

# SONĀRE

*The Environmental Acoustics Magazine*

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*Premiere Issue*  
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# THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Poor acoustical design negatively impacts occupants' focus, speech privacy and comfort, which in turn affects the organization for which they work—by reducing productivity, confidentiality, collaboration, attendance,

customer service, and overall workplace satisfaction. You might see employees donning headphones, ducking into privacy booths or out the door to work from home, but the true impact—and cost—of poor acoustics lies below the surface.



#1

LACK OF SPEECH PRIVACY IS THE GREATEST SOURCE OF EMPLOYEE DISSATISFACTION



55%

OF EACH DAY IS SPENT ON INDIVIDUAL FOCUS WORK



69%

OF EMPLOYEES ARE DISSATISFIED WITH NOISE IN THEIR PRIMARY WORKSPACE



88%

SAY FOCUS WORK IS THE MOST CRITICAL ASPECT OF THEIR JOB



OVER 3/4

OF EMPLOYEES CRAVE QUIET TIME DURING THE DAY



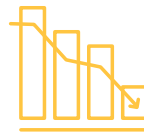
42%

USE MAKESHIFT SOLUTIONS TO BLOCK OUT NOISE



86 MINUTES

AVERAGE AMOUNT OF PRODUCTIVE TIME LOST PER DAY DUE TO NOISE DISTRACTION ALONE



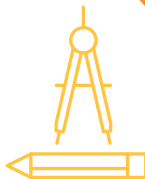
5 TO 10%

DECLINE IN COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE WHEN EXPOSED TO NOISE



70%

SHIFT FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AFTER MOVING FROM CUBICLE TO OPEN SPACE



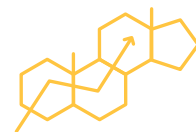
NEARLY 1 IN 2

SAY WORKPLACE DESIGN HAS A STRONG IMPACT ON RETENTION



9 IN 10

MILLENNIALS WANT THEIR EMPLOYERS TO FIX NOISE AND DISTRACTION ISSUES



3 HOURS

TIME IT TAKES FOR STRESS HORMONES TO INCREASE WHEN EXPOSED TO OPEN OFFICE NOISE

# How Can You Tell it Hz?\*

Managers aren't always as conscious of acoustic issues as their staff...

How do you know you have speech privacy and noise control issues? Are the treatments you've implemented working? An acoustical engineer has the tools to accurately assess measurable targets, such as speech privacy goals, as well as the know-how to improve these markers. They can even model the outcome for you in advance of investing in solutions. But if you don't have the budget to hire a consultant, here are five basic questions to ask yourself:

## Can you clearly hear conversations?

If you're working in an open plan, it's one thing to be able to overhear your immediate neighbor, but another to clearly understand a conversation happening a distance away from you. With effective acoustic treatments, you might be able to tell when someone's speaking, but their conversation won't be intelligible. If you're in a private office or meeting room, those outside it shouldn't be able to easily hear you—or vice-versa.

## Are employees often coming in early or staying late?

Numerous studies show the negative impact poor acoustics has on concentration. Whether you're talking about the 23 minutes the average worker takes to regain full concentration as noted by *The Wall Street Journal*, or even assume just a few minutes a day, it all adds up to the same thing. If employees are often coming in early or staying well into the evening, it might be because they're distracted by noise during the day and simply can't get their work done during regular business hours.

## Are they commandeering the meeting rooms?

If your space has poor acoustics, employees may be commandeering the meeting rooms...not to hold meetings, but in order to accomplish everyday tasks requiring concentration or privacy. Similarly, you might notice that they prefer to use electronic media to communicate with each other, because they know they'll be overheard during face-to-face conversations.

## Are they often calling in sick?

The Integrated Benefits Institute estimates that health-related productivity losses cost US employers more than \$225 billion per year. Everyone has off days, but if your employees seem consistently unhappy about coming to work and the number of sick days is escalating, it could be due to the stress and fatigue caused by noise. Yes, this even applies to Millennials.

## Are they wearing headphones?

In a workplace survey by Interface, 44 percent of employees indicated their company does nothing to address noise, forcing them to find their own solutions. While 16 percent chose to work remotely, 31 percent of those in the US and UK—and a whopping 47 percent in Australia—use headphones. As a JLL Staff Reporter writes “...doling out headphones is not the solution. While these may block out noise, they also block opportunities for employees to connect, collaborate, or to learn what's new in the organization.” What they're listening to is likely to cause distraction as well.

And, of course, you can also ask occupants. Send out a survey with specific questions relating to acoustics. Just ensure you're prepared to do something about their response.

\* Hertz (Hz) is the unit of measure for frequency.



# How it Hz?

...but employees are well aware.

## **Your conversations aren't private**

How much was your hydro bill? You're arguing with your spouse? You forgot your mother's birthday? These are just some of the questions to which your coworkers know the answers.

## **You're easily distracted**

Coworkers typing and talking, office equipment whirring and beeping, HVAC cycling on and off, your pen-tapping neighbor...with so much going on around you, it's hard to think creatively and constructively. Each time you're distracted, it takes up to 15 minutes to refocus. After eight hours (or more), you definitely don't want another bite of acoustic stew.

## **You feel self-conscious**

Because you know everyone can hear you, you're also concerned about disturbing others. And you wish your coworkers were as self-aware...

## **Introverts aren't welcome**

Keeping to yourself is hard to do in a space where everyone knows everything. Finding a spot that allows you a few moments of 'me time' to recharge and refocus is almost impossible.

## **Collaboration isn't always desired**

Although open plans aim to encourage collaboration amongst co-workers, some of your most important tasks don't involve anyone else. In fact, you spend over half your time on individual focus work.

## **Finding a private space is challenging**

Need to make a phone call or have an in-person conversation that involves confidential information? Good luck finding an appropriate location. With so many people requesting a meeting room (or practically taking up permanent residence), your name gets pushed to the bottom of the list...or you don't get in the door fast enough to book one in the morning.

## **You get sick more often**

Given the close quarters, it's easier to catch colds and flu from coworkers. Or you're absent because you simply need a day away from the ruckus.

## **You email more often**

A study conducted by Harvard Business School professor Ethan Bernstein found that when corporate headquarters moved from cubicles to a wide-open layout, face-to-face communication dropped by 70 percent and email communication increased in its place—possibly because occupants began wearing headphones and hesitated to discuss sensitive information in a roomful of people.

## **Your home or headphones are your refuge**

You believe working from home or finding the right playlist are the only ways to reduce distractions.

## **You crave a cubicle to call your own**

Providing the panels are high enough, not only will it offer you much-needed visual privacy (and a place to store personal effects and put up a few photos), no acoustic strategy can beat blocking when it comes to controlling noise over very short distances.

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