Organizational Skills

A CAREER as a drafter or designer involves utilizing strong technical skills, but being a good employee is also essential for a successful career. Organizational skills are an important part of success in the workplace. In addition, managing time and paper/information are two important aspects of organizational skills.



Objective:

Identify organizational skills, including information and time-management skills.

Key Terms:

delegate
job obligations
organizational skills
schedule
timeline
time management

Using Organizational Skills

Organizational skills are self-management skills that involve strategies and techniques needed to help a person organize time and deadlines as well as manage information and paper in the workplace. Strong organizational skills allow you to work effectively and efficiently so all tasks are completed in a timely manner and with accuracy. A person who can stay focused on the task at hand and organize his or her workload will be a valuable employee.

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

Organized workers have several advantages over other employees, increasing their value to the workplace. Employees are more productive on the job when they are organized because

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papers are easier to access and projects are completed on time. Supervisors and bosses have a better impression of the value of organized employees because work is done in a timely manner, resulting in potential job growth. Having strong organizational skills helps employees become more efficient with their time and energy, resulting in happier employees.

DISADVANTAGES OF BEING DISORGANIZED

In a workplace situation, not being organized can cause challenges that may lead to problems for the employees and the workplace. Physically, clutter on a desk or filing area can lead to time lost in looking for information. In addition, missing papers can cause problems that may jeopardize job security. Mentally, an endless list of things to do without a sense of priority can lead to confusion, exhaustion, and decreased efficiency.



FIGURE 1. A cluttered desk can lead to a decrease in work capacity, including confusion and exhaustion.

STEPS TO IMPROVE ORGANIZATION

Overall, several steps can help employees increase their organizational skills. These skills can offer several benefits to employees and the workplace. The items in the workplace area should be evaluated and designated into categories that make sense. Possible categories might include financial, legal, records, supplies, and projects. Everything in the work area should be placed into categories and grouped together into tagged boxes. Items that have no real value should be eliminated, and others should be placed into easily accessible locations. Everything in the work area should have a purpose and a place to be stored.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Effectively managing information in a work environment ensures that projects will proceed smoothly. As the amount of paper in the workplace continues to increase, the ability to manage the information becomes essential. If employees cannot find the needed paperwork or tools to effectively work, the job or project cannot be completed. If it is impossible to find the information, it is no longer valuable or useful.

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Information Importance

The first step is to decide if the information is important. Ask yourself the following questions to determine the value of the information: Is this something that I must act upon now? Is this something that I can **delegate** (assign the responsibility to someone) to another employee? Is there someone else who needs this information? Will I need to refer to this information at a later time?

Storage

If the information is important enough to be kept, carefully consider how to best save and store it. Paper documents are usually best kept in file folders placed in hanging folders in a filing cabinet. Organize the file in a way that makes sense to you and your co-workers. If you are not available, other people need to be able to find files. Label the files to make finding them easier. Color-coding can visually increase the ease of finding files.



FIGURE 2. When filing papers, color-coding can assist visually in easy retrieval.

Reviews

Regularly reviewing the filing system can help you stay organized. Once or twice a year, go through the files and shred papers that are no longer important or that have no value to you or the workplace. At the end of each day, clear off your work area and file papers away. Otherwise it is easy to create piles of paper that will soon become overwhelming. If possible, save documents on the computer. Have a regular back-up system so important papers are not lost or deleted.

TIME–MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Success in the workplace is dependent on completing tasks and projects in a timely manner. **Time management** is the process of making choices on what task(s) will be completed and when. Five steps should be considered in organizing and managing the use of time.



FIGURE 3. Successful time management starts with understanding what needs to be done and when it must be completed.

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BROADENING AWARENESS...

AMAZING ASPECTS: Organizational Skills

It may surprise you to know that according to a study conducted by a marketing firm in Boston and reported in *Newsweek*, the average American worker wastes 55 minutes a day looking for things that he or she knows are there but just cannot find. This equals almost five hours a week or 31 work days per year. In addition, *The Overworked American* reports that Americans are working 164 more hours per year than 20 years ago. That is more than 20 additional eight-hour work days per year. Also, according to *The Leader-Post*, 80 percent of what we file is never looked at again.

Due Dates

Initially, it is important to review what needs to be completed and when. List all the activities that should be completed. This may include meetings, appointments, projects, and tasks. The list may be grouped by activity, project, or day. Short-term and long-term activities should be included. Determine the date and time by which each task must be completed.

Order of Importance

The order of importance for these activities must be determined. After the activities are placed in order of importance, the list may be large and overwhelming. It may appear that not everything can be completed, and this may be true. Successful time management involves completing the important tasks, not necessarily every task. The level of importance assigned to each task may be based on job expectations, how the work affects others on a team, or whether **job obligations** (tasks that an employee is legally or morally committed to perform) are being fulfilled.

Smaller Tasks

For the major or long-term project on the list, several things can be done to effectively manage the time needed to complete the project. The project can be divided into a series of smaller and more manageable tasks. Each of the smaller parts or tasks can be viewed as a separate one with its own timeline and importance. Clear definitions of each item can be created.

Length of Time

Consider how long it will take to complete each task. The timeframe may be based on past experience or on company standards. If the task is unfamiliar, ask an experienced co-worker how long the task has taken in the past, or a supervisor can offer a time estimate. Generally, it is better to overestimate rather than underestimate the time needed to finish the work.

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Timeline

The final step is to set up a schedule or timeline. A **schedule** is a list or chart of tasks that have to be completed as well as the completion dates. A **timeline** is a list that shows the order in which tasks must be completed as well as the due dates. The schedule or timeline will allow an employee to plan daily activities as part of long-term goals. A calendar or daily planner can aid in the management of this information. Considering personal work habits can improve work completion. Planning the most challenging tasks at a time of peak performance will improve success. Also, color-coding can help organize activities. One idea is to group similar tasks together; the files can be coded with the same color for visual recognition.

Summary:



While a career as a drafter or designer involves utilizing strong technical skills, strong organizational skills allow you to be more productive and efficient with an uncluttered workplace. Care should be taken to determine the value of all information and papers considering importance and future use. In addition, papers should be labeled and filed. Evaluating activities, determining the time needed to complete, and then creating a schedule helps time-management skills.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are organizational skills, and why are they important to success in the workplace?
2. List at least three advantages that an organized employee would have over other workers.
3. What are some questions that might be asked when determining the value of information?
4. If the decision is made to keep information or papers, what are some tips on effectively organizing the information?
5. What steps would you take when deciding to organize and manage your time at work?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Over the next two days, keep a journal, tracking what you do and how much time you spend on each activity. Also, reflect on how much time you waste that might be better spent on other activities. Why would doing these productive activities be better for you in achieving your long-term and short-term goals? Write a reflection on your organizational skills, including time and paper management. Consider how you might make changes to increase your productivity and success.

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Web Links:



Productivity Test

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/productivity-quiz.htm

Organizing Steps

http://www.worklifecoach.com/ten_easy_organizing.pdf

Managing Your Time

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm

Ways to Manage Papers

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_85.htm

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