

Is there a problem with focus in the office?

23 working days are lost each year. Without anyone realising it.

We live in a world that constantly demands our attention. Yet in the workplace, it is increasingly the built environment itself – not just digital noise – that fragments our focus. From visual overstimulation to uncontrolled acoustic spillover, many offices unintentionally create conditions that work against concentrated work. The voice AI specialist Saima recently reported that around two hours of working time are lost each day due to distractions in the office. Over the course of a year, that adds up to an average of 23 lost working days per employee due to disruptions in their immediate working environment.

“The greatest misunderstanding of the last office decade is the belief that concentration simply means “less noise”. But research clearly shows: people lose focus not because of noise – but because they lack control over their environment,” says Ernst Holzapfel, Marketing Director at Sedus. “At a time when work is distributed across many locations, the office needs a clear purpose. Neuroscience shows that more than four hours of genuine concentration are biologically almost impossible. If we lose this time in the office, the company loses its most valuable source of energy.”

Over the past decade, office design has placed an emphasis on openness, collaboration and creativity, which were regarded as the most effective levers for implementing hybrid office models. But architects and workspace strategists increasingly point out that many of these environments overstimulate rather than support people. Open layouts often blur cognitive boundaries, weaken personal control, and make sustained mental work more difficult. Communal tables, meeting corners and lounge areas encourage interaction but often at the expense of another essential need: the ability and opportunity to concentrate.

Deep Working: workstation design that promotes concentration

Attention is cyclical by nature: phases of intense concentration must be followed by moments of relaxation. That’s why workspace design has to take into account the fact that deep concentration requires not only time and consistency, but also the right conditions to alternate between effort and relaxation. In practice, this means creating a spatial choreography that reflects these cognitive rhythms – from low-stimulation focus zones to transitional areas supporting mental reset. Materials, light levels, acoustic textures and spatial proportions all shape how easily people can enter and maintain deeper concentration.

Holzapfel emphasises that, despite good intentions, many modern offices often miss the point: “Many offices make people tired before they even have a chance to be productive. Good working

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environments function like an energy filter: they reduce stimuli, stabilise the peripersonal space, and give employees mental strength instead of draining it. An office has value not just because people gather there – but because it enables them to think more precisely, more clearly, and with more focus than anywhere else.”

When designing modern offices, it is essential to organise spaces that support different types of concentration. Some areas can be open and sociable. Others need to be quiet and private. Focus rooms, meeting pods, or even simple corners with privacy screens can help reduce digital and visual distractions. In between there are transitional areas for informal breaks or brief moments of rest.

To achieve this goal, Sedus increasingly relies on solutions that support the natural rhythm of concentration and accommodate different sensory needs. “Concentration doesn't just happen,” says Holzapfel. “It needs to be activated. Workplaces that are unbalanced in sensory terms hinder this process – workplaces with a balanced design accelerate it. That’s why our approach focuses less on individual products and more on cognitive zoning principles: environments that consciously modulate acoustics, light, materiality and spatial density to stabilise attention. Whether through acoustically protected micro-environments such as the se:cube, balanced lighting concepts or modular settings that adapt to different working styles – the goal is always the same: to channel mental energy rather than disperse it. The better a space channels mental energy, the greater its impact on people.”

Sedus INSIGHTS N° 20: Focus office

The current issue of Sedus INSIGHTS N° 20 explores the topic “More Concentration in the Office” The trend barometer presents new research findings and opportunities that can meaningfully support workplace design. In addition, recent real-world case studies are presented.

Want to find out more about workstation design that promotes concentration? You can find the latest edition of Sedus INSIGHTS N° 20 here: <https://www.sedus.com/en/knowledge/trend-monitor-sedus-insights>

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