks that require effort and concentration means one or both of them will suffer -

e.g. Speaking on the phone while driving a car;

Or when you talk on the phone to a client and work on your computer at the same time - you hear less of what the client is saying and could make errors on whatever you are doing on the computer.

There are, especially some men, walking around boasting that they are good at multitasking. You are not Sir – you can be 20%, 30%, 50% more productive if you stop multitasking.

Now I have a problem with women – they seem to be born with the ability to multitask - they can sit in a group talking, gossiping, laughing and they will still hear what the men, 10 meters away from them, are talking about !

Improve your Productivity

- by working and concentrating on one task at a time
- by setting aside time when people know you are unavailable and close your door.

Manual Filing Systems

An effective Filing System requires a degree of consultation and effort. Your filing system could follow the 4 basic divisions in a business –

- Customers (Sales)
- Suppliers (Purchases)
- Employees
- General Administration

Sales

You should distinguish between Credit Sales and Cash Sales

Credit Sales

Most of the filing will be in a Lever Arch File - in number sequence

Invoices

Delivery Notes

These might be attached behind the invoice

Orders and Quotations

These could be filed in the Suspension File of a Customer

Cash Sales

Most of the filing will also be in a Lever Arch Files - in number sequence

Invoices (Till Slips)

Delivery Notes

Some Cash Sales could involve delivery.

Orders and Quotations

These should be attached behind the Invoice

Purchases

Once again a distinction should be made between Credit Purchases and Cash Purchases

Credit Purchases

Most of the filing will be in a Lever Arch File - in alphabetical order
A major supplier could demand its own Lever Arch File

Statements
Invoices
Delivery Notes

Cash Purchases

Payments that are immediately made for Purchases or Expenses can be made from the bank by EFT or from Petty Cash

You should have a Lever Arch File for Petty Cash filing voucher in date sequence.

Payments made by EFT should also be filed in date sequence in Banking Lever Arch File.

Supporting documents must be attached behind the Payment Advice

Employees

Keep a Folder per Employee containing their Letter of Appointment and all other related documents. Employee filing should be in Suspension Folders in a secure environment.

Banking

All banking filing require a Lever Arch File containing EFT payment advice and Bank Statements

General Administration Filing

Many other documents would also require filing e.g.

- Insurance Policies
- Provident Fund
- Vehicle Licenses
- Software Licenses
- Financial Statements
- Installment Sale Agreements
- Rental Agreements
- Tax Returns
- Secretarial.

Suspension Filing is generally the most suitable approach for General Filing.

Filing and Retrieval of documents can also become a time-waster when you use an alphabetical filing index order having to unless you spend time (wasting time) to re-index these files.



We found a productive approach to deal with General Filing

Create a “Filing Index” in Excel

- Page Margins 6/6/6/6
- 6 Columns - widths 6/35/8/8/8/35 with Headings as indicated
- Create a sequential number sequence (text) under the “Loading Index“, a few numbers more than the number of your current Suspension Files.

Loading Index

- Enter the File Descriptions of all your files next to the numbers - in any order

c:\ admin \ zzz - filing index

Filing Index	
Retrieval Index	Loading Index
<u>No.</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>Description</u>
	✓ 01 Short Term Insurance Policies
	✓ 02 Provident Fund
	✓ 03 Vehicle Licences
	✓ 04 Software Licenses
	✓ 05 Financial Statements
	✓ 06 Instalment Sale Agreements
	✓ 07 Rental Agreements
	✓ 08 Tax Returns
	✓ 09 Secretarial
	✓ 10 _____
	✓ 11 _____
	✓ 12 _____
	✓ 13 _____
	✓ 14 _____

Retrieval Index

1. Copy the File Descriptions (from right to left) under the Retrieval Index column
2. Then do the same with the Numbers (right to left)
3. Highlight the Descriptions and File numbers columns on the Retrieval Index side and do a sort

Go to - Data
Sort;
Select A-Z

Looking for a File now ?

