

How to create a great office space?

*There are 5 main
employee needs you
should keep in mind*



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The office space market is developing more and more dynamically. Forecasts indicate that more companies will decide to change or rearrange their offices with their business and employee needs in mind as the trend continues. An office space is an expensive investment and a significant fixed cost for many companies. But it does not only mean financial outlays; it can also generate added value.

5 non-wage factors that influence employee motivation*



THE OFFICE AS A COMPANY'S SHOWPIECE

The strength of the employee market has caused employers to compete with each other for specialists. According to research carried out by the Office for Designing Digital Systems, as many as **75% of Polish companies have difficulty in finding suitable people to employ.** At the same time, enterprises have to continually prevent their hard working employees from moving to their competitors. Consequently, companies strive to build an image of themselves as an attractive employer in many ways. Offering employees sports cards or medical packages is a common practice. People are becoming increasingly aware that conditions in the office are as important to employees as other benefits. This is especially the case because, in contrast to other methods of motivating employees, there are factors that continuously influence people's satisfaction and efficiency.

*Source: www.social.hays.com/2016/04/26/5-things-that-motivate-your-employees-more-than-money

Our research shows that as many as **75% of people are attracted by the look of the office when choosing a new employer**. A well-designed interior makes a good first impression on candidates and increases employee satisfaction.

By investing in an office, we can improve the company's image in the eyes of its business partners. Through a properly designed interior, companies can communicate professionalism, stability and the values they rely on.

In the age of ubiquitous Internet access, which has enabled employees to perform their professional tasks from virtually anywhere in the world, the office is changing into a space where we do not have to, but rather want to stay. Because of this, companies are trying to arrange their offices in a way that encourages people to work on location, and not from home or a café. This is very important, since incidental meetings between people from different departments trigger the exchange of information and knowledge, which has a direct impact on the way a company functions. The opposite effect is achieved by a space that hinders the realisation of business processes instead of facilitating them. As a result, employee efficiency decreases, there are more complaints and employee rotation grows, which can cause the employer to incur additional expenses due to recruitment.



WHAT THINGS DO THE OFFICE USERS COMPLAIN ABOUT MOST?

In this report, we analyse problems employees have to deal with in the office, focusing on the five main areas that are most often criticised by employees working at the companies we collaborate with.

Our knowledge in this field is based on **25 years of experience in supplying comprehensive solutions and furnishing offices all over the world.** During this time, we have had thousands of conversations with our clients, helping us discover their needs and expectations. We have learnt from their mistakes. We have seen dream offices and those where many things could be changed.

For almost three years, we have also been conducting research for companies operating in different sectors. The research has resulted in recommendations on how to design an optimal office that responds to a company's needs and expectations. **The information we gathered has allowed us to determine the 5 main needs of the employees we surveyed.** We start our analysis by looking at the problems that are most often pinpointed by employees. We face these problems continually when we support architects as they design projects

Our research shows that as many as **75% of people** are attracted by the look of the office when choosing a new employer.





for our partners. For this reason, we decided to collect tips, inspiration and ready-to-use solutions that would help people cope with potential problems, steer clear of the mistakes they often make, and avoid incurring any unnecessary costs or complaints.

These tips will surely prove useful for people responsible for creating and maintaining office spaces. These people frequently join a project team that is created in order to support the process of designing a new office or rearranging an existing space. The tasks they are entrusted with require increased engagement, knowledge and intuition. They are also constantly reminded of the limited investment budget they have. Knowledge of the latest trends is also crucial because they need to understand the requirements of the office users, who are the most important recipients of the project. The various inconveniences employees encounter in connection with badly designed interiors can have a negative influence on their efficiency at work.

We hope this report will act as a useful guide on your way to an ideal office and that everyone will find some valuable tips within it.

We invite you to read the report!



Hunger


Problem no. 1: *Hunger*





Eating meals together
integrates employees, prevents
professional burnout and
increases job satisfaction.*

***Source:** Taormina, Law & Taormina, (2000), Approaches to preventing burnout: the effects of personal stress management and organizational socialization. Journal Of Nursing Managment, 8 (2), p. 88-99.



Have you ever worked in an office with a canteen that was too small? The never-ending queues to a microwave oven or a coffee machine, and the lack of space at the canteen table are everyday problems for employees working in many companies. Small, dark canteens with a single table were supposed to be sufficient for the whole floor, but reality has turned out to be completely different. As a result, some employees have lunch at their desks (which makes the whole office smell food), while others eat out. Unfortunately, the nearest restaurant is 15 minutes away from the office building, so lunch breaks last up to one hour.

When analysing the design solutions used in many offices, we noticed that the canteen was often located in the darkest corner, and its size depended on how much space was left after designing other rooms. The canteens in the offices we surveyed turned out to be too small or lacked sufficient air conditioning.

Providing our bodies with the proper nutrients fulfils one of our basic needs. Since we spend at least 8 hours at the office, we cannot ignore the influence hunger has on our productivity. If employees do not satisfy their hunger

during their working day, or if they eat meals in uncomfortable conditions, they experience an increase in dissatisfaction and frustration.

Therefore, especially in large companies, the canteen should be a place where employees can recharge their batteries and rest, but also meet people from different departments and establish closer relationships with them. Eating meals together not only allows employees to integrate and relax, but it also helps them come up with new ideas and exchange knowledge.



The size of social zones
is a problem for **33.5%**
of employees working in
the offices we surveyed*.

*Number of respondents - 2486, number of surveyed companies - 8

A well designed modern canteen deviates completely from the traditional image of an office cafeteria. Instead, it should resemble a café where everyone is eager to spend time and take a moment to relax.





