



## Creating a More Productive and Innovative Organization Resource Document

**Purpose:** Distraction and inattention limit worker productivity. The following guidelines are designed as a resource for organizations to adopt and share with executives and employees to foster a more productive and innovative work environment. This document is designed to help employees working in open-office and private workspaces as well as working from home.

Organizations are invited to incorporate the content from this document and share with employees at their discretion and are welcome to edit the content to meet their specific needs.

For workshops and consulting to implement these guidelines into your organization and make your group more productive, innovative, and PROLIFIC, visit [CharlesChaffin.com](http://CharlesChaffin.com).

### 1. Physical Work Environment

#### A. *In the office*

- a. Even at low levels, background noise causes distraction and stress. To minimize distraction and stress, maintain a quiet workspace as much as possible. Noise makes open-plan offices particularly disruptive to well-being and productivity. All employees are encouraged to be mindful of colleagues around them when engaging in conversations. If employees need to make a phone call or engage in a larger conversation, they are encouraged to find an alternate space.
- b. Workers tend to feel uncomfortable holding discussions in front of others. This is another cause of low productivity in open-plan workspaces. To ensure they can hold discussions freely when needed, employees are encouraged to explore alternate spaces to have discussions with co-workers.
- c. Employees working in an open office space are encouraged to use desk signs to signal when they are in focused time. The organization provides a standard sign that employees can use to signal their focused time. Managers are encouraged to discuss the amount of focus time employees need to be most productive while still maintaining a collaborative environment.

#### B. *Working from home*

- a. Noise is distracting and stressful in the home office just as it is in the onsite office. To minimize distraction and stress, employees working from home ideally are encouraged to find a dedicated quiet space in which to operate.
- b. Employees are encouraged to find ways to maintain boundaries between their work and personal environment.

## **2. Email communication**

### *a. Internal email format*

- i. Employees can spend an enormous amount of time sending emails, even internally. To minimize the amount of time devoted to emailing within a department, managers and employees should discuss a standardized format and even frequency for sending emails. Having standards for formality, frequency, and response time can save employee time and reduce workload.

### *b. Checking email*

- i. Employees need to monitor their email inboxes to ensure that they are responsive to colleagues and clients. However, spending too much time checking email can cause stress and distract from other work. Employees are encouraged to consider blocking out specific times during the day to read and respond to emails. Supervisors are encouraged to offer employees guidance on the ideal frequency of checking email.

### *c. External communication*

- i. When engaging clients, employees are encouraged to establish reasonable response email deadlines and adhere to them. This will manage expectations and show that the organization is responsive to their needs in a timely manner.

## **3. Meetings**

Meetings are necessary to foster collaboration and to ensure that departments within and across the organization work together to achieve their goals. But they are expensive for organizations and employees, so thoughtful planning and implementation is necessary to ensure they are efficient and useful.

- a. Meetings are expensive. Everyone's time is valuable. Organizers are encouraged to ensure that only those whose work is directly impacted by the topic of the meeting are asked attend. Too many people in a meeting also may not give everyone an opportunity to offer their perspective.
- b. Meeting organizers are encouraged to share an agenda ahead of time. This ensures that everyone can plan for each topic, comment on and potentially edit agenda items, and come prepared for discussion. Instead of using an outline of discussion topics as the agenda, organizers are encouraged to prepare a list of specific questions that the group needs to answer. This can help keep the group focused on the meeting's purpose.
- c. To maximize engagement and effectiveness, organizers are encouraged to hold meetings in comfortable, distraction-free environment with appropriate equipment, to start and end punctually, and to allow attendee participation as much as feasible.
- d. Organizers are encouraged to identify the quarterly/annual goals related to a meeting can help ensure the meeting contributes to the organization's goals. If the meeting does not relate to a specific quarterly/annual goal, it may not be necessary.

#### **4. Social Work Environment**

- A. Incivility, whether in-person, video conference, or in writing, distracts employees from their work. Even those who are not the target of the incivility but merely witness it can be distracted from their work for hours or even days afterward. Managers and employees are encouraged to promote and maintain an environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

#### **5. Video conferencing**

- a. Videoconferences are associated with higher-than-normal levels of fatigue, during and after the meeting. Employers are encouraged to use video meetings sparingly, in the same way they would use face-to-face meetings.
- b. Videoconference fatigue during a meeting reduces participants' feeling of engagement and having a voice. Meeting leaders are encouraged be aware of and manage attendees' levels of videoconference fatigue.
- i. A sense of group belongingness is a strongly associated with protection against videoconference fatigue. Meeting leaders are encouraged to foster a team spirit and feelings of belonging amongst videoconference attendees to offset risk of fatigue.
  - ii. The ability to turn off the camera can mitigate videoconference fatigue. Meeting leaders are encouraged to adopt a camera policy that best encourages meeting productivity while protecting attendees' autonomy and privacy.
  - iii. Meeting leaders are encouraged to use micro-breaks to manage videoconference fatigue and restore attendees' attention and vigor. Even breaks as short as one minute can be beneficial, though occasional longer breaks are recommended for extended videoconferences.

We can help your organization implement this guide:

- Employee surveys to identify their obstacles to doing their best work
- Executive workshops to address distractions, set goals, and set protocols to make the most of employee time and attention
- Live in-person or online programs across the organization to help set and meet quarterly and annual goals
- Access to PROLIFIC, the on-demand program for employees to identify obstacles and set a personal plan for higher performance whether working in the office or at home

**Dr. Charles Chaffin**

<https://charleschaffin.com>

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