HAWORTH

Why We Can't Focus at Work

Inability to complete focus work continues to be a top complaint of employees. Why can't we solve this problem? Different work activities often compete with one another, focus work tasks themselves can differ, and people's abilities differ. There is no "one-size-fits-all solution."

Knowing the ways that focus work is task- and person-specific can help you create a workplace—its culture, policies, and the variety of workspaces—to meet all the ways employees need to work, including focus work.

3 Culprits That Sabotage Focus Work

Distractions
When unexpected off-task information captures our attention.

Interference
When off-task information gets confused with task information.

Interruptions
When a distraction or interference pulls us off a task entirely to start a new task.

Solutions to workplace distractions, interference, and interruptions should consider organizational culture and workspace design implications.

Want to learn more?

Get more in-depth information about how our brains help and hurt our focus work efforts, and find strategies for managing distractions, interference, and interruptions in our white paper, Why We Can't Focus at Work.
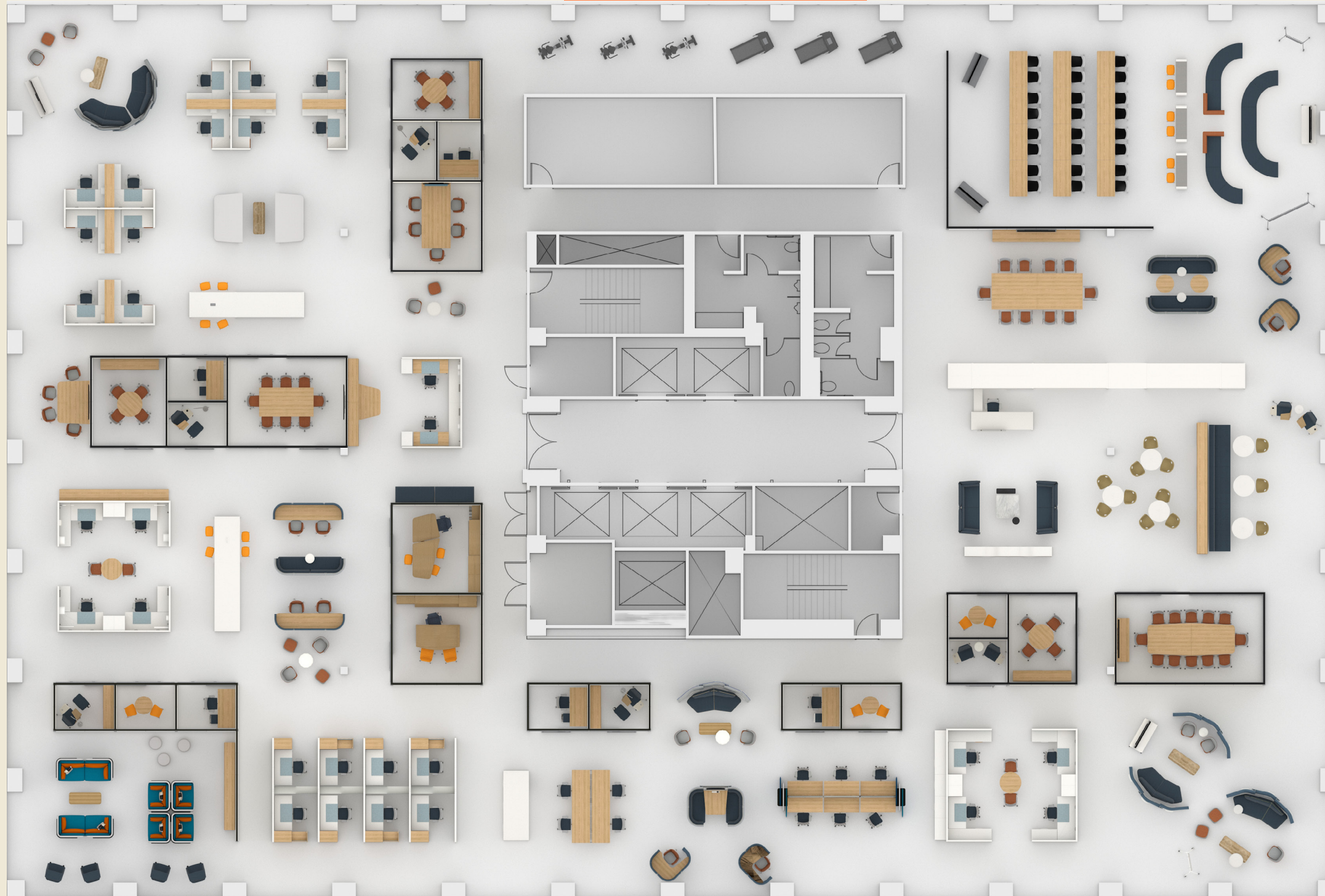
Click on the numbers to learn more.
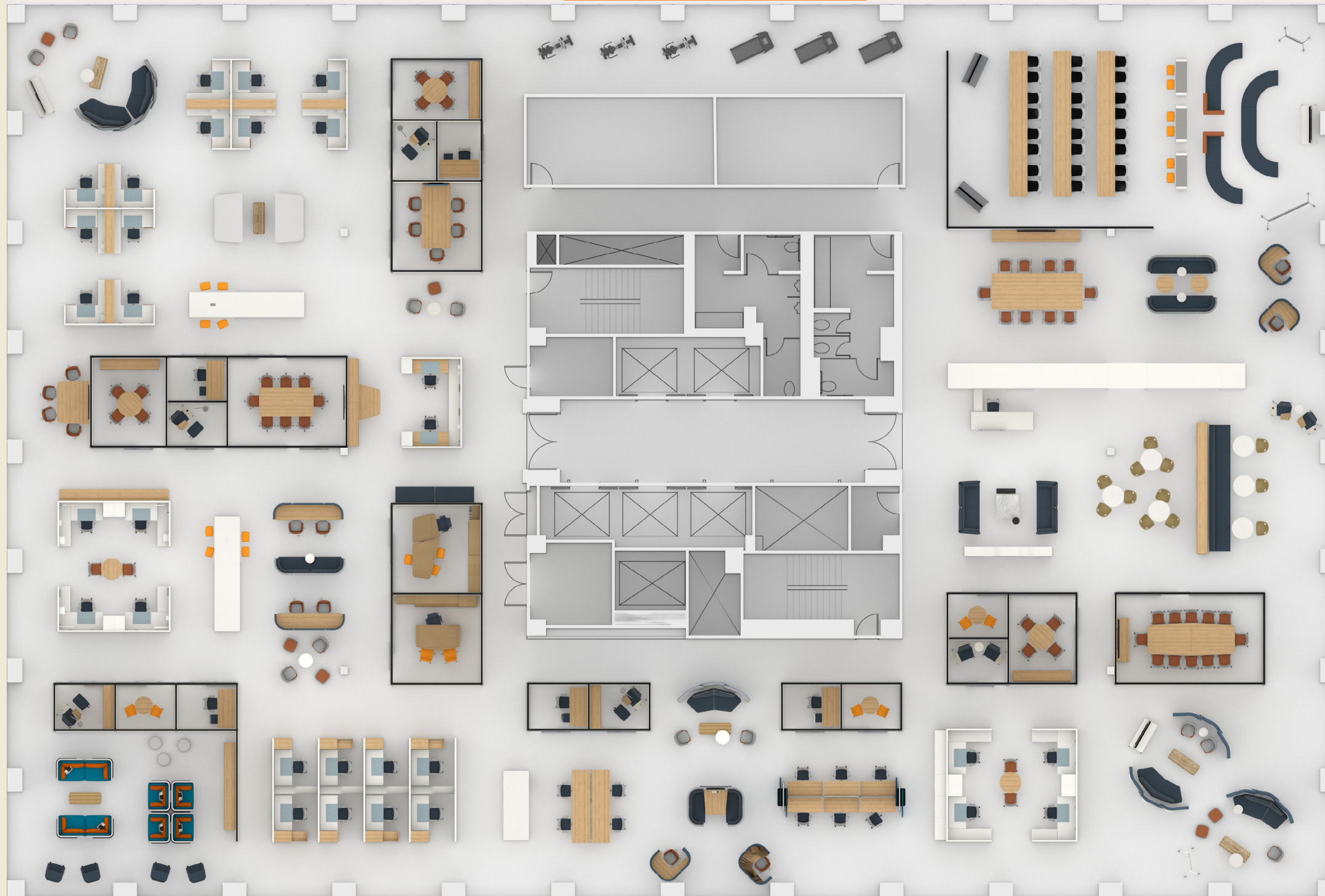
Organizational & Team Culture Implications

Culture is the personality of an organization, comprised of values, assumptions, and artifacts. It is embodied in space design because the space communicates what is valued.