What should you think about at the design stage?

In companies that have enough space and financial resources, a cafeteria is the best solution. It allows the organisation to have an indirect influence on their employees' health, assuming that the meals available on the menu are varied and balanced. This is particularly important in office blocks located in areas with no catering facilities: employees working in these offices waste a lot of time ordering meals or going to restaurants every day.

For smaller enterprises, a spacious canteen where employees can warm up their meals or cook dinner can be a good solution. A table at which many employees can eat together and talk should occupy a central spot in the room.

The employees working in one company that used our research service had friendly relationships with each other, so meals eaten

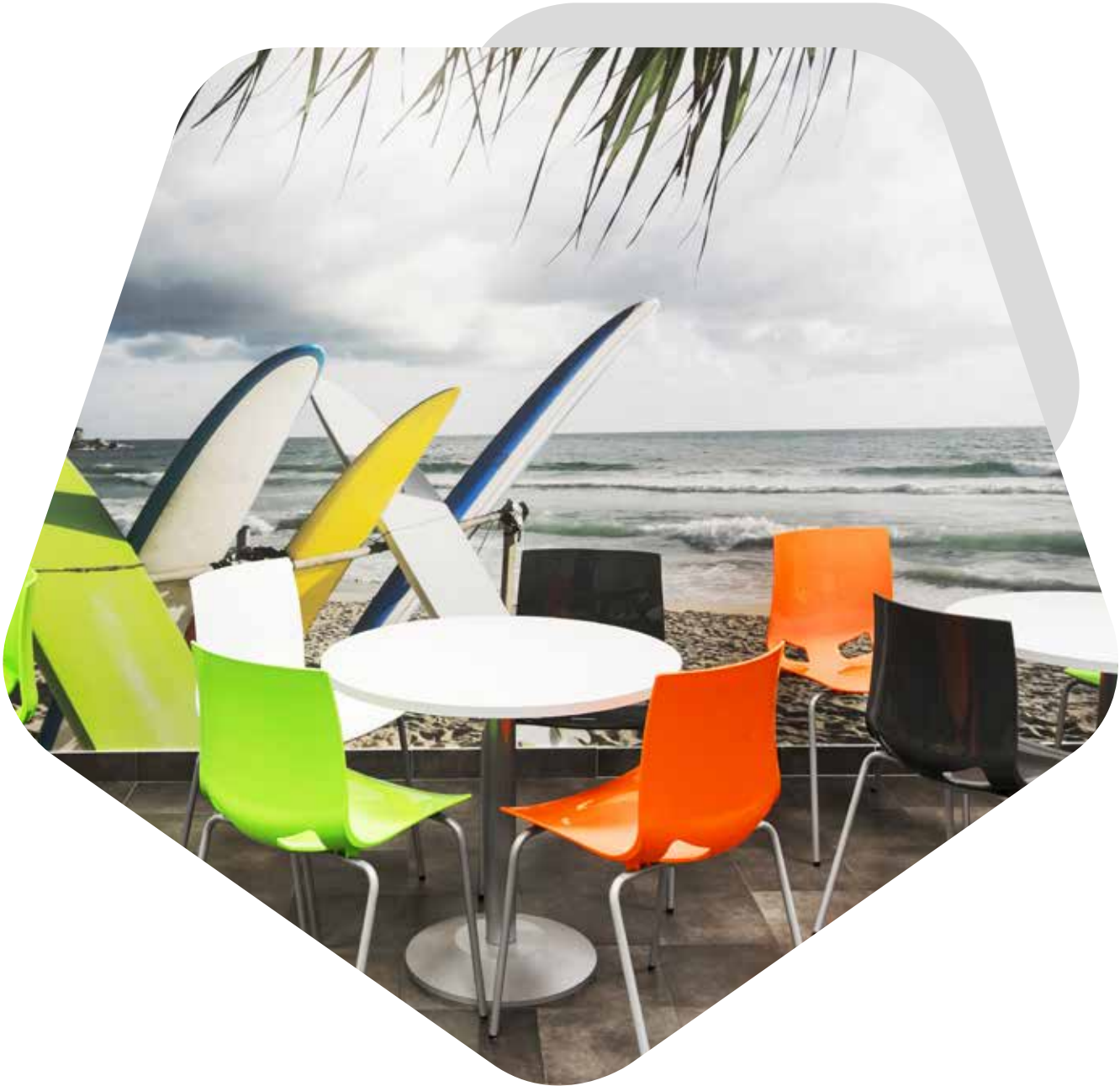
together were an important part of the day for them. Unfortunately, their office canteen was too small. There was no window and, consequently, gravitational ventilation did not work. To ventilate the room, employees had to open the door to their open office space. As a result, the smells and loud conversations from the canteen spread into the open space, where other employees were trying to carry out undisturbed tasks or have phone conversations with clients.

Access to daylight and a view through the window were also important for employees. We discovered this through workshops, during which two of three groups designed a dummy window in the canteen.

In this case, the solution was to change the arrangement of the walls. As a result, the canteen was equipped with a window and there was space for a bigger table.

