



7 Steps to Increase Office Productivity

A Staples Business Advantage® Expert Solutions Guide

***“If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind,
of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?”***

— Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein may be renowned for his insights into the mysteries of the universe, but when it comes to office organization, he might have missed the mark a bit. That’s because science has established **a clear correlation between neat, organized workspaces** and the **levels of productivity** that can emerge from them. Put simply, cluttered workspaces and offices can have wider implications beyond mere aesthetics. Brother UK, a supplier of technology solutions, interviewed more than 2,000 office workers regarding workplace clutter. The survey revealed that:



But have no fear. We’ve examined reams of research on the science of clutter to assemble seven practical steps that can transform your workspace into a productivity-enhancing haven.

The Science Behind the Clutter

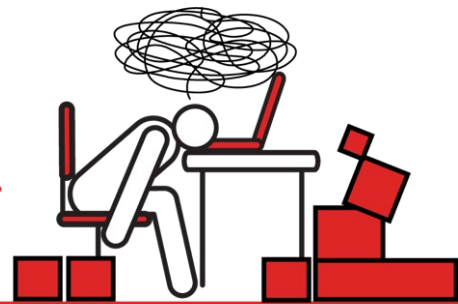
From a messy person's perspective, it might be easy to discount the correlation between being organized and productive. Can a seemingly small aspect of work life — office organization — really make a big difference?

How can desk clutter cause work sputter?

Turns out, it's a visual thing. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the Princeton University Neuroscience Institute found that **cluttered environments hinder concentration and hamper focus.**

When your workspace is cluttered, your brain receives multiple visual stimuli at once, leading to **cognitive overload**. This means your working memory has to work harder just to process all the clutter it sees — leaving little remaining brain power to focus on the tasks at hand.

A cluttered workspace can cause **cognitive overload**.



Clutter can cause elevated levels of **cortisol**, a **stress hormone**.



Wait, it gets worse. The psychological implications of clutter can be profound. Elevated levels of the **stress hormone cortisol** have been observed in individuals **who work in cluttered environments**. This chronic stress response not only affects your mental ability, but also has tangible effects on your physical health.

Clutter can even negatively affect interactions with coworkers. Social researchers found that cluttered environments can hinder our ability to accurately interpret emotional expressions (because we're distracted by all the clutter). This can lead to miscommunications and strained relationships with colleagues.

So, to clarify, science confirms that office clutter can make you **mentally slow**, **emotionally stressed** and **socially misread** — none of which are traits typically found in highly productive workers.

Strategies for Decluttering and Organization



Since one of the keys to more productivity is less clutter, let's start with what you can actually do about it.

Work like a minimalist.

Promote the concept of having only essential items on desks. This can include conducting regular cleanup days where your employees assess and remove unnecessary items from their workspaces.

Declutter work time.

Implement time management techniques, such as the Pomodoro Technique or time-blocking. This helps employees structure their day better, reducing procrastination and its ensuing physical clutter.

Make decluttering a workplace policy.

Develop company-wide policies that encourage organizational habits, such as designated filing systems or shared storage solutions for commonly used items.

Actively encouraging an organized workspace can make your employees feel better, work harder and collaborate amiably. Now that you have some strategies to try out, let's move on to the seven steps that can help you implement them.

1

Deny clutter a surface to root

Clutter is like a weed clamoring to take over your workplace, and all it needs is a little surface area to get started. Desk organizers deny them this space. They keep frequently used items accessible, which reduces the time spent searching for them. More importantly, organized items can't mutate into clutter.

Items that can help:

Drawer organizers

Letter trays

Wall file pockets



2

Create a home for everything except clutter

Proper storage solutions prevent documents and items from piling up on desks and becoming visual distractions. These storage solutions ensure your office has a specific place for all the sheets of paper that can quickly become clutter.

Items that can help:

Bankers boxes

Binders

File cabinets

3

Label everything

Labeling eliminates confusion and streamlines processes. It ensures everyone knows exactly where to find – and return – each item. For every shared drawer, cabinet and shelf, make sure it's clear what items should go there. When you do, clutter has nowhere to hide.

Items that can help:

Label makers

4

Utilize desk accessories to reduce tech clutter

Reclaim valuable workspace and enhance functionality. Cable management systems and docking stations keep workstations tidy and equipment accessible, which goes a long way to minimize distractions and to keep workers focused on their core tasks.

Items that can help:

Cable management systems

Docking stations



5

Invest in ergonomic technology

Ergonomic technology is an investment in employee wellness, as well as an incredible productivity tool. Ergonomic keyboards and mouse devices reduce the risk of repetitive strain injuries, while dual monitor stands promote proper posture and visual comfort.

Items that can help:

Ergonomic keyboards

Ergonomic mouse devices

Dual monitor stands

6

Use storage solutions to remove breakroom clutter

Storage bins can accommodate everything from utensils to snacks, while magazine holders serve to neatly contain reading materials. The result is a tidy, stress-free environment where employees can truly unwind and recharge, ultimately boosting productivity.

Items that can help:

Storage bins

Magazine holders



7

Invest in ergonomic breakroom seating

Once everything is in its place, get your staff some ergonomically designed furniture from which to view all those uncluttered breakroom countertops. Ergonomic seating minimizes fatigue, among other things. So, when they return from their break, your staff is primed to produce.

Items that can help:
Ergonomic seating



The Key Takeaway

The evidence is compelling — organization is essential for enhancing worker productivity. Understand the science behind the clutter, then implement strategic solutions, like:

1. Deny clutter a surface to root.
2. Create a home for everything except clutter.
3. Label everything.
4. Utilize desk accessories to reduce tech clutter.
5. Invest in ergonomic technology to improve comfort and productivity.
6. Use storage solutions to remove breakroom clutter.
7. Invest in ergonomic breakroom seating.

Doing so can create an environment that fosters focus, efficiency and well-being.

But don't stop there. Equip your workplace with the right tools to better organize your workspace. Explore the comprehensive range of products available through [Staples Business Advantage](#).

Take the first step toward a more productive work environment today.



Need help choosing the right products? We're here to help.
Contact a Staples Business Advantage Expert.

Sources:

¹ Psychology: Your Attention, Please. Distractions in our visual environment can impede our brains' ability to function. Princeton Alumni Weekly.

² Roster, C. A., & Ferrari, J. R. (2020). Does Work Stress Lead to Office Clutter, and How? Mediating Influences of Emotional Exhaustion and Indecision. *Environment and Behavior*, 52(9), 923-944.

³ Cutting, James E, and Kacie L Armstrong. "Facial expression, size, and clutter: Inferences from movie structure to emotion judgments and back." *Attention, perception & psychophysics* vol. 78,3 (2016): 891-901.