The Files under Retrieval Index are listed alphabetically
Just find the Description and the location number

c:\admin \ zzz - filing index

Filing Index

Retrieval Index		Loading Index	
	No.	No.	Description
Financial Statements	05	01	Short Term Insurance Policies
Instalment Sale Agreements	06	02	Provident Fund
Provident Fund	02	03	Vehicle Licences
Rental Agreements	07	04	Software Licenses
Secretarial	09	05	Financial Statements
Short Term Insurance Policies	01	06	Instalment Sale Agreements
Software Licenses	04	07	Rental Agreements
Tax Returns	08	08	Tax Returns
Vehicle Licences	03	09	Secretarial
	10	10	<i>Budgets</i>
	11	11	<i>Payroll</i>
	12	12	<i>Imports</i>
	13	13	
	14	14	

Print the Document; insert it into a protective plastic folder and put it in front of the 1st Suspension File

The additional lines, under Loading Index, are used to manually add additional files. The Filing Index is then, from time to time, updated in Excel and re-printed,

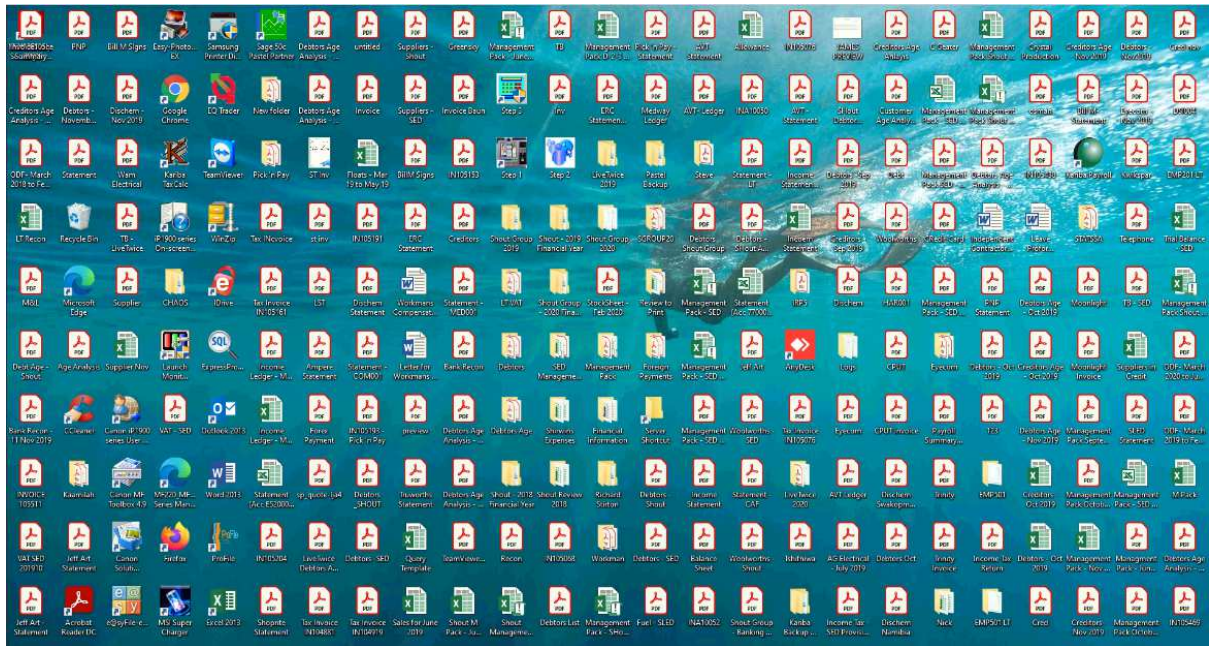
De-clutter

Clutter is a collection of things lying about in an untidy manner.

Clutter steals your focus; increases stress; contributes to procrastination; costs you time and money etc.

De-clutter your Computer

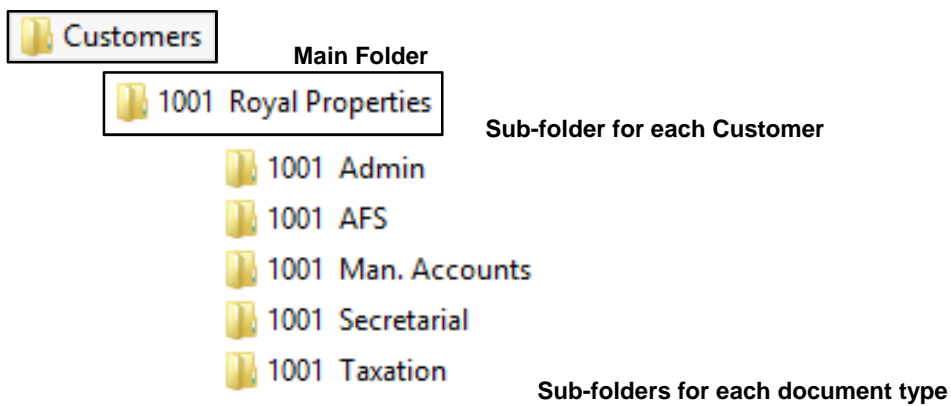
You have a serious problem if your Desktop looks like this !