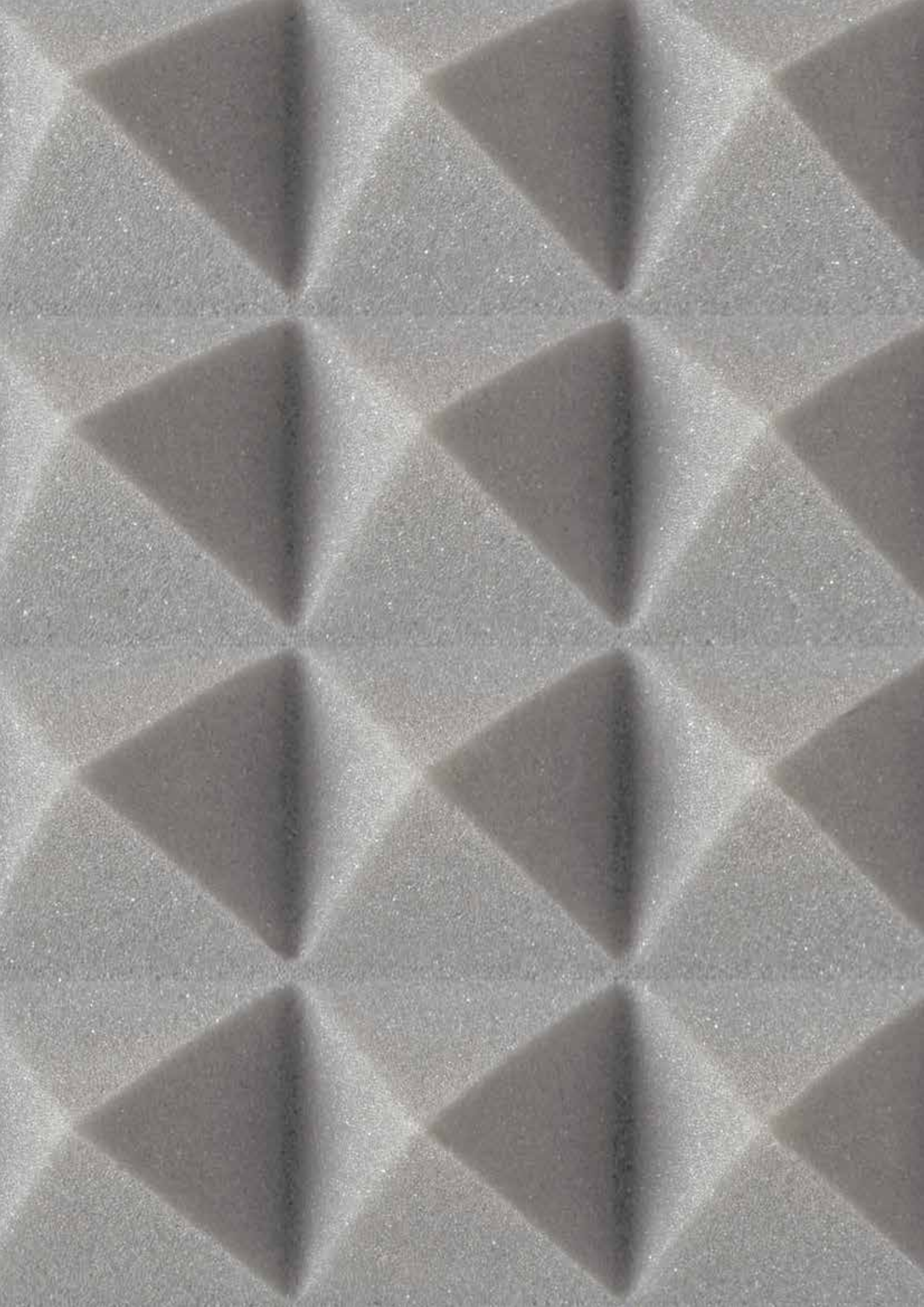
Solutions offered by Nowy Styl Group





Having a friendly cafeteria with a great atmosphere will not only provide a relaxing environment for your employees, but will increase your business productivity. Your employees will be fit mentally and physically, helping your business and productivity*

*We read this in the report "How the Office Cafeteria Affects Employee Productivity" (Bojan, S., 2014).





Acoustics

Problem no. 2:

Acoustics





Office acoustics is
a problem for **31.6%**
of employees working in
the offices we surveyed*.

**Number of respondents - 2486, number of surveyed companies - 8*

How many times have you been unable to focus on your work due to noise? Tomorrow is the deadline of an important report. You arrive at the office early to start your work before your colleagues turn up. There is silence, peace, and nobody is there to disturb you. Unfortunately, after a productive hour you are surrounded by distracting noise. Phone calls, the sound of printers, and loud conversations can be heard in the whole office. Can you concentrate in these conditions and complete your task on time?

As independent research cited by the portal www.bhp.abc.com.pl shows, **85% of people working in open spaces claim that the spaces are too noisy.** Noise distracts half of the employees, while 60% have to raise their voices when they want to talk to others (including on the phone). In these conditions, employees find it difficult to work efficiently and carry out their professional tasks, especially those that require concentration.

