



Having To Maintain a High Level of Concentration for Extended Periods

Work Design

What is The Problem & When Does it Appear?

Due to staffing shortages and the economic implications of the pandemic, many employees are being asked to do increasingly. Having to concentrate for extended periods of time in the workplace can have long term effects on mental health. Focusing on tasks, if done right, can motivate employees and increase productivity. However, if employees do not have the skill set or experience of focussing their energy efficiently, they will become stressed and irritated.

Why Is It Important?

Making sure that employees can concentrate on their work is vital to the success of a company. Fully engaged individuals are happier at work and feel that they can tackle the workload successfully.

What Can You Do to Improve?

1. Get rid of distractions.

While you cannot do away with everything, it is important to discuss with your team what could be done to reduce distractions. For example: Creating quiet zones in the workspace for people to focus. Making sure everyone knows how to turn off notifications on their phones and computers or encouraging turning off phones altogether while doing a task.

2. Teach and implement time management techniques in your business e.g. Pomodoro technique.

Try the [Pomodoro technique](#). This timing method helps you train your brain to stay on task for short periods of time. Here is how it works:

- Set your timer for 25 minutes and get to work.
- When the buzzer sounds, take a 5-minute break.
- Then, set the timer again and get back to work.
- Once you have done four rounds of this, you can take a longer break, 20 to 30 minutes.

3. Put a lock on social media.

Many businesses block social media because of the unnecessary distraction it causes. There are several apps that work for phones, tablets, or computers. In addition to social media, some of these distraction-busting programs also allow you to block online games, as well as apps and sites like YouTube, Netflix, Amazon, Twitter, text messages, and even emails. Some of the most popular social media blockers include Freedom, AppBlock, FocusMe, and Focus.

4. Create fuel and exercise breaks.

We all know what happens when “hanger” strikes. The dreaded combination of hunger and anger causes people to become incredibly stressed when asked to focus. Make sure the team is taking breaks and eating well. Have a walk and talk meeting and try and incorporate movement into work routines that are sedentary. If possible, organise fruit or healthy snacks to be available or as some workplaces do, create a snack cupboard where everyone donates food or puts money in per week to buy fresh fruit. Some well-known brain food to support concentration are: green, leafy vegetables like kale, spinach, and broccoli, fatty fish such as salmon, berries, like blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, or blackberries, walnuts

5. Be aware of sleep deprivation.

While a few nights of minimal sleep are fine, not getting enough sleep most nights of the week can negatively impact your short and long-term memory, as well as your ability to concentrate. Many workplace accidents are linked back to a lack of sleep. Make sure your team knows the importance of sleep and how to get good quality sleep. The recommended amount of sleep for adults aged 18 to 60 years old is 7 or more hours a night. Older adults may need up to 9 hours per night.

6. Set SMART goal.

If the lack of focus is a result of feeling overwhelmed by a complex project, try breaking it down into smaller parts and plugging the smaller steps into the SMART formula. SMART stands for:

- **Specific.** What exactly needs to be done?
- **Measurable.** How will you track your progress?
- **Achievable.** Is it realistic? Can it be done by the deadline?
- **Relevant.** How does it fit with the overall plan or bigger goal?
- **Timely.** When does it need to be done?

When a large, complex project is broken down into smaller, bite-size tasks, it can boost your ability to concentrate and focus on specific tasks. That is because you end up with goals that you feel like you can accomplish. Go through this process with your team to make sure that their time is being used efficiently.

7. Be more mindful.

Teaching your team to maintain moment-to-moment awareness of where they are and what they are doing has proven to have many health benefits. By being mindful and recognizing when your attention starts to drift, you can quickly bring your focus back to where it needs to be. Plus, you can train your brain to be more mindful by practicing breathing techniques, meditation, and mindful movement, such as yoga.

8. Prioritize tasks.

If the team has a lengthy number of tasks to complete, ensure that they know what needs prioritising. It is good to create a to-do list, but to also rank each item by their level of importance. After you make your list, choose two or three key tasks, and put them at the top. Then rank the rest of the items in order of importance. This allows you to tackle urgent tasks when brains are fresh and team energy levels are high.

9. Focus on similar tasks.

Stop your team from multi-tasking. Discuss which tasks are similar, group them together, and do one at a time. Despite what many people may think, multitasking is not more effective or efficient, especially when you are struggling with staying focused. In fact, some reports from the American psychological society state that multitasking may reduce productivity by as much as 40 percent.