

MoreThought

Enterprise design telemetry
benchmark study: Wave 1

How Design Teams Work

Focus is the leading
indicator of project
health

Benchmark study | September 2026



The findings

Across 43 design projects in six organisations, focus emerged as the strongest predictor of project success among the factors we examined. Focus, measured by whether designers sustained attention on individual files or fragmented their effort across many, explained more variation in outcomes than team size, seniority, tooling or process.

Projects with low file-switching averaged **3.1** out of **5** on business and customer outcomes. Projects with high file-switching averaged **2.1**. That gap - a full point on a five-point scale - held regardless of team size.

And it is visible early. The same behavioural signature that predicts final outcomes is already present in the **first three weeks** of a project. Organisations do not need to wait for a project to finish to know whether it is in trouble. Week-three metrics for activity, consistency and file-switching correlate at 0.97–0.98 with the full project, so the early read is representative.

Why this matters

Design leaders currently have almost no leading indicators. Outcome data – whether a project shipped well, moved the metrics it was supposed to – arrives too late to act on. Everything else available today (velocity, headcount, ticket counts) measures activity, not coherence.

Focus is different. It is a measurable proxy for the cognitive conditions under which good design work actually happens: sustained, undivided attention on a problem, rather than shallow, repeated context-switching across many. This is consistent with research on flow states and attention residue - when people switch tasks, part of their cognitive capacity stays attached to the task they left, degrading performance on the one they moved to. File-switching in Figma is an unusually clean behavioural trace of exactly this pattern, captured automatically and at scale.

This converts an abstract management concern about team focus into a real-time number accessible three weeks into a twelve-week delivery cycle instead of at a retrospective.

The evidence

Two modes of working emerged clearly when projects were grouped by behaviour:

	High focus	Medium	Low focus
Projects	15	11	17
Average Outcome score	3.1	2.7	2.1
File switching	Very low	Moderate	High
Files worked on by multiple people	36%	29%	23%

How we tested alternative explanations

We ran four separate models to see what best predicts project outcomes. File-switching consistently outperformed the obvious alternatives.

What we tested	Measures used	Prediction score*	Finding
File-switching + team size	Switching rate, number of designers	0.21	Switching dominates; adding people does not compensate
Duration + momentum	Project length, consistency of work	0.11	Both help, but jointly weaker than switching alone
Team composition	Editors versus viewers	0.11	Viewer-heavy teams score lower
Switching alone	Switching rate only	0.15	Strong predictor even without controls

*Numbers are McFadden pseudo-R², a measure of model fit. Higher means the factors explain more of the variation in outcomes.

The evidence

High-focus projects were not simply smaller or better resourced – team size did not explain the gap. They were distinguished by fewer people jumping between files and more files receiving sustained, shared attention.

The signal appears early enough to act on. Early-window metrics (first 21 days) for activity, consistency, and file-switching correlated at 0.97–0.98 with full-project metrics. A three-week read is, in practical terms, the whole story.

How well does week three predict the full project?

Week-three signal	Correlation with final project signal
Total activity	0.98
Work consistency (momentum)	0.98
File-switching	0.97

A near-perfect correlation means the first three weeks are representative. There is no hidden pattern that emerges later to reverse the early read.

Separately, early collaboration on shared files accounted for a meaningful share of outcome variation - a consequential effect for a single early-stage signal.

The effect persists after accounting for the obvious confounders. Team size, project duration, and proportion of active editors were all tested as alternative explanations. File-switching remained the dominant factor even when these were controlled for.

How focus is measured

Focus (switch rate) is the share of a project's Figma activity where a designer's very next logged action is on a different file. Values range 0-1: higher means more file-hopping. High/low groups are relative to our 43-project sample, not industry norms. Organisations with heavy viewer traffic may show a lower number for reasons unrelated to focus.

What design leaders should do

Run a focus check at week three.

If designers are bouncing across many files with little overlap, intervene on scope and stakeholder alignment before adding headcount - adding people to an unfocused project compounds the problem.

Stop equating visibility with contribution.

A large roster of Figma viewers is not a sign of health. Track who is actually building, not who is watching.

Don't apply one collaboration template everywhere.

Different operating models (centralised pools, embedded squads, design system teams) reach good outcomes through different patterns. The focus signal travels across all of them; specific collaboration norms do not.

What we're confident about, and what we're not

This is the first wave of an ongoing benchmark. The headline finding - focus predicts outcomes, and predicts it early - is consistent, holds after controlling for team size, and is corroborated by a separate early-window analysis. We're confident in it.

What we can't yet claim: causation in the strict sense (chaotic projects could generate switching rather than the reverse, though the early-prediction result makes pure reverse-causation less likely), or fine-grained claims about specific operating models, where sample sizes per category are too small to generalise. Outcomes were also self-reported by participating teams rather than tied to independent business metrics in this wave.

What's next

The methodology is capable of interpreting the impact of momentum (how consistently a project is worked on), team size, collaboration and participation, iteration rounds and speed. Whilst early signals showed there were some effects present in outcomes, the data sample was too small in this round, so a second wave of research is planned.

The next wave, opening October 2026, will expand the sample and test these signal against independent performance data. If you lead design teams and want to participate, please [email](#) for further details.

About MoreThought

MoreThought provides operational telemetry and diagnostic intelligence for enterprise product and design organisations.

We help executive leaders replace subjective advocacy, manual spreadsheets, and disruptive workshops with objective activity data. By analysing passive workflow telemetry directly from the tools teams use every day, MoreThought exposes where delivery stalls, quantifies true team capacity, and isolates cross-functional friction without interrupting ongoing work.

Our fixed-scope diagnostics provide leadership teams with an empirical baseline of operational health, throughput, and focus in under three weeks, backed by continuous monitoring.

Learn more or arrange a scoping discussion:
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