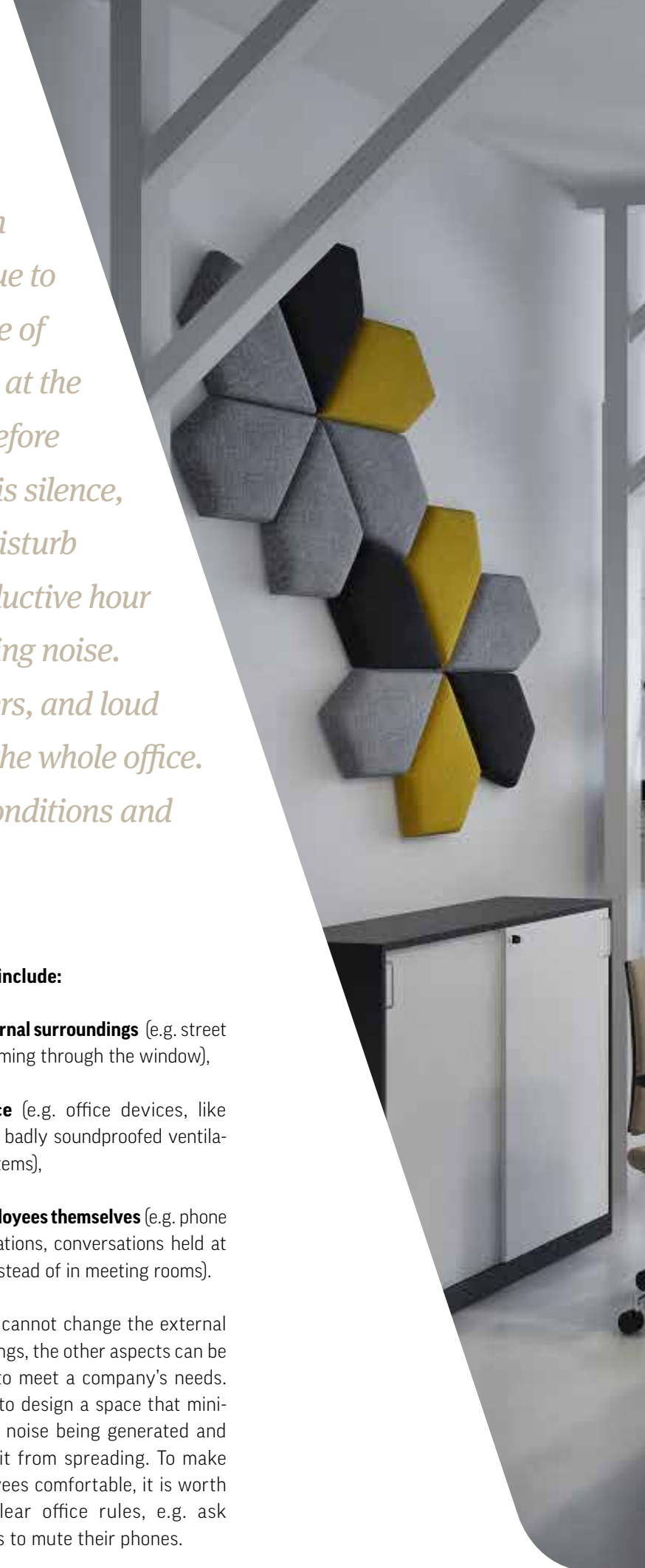
It is no wonder that bad acoustics is such a frequently discussed problem. Many of the organisations we surveyed have huge open work spaces with a dozen or so rows of desks. This arrangement resembles a “contemporary sewing room” that does not evoke positive feelings.

To manage noise, it is first necessary to find the sources.

They can include:

- **external surroundings** (e.g. street noise coming through the window),
- **space** (e.g. office devices, like printers; badly soundproofed ventilation systems),
- **employees themselves** (e.g. phone conversations, conversations held at desks instead of in meeting rooms).

While we cannot change the external surroundings, the other aspects can be adjusted to meet a company’s needs. It is best to design a space that minimises the noise being generated and prevents it from spreading. To make all employees comfortable, it is worth setting clear office rules, e.g. ask employees to mute their phones.









What should you think about at the design stage?

It is a good idea to think about the acoustics of a building at the design stage. It is best to consult an acoustician who specialises in construction. An expert will spot possible mistakes and suggest the right solutions. Defects can be eliminated at low cost at the design stage, but cannot be improved easily and cheaply once the office building is erected. Classic examples of this include partition walls of conference rooms or managerial offices that reach the suspended ceiling, but not the ceiling itself. This lets sound spread through the rooms above. The choice of finishing materials is also crucial. Too many hard surfaces will make the sound bounce, which will cause an echo effect. These problems are often solved by the use of suspended acoustic ceil-

ings or carpets. However, this solution may prove insufficient when it comes to other factors that increase the level of noise in an office.

Luckily, acoustic conditions can be also improved in existing buildings. **It is a good idea to use acoustic panels to separate teams from each other, include phone booths for having comfortable conversations, or equip the office with furniture systems fitted with sound-absorbing high walls.** At this stage, it is also worth consulting professionals who can help you take measurements and advise you on what products and solutions to use in a given space. Nowy Styl Group has a team of acousticians to help the company incorporate research in the comprehensive process of designing their office space.

Case Study: Jasło

The rearrangement of our office in Jasło, which had already been arranged when we took acoustic measurements, provided us with valuable experience. We used the measurements to choose solutions that would improve the work performed by specialists in different departments. As the company continued to develop, our employees started to have new expectations. However, we managed to meet them all.

First, we equipped the office with **a phone booth**, because our employees had started to hold increasingly long and much more frequent phone conversations.

We used the upholstered walls from one furniture system to line printers, which enabled us to prevent the noise they generated from spreading. It also helped us hide office documents, rubbish bins and other objects placed near the devices that were not aesthetically pleasing.

Departments that did not usually work together were separated using acoustic panels, so they no longer bothered each other. We also sectioned off additional zones for holding quick meetings of between 2-4 people. Employees can now talk with each other without having to book a meeting room in advance.

We also assembled acoustic panels in conference rooms. On one hand, they made the colour concept more interesting, while on the other, they shortened the reverberation time within the interiors.

The project showed that it was possible to equip an existing space with acoustic panels easily and attractively, and improve work comfort at the same time.





