Stop Wasting 45% of Your day

How Drive-by Requests, Meetings, and Interruptions are Destroying Your Productivity

workfront™

THE AVERAGE IT
ORGANIZATION SPENDS

45%-55%

OF ITS TIME ON
UNPLANNED AND
URGENT ACTIVITIES[1]

MORE THAN

1 OUT OF 3

ENTERPRISE WORKERS
ATTRIBUTE THEIR WORK
FAILURES TO A LACK
OF CLEAR PROCESS
AND PRIORITIES

INTRODUCTION

Do you have drive-by requests coming at you like a spray of bullets? Do constant fire drills leave you feeling like you've been racing around battling real flames? When you look around, do you see carnage everywhere in the form of sticky notes about urgent bug fixes or malfunctioning software, emails about last-minute status update meetings for three different projects, or people popping in to see if project X or Y is ready for testing?

Research shows that drive-by work requests, meetings, and interruptions can take a significant toll on productivity. The result? Enterprise workers end up using less than half their time on their primary job responsibilities.2 With more than half your day shot to pieces by unplanned requests and interruptions, it's almost impossible to be productive.

And you know where that leads: the death spiral of late nights, weekends, and total burnout.

If you're tired of a productivity-killing work environment that leaves you struggling to survive each day, then read on. Learn how to stop this drive-by cycle and gain precious hours.

You've got your day all mapped out. First, you'll tackle a draft of the network security plan, then you'll work on configuring the point-of-service hardware for the website, and if you have time, you'll address a database update for the marketing department. But, before you've even had your first sip of coffee, things go south. The CFO calls to say there's a glitch in the payroll software and he needs it fixed today so he can run payroll. You dash up to his office to find out what's going on. By the time you get back, you've got a sticky note request on your desk from the marketing manager asking you to run a geolocation visit report for the last three weeks. You're afraid to even open your email for fear of more requests ready to ambush you.

In one study, ad hoc requests comprised nearly 50 percent of respondents' team work hours.[3] Beyond the personal frustration of never being able to tackle what you planned on, there's also a high organizational cost to this kind of ad hoc work environment. When your day is consumed by unplanned work, the planned work doesn't get done. This creates a cascading effect of projects that end up sidelined or delayed—at a considerable cost to the organization. For example, a project that is three months late to market can result in a 26.9 percent decrease in revenue.[4]

> MORE THAN 1 IN 3 WORKERS ATTRIBUTE WORK FAILURES TO A LACK OF CLEAR PROCESSES AND PRIORITIES

When requests come at you constantly and from all different directions—delivered in the hallway, on sticky notes, or through emails—it's also easy for them to get lost or forgotten. You know the scenario...your boss says,

"Hey, I asked you last week to have a demo ready for our online banking tool... tomorrow's the stakeholder meeting, are we all set?" Only now is it vaguely coming back to you that you were even asked (in the hallway on your way to the bathroom) to do this. Yup, fire drill time.

It is also difficult to decipher what work is urgent and what can wait. In fact, 20 percent of enterprise workers surveyed said that a lack of understanding about the urgency or time-sensitive nature of a task was the most common source of conflict with other departments or teams, and more than one in three attributed their work failures to a lack of clear processes and priorities.[5] Incorrectly prioritizing work can lead to serious financial consequences as well as some pretty unhappy stakeholders.

The Fix: Put all work in one pipeline

To stop the drive-by chaos, you've got to start with enforcement. Require that all requests be submitted in the same way to a central location. No more hallway requests, random emails, or notes left on desks. Requests may be submitted through a work management tool, a shared spreadsheet, or some other system, but there must be no exceptions to the rule. If a request isn't submitted correctly, the request won't be considered. Period. Once all work is in the pipeline, and you and your entire IT team can see what's being asked of you, it's much easier to see what work is truly urgent, what can wait, and how to best delegate tasks based on who is working on what.

Effective prioritization also eliminates a lot of fire drills. When all work is visible and when it is prioritized against other work, it gets done—in the right order—before it becomes an emergency. High-performing IT organizations spend less than 5 percent of their time on unplanned work versus the 45 percent to 55 percent of average organizations.[6] That's a big difference. By taking control of drive-by requests, you could gain an average of four hours a day. This is time you could spend on your planned to-do list and on meeting the organization's strategic priorities.

② "Hey, How about a meeting... Right now?"

Today, more than a third of all meetings are ad hoc and more than 50 percent of employees report that the number of meetings they have is increasing.[7] Even worse, 67 percent of employees report that more than half of the meetings they attend are not of value.[8] You don't have to be a mathematician to know this equals a lot of wasted time and squandered productivity.