Building a workplace strategy to include insulating focus work starts with culture. It involves identifying and addressing how cultural norms, the overall built environment, and supportive technology all influence each other.

1 **Organizational Culture**

2 **Norms**

3 **Legible Spaces**

4 **Technology**

Click on the numbers to learn more.

Workspace Design Implications

Based on our acoustics research, noise levels for an organization are the top consideration in designing spaces. Floorplate, adjacency features and workspace characteristics should communicate where specific work activities can take place, effectively managing auditory and visual distractions and interference. Carefully consider overall arrangement and adjacency of the various activity zones—from quiet to active—in the floorplate.
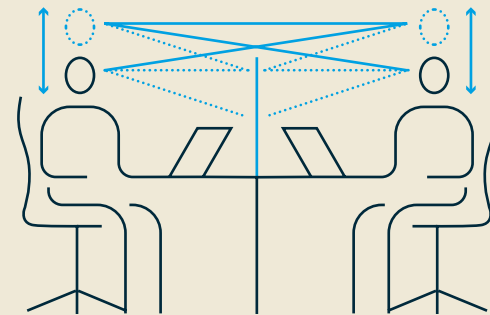
1. Quiet Zones
2. Active Zones
3. Workstyles
4. Unassigned Private Spaces
5. Confidential Speech
6. Absorptive Materials
7. Visual Barriers
8. Visual Orientation
9. User Control
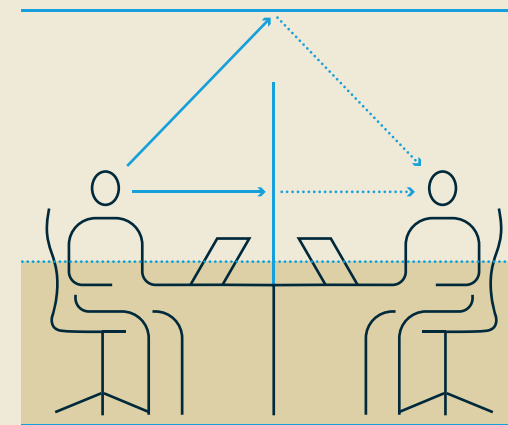10. Recharge Spaces

What Helps Focus Work?

Allowing people to work un-interrupted and on a single task until they are complete or when at a natural break is key to managing interruptions.

Visual barriers and orientation manage visual distractions and interference. A panel at least 50" high gives enough visual protection for seated positions.

Absorbing sounds within a space, blocking sounds between spaces, and covering intruding sounds with background sound help manage auditory distractions and interference.

Resources

Need a Little Design Inspiration?
Visit the Haworth Idea Starters page and explore more floorplans and applications to help you design inviting workspaces that help people focus.

Go Deeper
Read our white paper, Why We Can't Focus at Work, to understand what's behind the distractions that affect focus work so you can create a workplace that meets employees' needs.

Culture and Space Design
Culture creates a sense of order, continuity, and commitment that permeates every aspect of the organization, from how employees interact to customer experiences. Find out how space design can support—or even change—the culture of an organization in our white paper, How to Create a Successful Organizational Culture: Build It—Literally.

Acoustical Elements for Focus Work
Privacy, and the ability to concentrate, are essential for individual focus work as well as private collaboration. In our white paper, Workplace Acoustical Performance: Designing for Privacy, learn how to tackle noise and privacy issues for optimal acoustical performance in the workplace.

See How It's Been Done
Check out our Client Spaces gallery and Case Studies to see how some clients promote a culture of creativity and innovation with design.