Solutions offered by Nowy Styl Group







Light

Problem no. 3:

Light





Would you like to work in an office without windows? People who mainly work at a computer often complain about daylight reflecting off of their screen. That's why, even when it is sunny outside, IT departments often draw the curtains and work in semi-darkness. Can you imagine working in these conditions every day, without the possibility of looking out the window and with no access to natural light? This situation is probably easier in the summer – the sun still shines when you leave your office, and there is plenty of time left before sunset. But what about in the winter?



The influence of light on productivity is greater, even though employees are more likely to complain about noise.



Source: „Impact of Office Design on Employees' Productivity", Journal of Public Affairs, Administration and Management, 2009.

Although statistically employees complain about noise more often, it turns out that light has a bigger impact on their productivity.

The influence of light exerts on people has been the subject of much research. Let us cite one study: the research involved 49 participants, 27 of whom were not provided with a sufficient amount of daylight during their working day. These people either worked in a windowless office or their workstations



were located far away from windows. As a result, they assessed their health condition as being much worse than the other employees, when completing the “Short Form 36” questionnaire.

21 of the participants also wore watches that measured their activity and exposure to daylight. All the gathered data showed that better access to daylight increased their physical activity, not only

during the working day but also after work and at the weekend. **The people who had limited access to daylight slept 46 minutes shorter, woke up more frequently and their sleep was of poorer quality*.** This shows that the hours we spend in the office have a significant influence on our private lives. In extreme cases, they might contribute to daytime rhythm disorders and, as a result, cause insomnia or constant tiredness.

Source: <https://www.fastcodesign.com/3033998/evidence/workers-in-windowless-offices-lose-46-minutes-of-sleep-a-night>





What should you think about at the design stage?

When using an office, a company often develops too dynamically and is unable to find enough room for all its new employees. We have often seen workstations placed randomly in offices – usually in conference rooms without windows or in an alcove in the corridor that was previously used for a photocopier.

Putting an employee in these surroundings temporarily will not cause a huge decrease in their efficiency. However, when designing a new office, it is worth considering the growth in the number of employees and ensuring workstations

are not put more than 6–8 meters away from a window. Areas with no access to daylight should be used as zones where people do not spend a lot of time. In offices where employees spend more time in meetings than they do working at a desk, it is worth thinking about having windows in meeting rooms or relaxation zones.

When thinking about these solutions, we strongly advise you to trust experts, architects and designers, for whom natural and artificial light are key when it comes to interior arrangement.

Solutions offered by Nowy Styl Group







Air conditioning

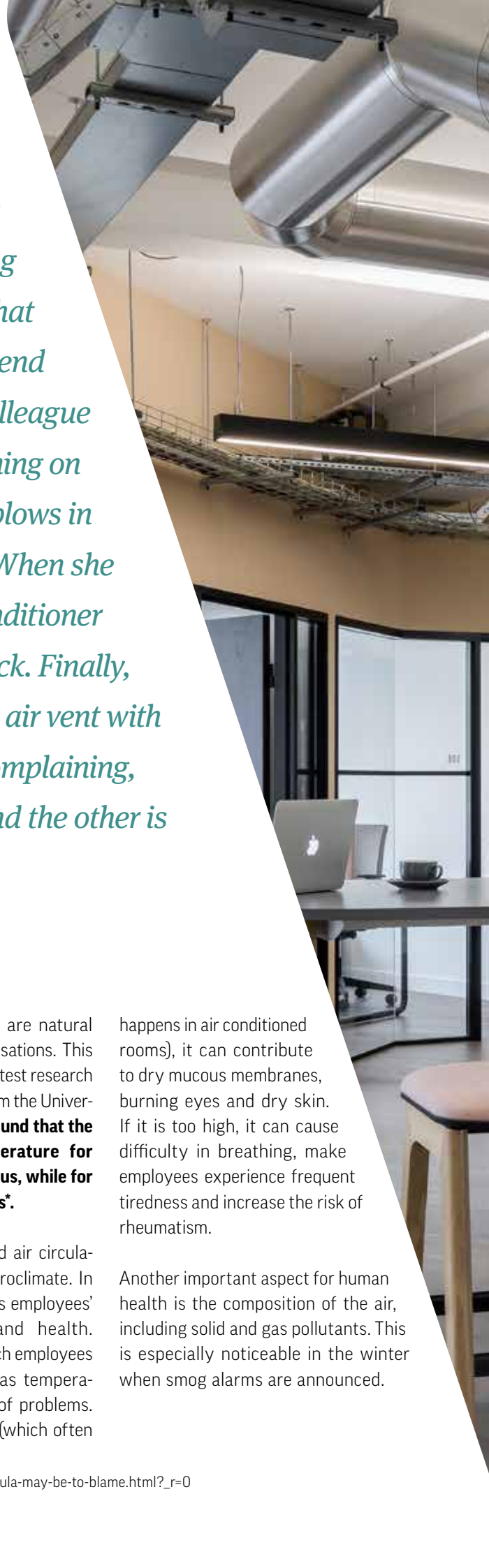
Problem no. 4: *Air conditioning*





Inconvenience connected with poor air conditioning was pinpointed by **27.9%** of employees working in the offices we surveyed*.

**Number of respondents - 2486, number of surveyed companies - 8*



Is there someone in your company who is always too cold or too hot? It's a scorching summer day. You arrive at work hoping that the air conditioned office will help you spend the day efficiently. Unfortunately, your colleague at a nearby desk does not agree to switching on the air conditioner, because the cold air blows in her direction and she is constantly cold. When she goes to a meeting, you turn on the air conditioner and enjoy the cool air until she comes back. Finally, someone comes with an idea to cover the air vent with a cardboard box. Your colleague stops complaining, but as a result, half of the office is cold and the other is hot. Now everyone is dissatisfied.