In fact, some employees spend so much time interacting with one another that they must do the rest of their jobs when they get home at night.[9] Sound familiar? But, what many organizations may not realize is that the cost is far higher than having to devote nights and weekends to work. Collaboration overload can not only damage employees' productivity and health, but also erode performance and stall innovation.[10] When put in this light, the cost of constant unplanned meetings, even when the meetings are productive, is simply too high. There has to be a better way.

> 67% OF EMPLOYEES REPORT THAT MORE THAN HALF OF THE MEETINGS THEY ATTEND ARE NOT OF VALUE.

The Fix: Streamline communication and collaboration

What if there was a way to communicate all the information shared in a meeting without holding a meeting? Ditto for all your peers. Thanks to technological advances over the last several years, there are ways to streamline communication and collaboration so everyone who needs to work together can—without constantly filing into a room to discuss face-to-face.

With 32 percent of all meetings now held virtually and 48 percent of all meetings one-on-one rather than group meetings,[11] the type of meetings being held is also changing significantly. The good news is that these more flexible types of meetings and the use of technology to initiate the meetings means that employees are comfortable with online solutions to the ubiquitous meeting problem.

The first step is to find a tool that lets you collaborate in the context of the work. Email doesn't do this, because it's too easy to leave someone off an email thread. Email is also really good at getting lost and forgotten in an overflowing inbox. But, there are tools that use a social approach to track collaboration and communication in the context of work. And, they can do it both virtually and in real time. This keeps everyone informed of the status of a project or task, lets them know what the next steps are, and lets everyone share their ideas in a collaborative manner. This can eliminate the need for status update meetings and allow productive group collaboration without a visit to the conference room.

In fact, implementing a social approach to project communication can reduce the time employees spend searching for content by 35 percent.[12] Add to that another 20 percent to 25 percent of potential overall productivity improvement that is possible when employees use social tools[13] and you can begin to see your productivity coming back to life.
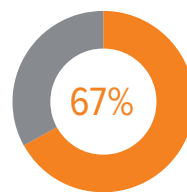
67% OF EMPLOYEES REPORT THAT MORE THAN HALF OF THE MEETINGS THEY ATTEND ARE NOT OF VALUE

③ "Excuse Me, Excuse Me, Excuse Me..."

You are deep in concentration, scrolling through the code to find the right place to insert a bug fix when a colleague pops her head in and asks, "Excuse me, do you have a minute?" You'd like to say no, but the truth is, it doesn't matter now—your concentration is already broken. You'll have to start combing through the code all over again, whether you answer her question or not. And what is the question? "Hey, I was just wondering where we were at on getting that new website integration feature ready for testing." Nothing urgent, but it was something she didn't know and you did because you have the spreadsheet tracking the progress of the project.

These kinds of interruptions happen all day long. Knocks on the door, phone calls, or the ping of an instant message may seem harmless, but they're not. They are productivity-sucking parasites. One recent study concluded that 28 percent of the average office worker's day is spent dealing with unnecessary interruptions and

> 28% OF THE AVERAGE OFFICE WORKER'S DAY IS SPENT DEALING WITH UNNECESSARY INTERRUPTIONS AND SUBSEQUENTLY RECAPTURING FOCUS.

subsequently recapturing focus.[14] And in another survey, 41 pecent of respondents said unexpected phone calls interrupted their work.[15] But, perhaps even more troubling is new research that shows unscheduled interruptions at work leave people more exhausted and more prone to make errors.[16] Even short interruptions can turn into long ones. Studies show that it can take 25 minutes before you return to the same task and 50 minutes before you can get back to deep concentration where you are doing your best work on a complex task.[17] That's a lot of productive time down the tube for just one interruption. Multiply it by numerous interruptions a day and it's easy to see why your productivity is on life support.

The Fix: Give them what they need, before they even ask

While you can't eliminate all interruptions, you can significantly decrease them by making the information your bosses and peers are seeking available to them proactively. Instead of keeping track of project status, who's working on what, or other project details on a personal spreadsheet or in your head, you need to create visibility across the organization.

When you allow complete visibility, in real time, across the organization, no one is left wondering what the status of a project is, and there will be fewer interruptions to find out who is working on what, when it will be done, or if the project budget is at risk. In addition, creating easy touchpoints, like a dashboard, will allow busy executives and stakeholders to have understandable, at-a-glance, real-time updates without having to ask. All of which means fewer interruptions for you and more time to focus on getting valuable work done.
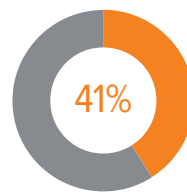
41% OF WORKERS SAID THAT UNEXPECTED PHONE CALLS INTERRUPTED THEIR WORK

Conquer Work Chaos
with Workfront

Stop wasting 45 percent of your day. With an Enterprise Work Management solution like Workfront, your team will enjoy:

- an easy-to-use, adoptable platform

- collaboration in the context of work

- real-time visibility into all types of work

- multi-methodology capabilities

- customized reports and dashboards

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Endnotes

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