The basic filing on your computer should follow a similar approach to manual filing.

Create Folders with sub-folders etc. wherein you file document types of a similar nature.

The following is a possible approach in an Accounting Practice



Allocating a numeric file number per customer is debatable but has practical advantages.

Your Computer Desktop should only contain shortcuts to Folders.

You could, if you still have a busy Desktop improve productivity

- Investigate “Fences” from www.stardock.com - it costs less than \$10 per User

De-clutter your Desk



Having less clutter will help you think more clearly and waste less time searching for misplaced documents. De-cluttering your work environment can also decrease anxiety, thereby increasing productivity

Employees

Your Employees are your most important asset

- No, the employees are not your most important asset
- the right employees are your most important asset

Workplace Conditions

A comfortable working temperature is between 20-22 degrees Celsius.
Ensure that both heating and air-conditioning systems are in working order for all seasons.

Remuneration

Encourage, motivate, and reward. Tell employees they are doing a good job and give constructive criticism and offer some personal incentive for a job well done.

Also clearly indicate the success of one employee to other staff to cultivate a sense of fulfillment to motivate others.

Attract Super Achievers and remunerate them for their performance.
The Cost of the Wrong People could be 23 times their Annual Salary

Training

A consistent training policy will also contribute to better productivity.

Training improves skills and knowledge; assists with performance appraisals; prepares employees for higher responsibilities and demonstrates that they are valued.

Equipment & Consumables

There's nothing more counterproductive and frustrating, for a user to wait for a computer to respond. Most software these days demands more than 4GB RAM (random access memory)

You could, before replacing computer equipment, first investigate the possibility to increase the RAM. RAM is not that expensive.

Every business must appoint a person with the responsibility to determine stationery requirements monthly and place orders accordingly. There is just no excuse to e.g. run out of copying paper or ink cartridges for the printer.

Data Backups

The business must have a proper Data Backup strategy, With no backups, you are not only vulnerable to viruses and hackers, but you must also consider the possibility of negligence, rogue employees, defective hardware, and natural disasters.

The absence of a proper data backup strategy could very well spell doom for your business.

Listen before you talk

You must listen like a doctor – ask questions and listen with empathy – a desire to understand and only then talk to influence, help, guide or prescribe.

Remember

- the Lord had good reason to give us 2 ears and 1 mouth
listen more and talk less !

**There is a big difference between hearing people
and listening to them.
Listening is wanting to hear.
- Dr. John Maxwell**

Get enough Sleep

Scientific research makes clear that adequate sleep is essential at any age so,

How many hours should you sleep?

- a minimum of 8 hours would be a good indicator for the average person.

The number of hours is important but it is also a healthy practice to get to bed at the same time every night.

Music

Music improves your mood, reduces stress and anxiety, and yes, increases concentration levels.

Music can help you settle into your work routine. Low-volume music can drown out noises in the office without interrupting other people around you.

- Choose music familiar to you and create a playlist
- Avoid music with lyrics
- Keep the volume low – your choice of music might not be appreciated by other team members
- Do not listen to music on the Radio – the Presenters and Advertisements will be a distraction.

The Pareto Principle

Most of us are familiar with the Pareto Principle

- 20% of our efforts yield 80% of the results.
- 80% of Income is contributed by 20% of the Customers

It's a good measure of where we can devote our efforts to increase our productivity

- Audit all of your processes. You must know your strongest twenty percent.
- Divert resources – energy, time, people – from some of the less powerful to the top twenty percent. Knowing it is all well and good. But the key to the Pareto Principle is making the most of the twenty and leaving the eighty behind.
- Protect the time in which you are most productive. Protect that time: don't allow any distractions.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a powerful, uncomplicated, inexpensive [group creativity technique](#) by which people meet to generate new ideas and solutions around a subject.

Brainstorming builds involvement, commitment, loyalty, and enthusiasm. Participation stimulates and unlocks people's creative thinking and thinking "out of the box"

- Involve as many as possible participants. Some of the best suggestions can come from someone unrelated to the subject matter
- Set a time limit
- Encourage them to let go of all inhibitions and that criticism or negativity can also contribute to a solution
- Inform the participants that all suggestions will be considered and the best solution/s will be introduced.

There is always a better way to do anything.

The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own, You do not blame them on your Mother, the Ecology or the President.
- Albert Ellis

And now - a Final Quote to brighten your day.

The reason the average woman would rather have beauty than brains is because she knows that the average man can see better than he can think.
- Dr James Dobson