Employees often complain about the airflow from the air conditioners directed at their desks. It is so irritating that employees sometimes try to solve the problem themselves, for example, by covering the air conditioner with a cardboard box.

The problem can arise at the office design stage, when the workstations and air conditioners are arranged independently or when the office arrangement concept changes and the location of air conditioners remains unchanged.

However, this is not the only inconvenience. Arguments about whether to raise

or lower the temperature are natural complaints in many organisations. This is not surprising given the latest research carried out by scientists from the University of Maastricht. **They found that the most comfortable temperature for women is 25 degrees Celsius, while for men it is 22 degrees Celsius*.**

Temperature, humidity and air circulation shape the office's microclimate. In turn, its quality determines employees' well-being, efficiency and health. Improper air humidity, which employees do not notice as readily as temperature, can also cause lots of problems. If the humidity is too low (which often

happens in air conditioned rooms), it can contribute to dry mucous membranes, burning eyes and dry skin. If it is too high, it can cause difficulty in breathing, make employees experience frequent tiredness and increase the risk of rheumatism.

Another important aspect for human health is the composition of the air, including solid and gas pollutants. This is especially noticeable in the winter when smog alarms are announced.

*Source: www.nytimes.com/2015/08/04/science/chilly-at-work-a-decades-old-formula-may-be-to-blame.html?_r=0







What should you think about at the design stage?

We should maintain good air quality all year. The easiest way to increase air humidity and improve the composition of the air is to fit the office with some potted plants. **Depending on the species, plants have different capabilities to absorb or neutralise chemical compounds, such as formaldehyde.** They also have a positive influence on employee well-being.

Harmful substances can also be eliminated using filters installed in modern air conditioning and ventilation systems. It is even possible to install vitamin C-releasing filters, which are supposed to improve the condition of employees' skin. However, when this kind of system is not properly serviced, it can become a breeding ground for bacteria and fungi, which can harm the office users instead of helping them.

When it comes to preventing the airflow from blowing directly at employee workstations, the

solution is much easier. All you have to do is remember the problem when arranging the office.

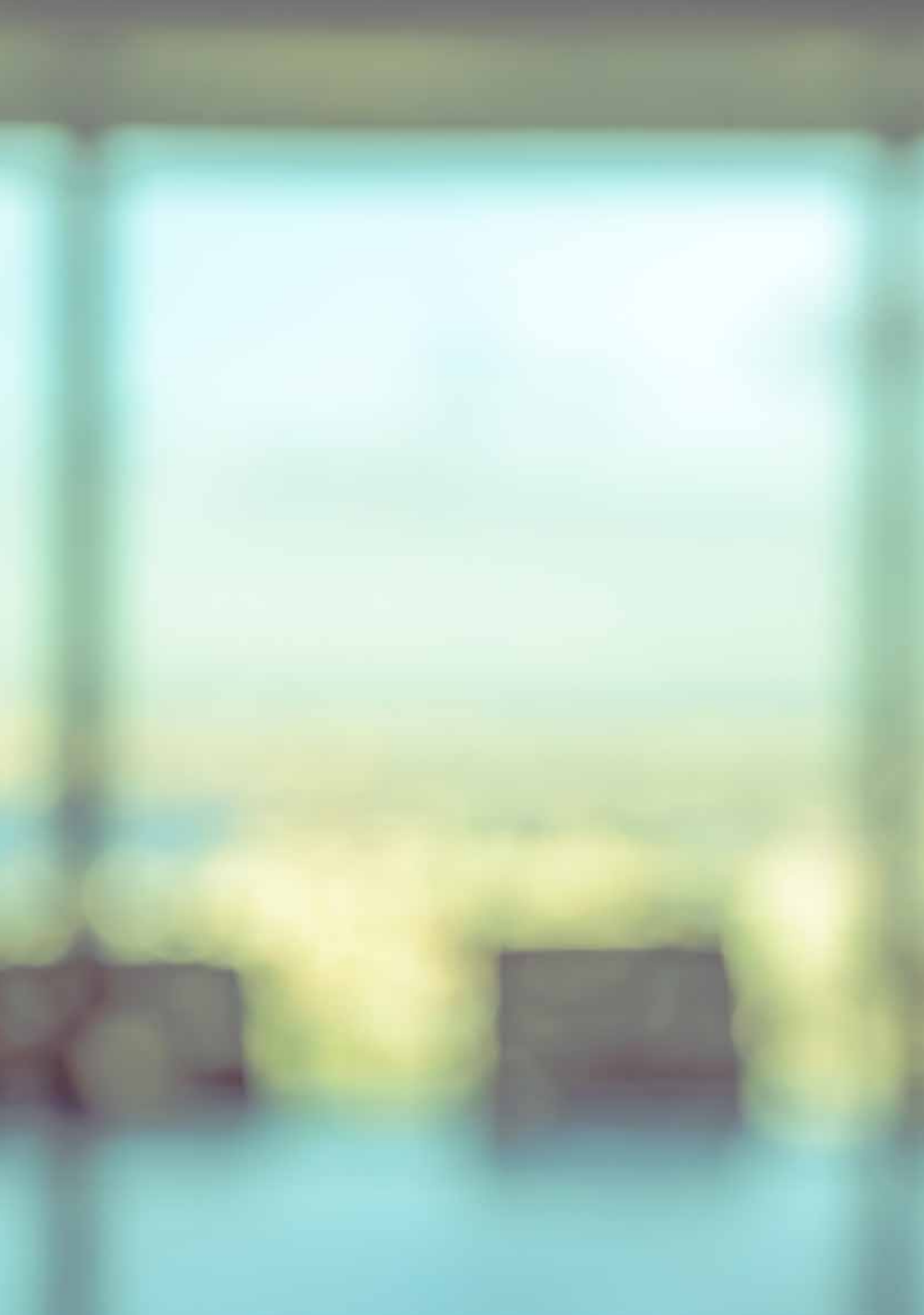
Differences in temperature preference can be addressed by allowing office users to control their own air conditioning. In many office blocks, the temperature is set using a centralised system, which is always uncomfortable for some employees.

Our natural reaction to a stuffy room is to open the windows. This was mentioned by lots of managers during the interviews we conducted, and respondents said they would prefer to have windows that opened in their offices. According to the report "BPO & Shared Service Centres: employees speak out on workplace," compiled by Skanska and JLL, as many as 83% of people would like to be able to open windows and switch off or lower the strength of the air conditioning.

Solutions offered by Nowy Styl Group









5

Meeting rooms

Problem no. 5: meeting points





As our research shows, the number of formal and informal meeting rooms is a problem for **26.5%** of employees working in the offices we surveyed*.

*Ilość respondentów - 2486, ilość przebadanych firm - 8

How often do you book large conference rooms to have meetings with 2–3 people? You open the calendar. You want to book a room to have a conversation with a team of three people, but unfortunately, all the meeting rooms have already been reserved. The only room available is a large conference room for 12 people located 3 floors below your office. The situation is the same every time and your colleagues have the same problem, so they end up talking at their desks, distracting you and everyone else around. Of course, you are not convinced that “they only need to discuss something quickly.” Maybe the situation is even worse and you prefer to arrange a meeting with your client at a café?

In the past, employees used to spend most of their working days at a desk. However, nowadays they often move to conference rooms or other zones in the office. **The average level of desk occupancy in the companies where we conducted our research was only 45%*.**

The number of tasks that require cooperation and communication is steadily increasing. The character of meetings has changed too. In the past, employees used to

hold pre-planned meetings with many colleagues; nowadays they most frequently hold spontaneous 2-, 3- or 4-person meetings.

Unfortunately, many offices are not suited to these kinds of meetings. Meeting rooms are designed for large groups of employees. There are also very few of them, which is why they are usually occupied and used ineffectively, by smaller teams than was originally intended.

*Based on the occupancy analysis of 3,044 workstations (at different clients).





This problem is faced by many companies from different sectors. In one organisation we surveyed from the telecom industry, the whole ground floor consisted of huge conference rooms. In contrast, the upper storeys had only a few meeting rooms. Just after entering the building, we came to the conclusion that employees might have difficulty in finding a free room. The research confirmed our assumption. We found

that half of the meetings were held by groups consisting of up to 4 people, while only 15% were held by 8 or more people. Our **observations also showed that, despite being used ineffectively, the meeting rooms remained empty for 46% of the working time, while the smaller ones – for 70%.** An analysis of all the factors revealed the problem behind this situation – that employees were not cancelling their reservations.

All these difficulties were solved in the new office, the design of which was based on our recommendations from the research. Firstly, the number of small meeting rooms was increased at the cost of bigger ones. Places for holding spontaneous meetings were designed too. This was possible thanks to the idea of arranging “room in room” spaces – these spaces were sectioned off using sofas with high backrests.

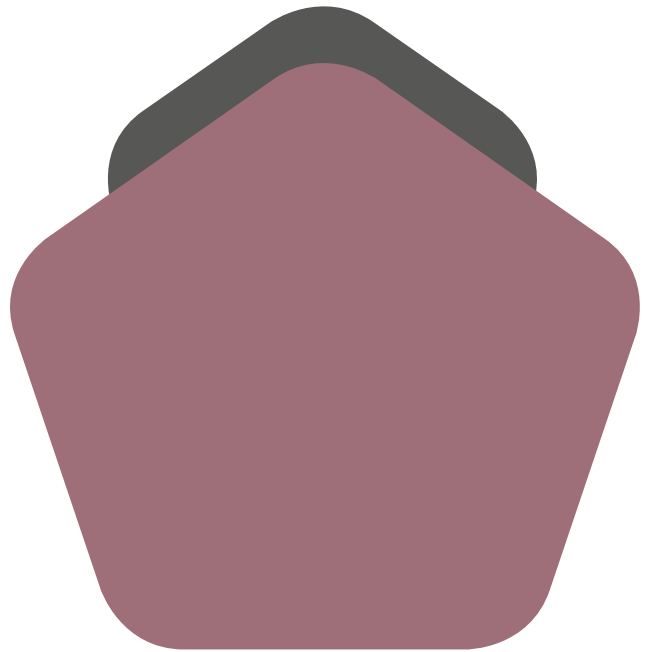




What should you think about at the design stage?

The number of meeting rooms should be adjusted to a company's needs. To determine this, it is a good idea to conduct research. This kind of activity will help an organisation define the character of its meetings (the size of groups, the time of day, employees' favourite places and the use of existing rooms), and then adjust the arrangement of the new office properly. It is worth locating meeting rooms near workstations – nobody wants to go down from the fifth floor to the first one, especially if they attend a few meetings a day. To ensure all of this, you need to have a good project based on a company's real requirements and the activity profiles of particular departments.

Solutions offered by Nowy Styl Group





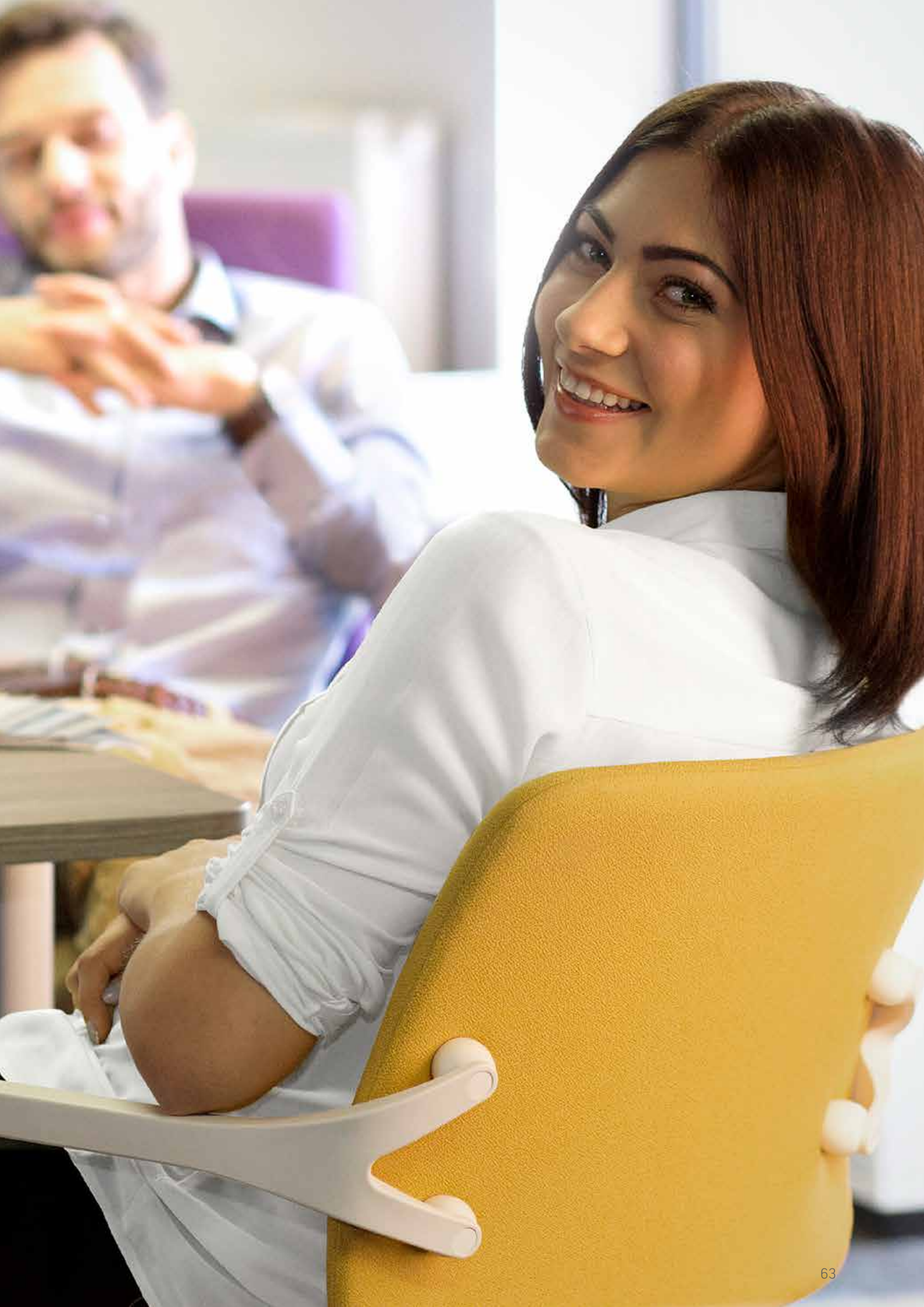
*How can you
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Every organisation is a complicated organism that consists of departments, teams, and specialists who have different work styles, needs and expectations. An in-depth analysis of all these aspects is often beyond the capabilities of the people responsible for office removals or rearrangements. It is, however, the most important problem of all those described here. **All office users are the target recipients of the project. They are the people who will either be supported or distracted by the new office. It is their increase**







in efficiency and satisfaction that will determine the project's success and the quality of their work. And all this has a direct influence on the results a company achieves.

Because of this, the process of designing an office should be initiated as early as possible and approached in a multidirectional manner. This will increase the chance to analyse all aspects and consider potential solutions. Rushing is never a good idea, especially when it comes to an investment that is supposed to serve for many years to come. Consultations with specialists who can support the process of taking decisions, surveying employees' needs and choosing product solutions with their knowledge and experience, can be extremely helpful.

For us, an office is not only a building. It is a combination of three components – **people, place and processes**. They must all be taken into consideration in order to design a good interior. It is important to use the whole space, its functionality and all physical aspects effectively, such as the acoustics and lighting. At the same time, you need

to consider the office users' needs and expectations. Therefore, it is worth analysing the way they use the space available. A functional office and the right products will help employees perform their everyday duties better and support all business processes carried out within the company.

Thank you for reading.





About the author

She is a graduate of the Architecture and Urban Planning faculty at Cracow University of Technology. Since her studies, she has been designing corporate and private interiors. Her interest in the influence of buildings on their users' health, behaviour and well-being has led her to Nowy Styl Group where she explores this issue in the context of workplaces. She is currently creating and conducting research processes that result in optimal office space projects for the organisations and employees surveyed. She is also responsible for analysing her research findings and the way they are translated into interior arrangement.



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