



Exploring Approaches to Increasing the Attractiveness of the Face-to-Face- Workplace: A Comparison between Germany and Tanzania

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global shift to remote work to reduce health risks. Similar to other years, in 2023, around 22% of German employees worked from home, for reasons like offering greater staff flexibility and saving commuting time. Many companies are now implementing return-to-office policies to encourage employees back to the office. In Tanzania, however, little is known about these efforts except in banking, telecom and higher learning institutions. Notwithstanding some employees valuing remote work when choosing an employer. Return to the office fosters better communication, coordination, and knowledge exchange. This study explores approaches to enhancing the attractiveness of face-to-face workplaces in Germany and Tanzania, focusing on cultural, organisational, and practical strategies that increase employee engagement. In Germany, flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid models and flexible hours, have shaped workplace appeal, aligning with a broader focus on work-life balance and employee autonomy. In contrast, Tanzania's workplace dynamics are influenced by cultural values and hierarchical designs, which are being balanced with inclusive management strategies and employee recognition programmes to attract and retain talent. The comparative survey examines the different approaches that influence workplace attractiveness in both countries, offering insights on how businesses can modify these tactics to suit their business settings. The study offers to issue valuable insights for multi-national corporations looking to maximize their face-to-face workplaces, while taking local cultural contexts and global trends into account.

Keywords: Home office, office work benefits, workplace attractiveness.

1 Introduction and Research Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic posed major challenges to the German economy. One key measure to reduce health risks was enabling employees to work from home. Even after the pandemic subsided, remote work remained prevalent. A 2024 study by the Federal Statistical Office found that in 2023, around 22% of employees in Germany worked at least partially from home—only slightly less than in previous years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024). Remote work offers benefits to both employees and employers: employees save commuting time, and companies can hire more staff than their office space would allow under full in-person work (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2024). However, since 2023, the concept of “Return to Office” has gained attention, aiming to reduce the established remote work culture (Brodersen, 2024). According to a study of Cisco in Germany (2024) 23 % of German companies lost staff due to policies to return to the office.

In Tanzania, the approach to COVID 19 was rather uneven from the rest of the world. There was no official lock down except for few institutions like banking, telecom and in higher learning institutions (ILO, 2022; East Africa COVID-19 Response, 2021; Mbise, 2022). The government ministries, manufacturing industries and few organisations continued in person due to infrastructural limitations and the physical nature of tasks (Mnyanyi, 2023). Hence, organisations had to rethink and restructure work arrangement (Tanzania Public Service College Report, 2021) and how they would make the workplace attractive by introducing wellness programs, flexible working hours, improve technology and digital options to encourage employees to come back to the office (Moshia and Mwalimu, 2022).

Many German and Tanzania employees prefer hybrid or remote work due to flexibility and time savings. However, employers worry about reduced collaboration, productivity, and workplace culture. The challenge is how to redesign physical workplaces to attract employees back.

The main goal of the study is to develop recommendations for companies to make in-person work in offices more attractive because COVID 19 is here to stay. The central research question is: What approaches can motivate employees to voluntarily return to partial in-person work? Derived from the research question the article focuses on learning about the preferences of German and Tanzanian level- staff regarding home office regulations and their motivation of working from home. Furthermore, the article demonstrates the strategies of organisations currently applied to enhance the attractiveness of the physical workplace. The analysis of the data reveals recommendations for organisations on how to optimise workplace and policies while including perspectives from employees and employers in Germany and Tanzania.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in workplace motivation theories such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) and the motivation theory of Hackman & Oldham (1976). These theories explain why factors like comfort, equipment, and recognition matter in workplace choice. Previous studies globally (post-COVID trends (2022–2025); Mosha & Mwalimu, 2022). The Herzberg Theory supports the idea of making physical workplace appealing in an era of hybrid work.

The theories show hybrid models are increasingly preferred in both countries- both sets of factors namely; hygiene (work climate, pay, and safety) and motivators such as meaningful interaction, recognition and opportunities for growth make employees willing and want to attend the workplace because they create emotional and psychological attachment to the work place. African contexts, including Tanzania, reveal that infrastructure challenges (like internet and power) play a unique role in shaping work preferences.

Maslow's theory provides a better understanding on how employees are attracted to face-to-face workplaces when these environments help satisfy unmet needs such as physiological needs-like comfortable working place, safe working conditions, team support and interaction, respect from supervisors and peers, and above all meaningful contribution.

Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Theory (1976) gives a valuable theoretical framework for understanding how the attractiveness of face-to-face workplaces is emphasized by skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, the theory explains how physical workplaces can foster meaningful work experiences that motivate employees to engage in on-site work.

3 Culture of Home-Office

The rise of home office culture in Germany began during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, only 13% of employees worked remotely, but by 2021, nearly 40% were working full-time from home (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024). This shift was driven by the SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 2021), which mandated reduced workplace contact and required employees to accept remote work offers unless justified otherwise. After the regulation was lifted in 2022 (Bundesregierung, 2022), full-time remote work declined, but partial remote work remained stable. By 2023–2024, companies like SAP and Deutsche Bank introduced policies requiring at least three days of in-office work per week (Haupt, 2024a), reflecting a global trend toward "Return-to-Office" strategies (Vincent, 2024). The following table shows advantages and disadvantages of working from home in Germany from the perspective of employees, organizations and the society (Krick *et al.*, 2023; Landes *et al.*, 2020; TAB, 2024).

Meanwhile before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was not a common practice in Tanzania, especially outside NGOs and multinational corporations. The pandemic forced many public and private organisations to adopt working from home as a necessity rather than an individual preference (Mosha & Mwalimu, 2022). After the

situation eased some organisational habit around remote work took shape and remained. The reasons are; Tanzanian culture in more of hierarchy and more of a face-to-face work environment and now with this new concept of hybrid work is still a struggle to many organisations (African Development Bank, 2024). However, if proactive measures are not taken soon the businesses will face massive turnover, dissatisfaction and low productivity.

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home

Perspective from	Advantages	Disadvantages
Employees	Staff satisfaction Flexibility Time saving Higher concentration	Blurred boundaries between work and private life Isolation and loneliness longer communication paths
Organizations	Fewer sick days Increased attractiveness of organizations Optimization of office Space	Insufficient control of staff Extra work equipment Data protection Onboarding process
Society	Resource conversation Infrastructure relief Employment opportunities for people with limited mobility	

3.1 Return to Office Policies

Employers argue that in-person work fosters collaboration, innovation, and stronger company culture. It improves productivity through faster problem-solving and better access to resources (Dennison, 2024; Breitenhuber, 2021). Onboarding and mental health also benefit from clearer separation between work and personal life (Landes *et al.*, 2020). A 2021 and 2024 survey done respectively in Germany and Tanzania found similar employee preferences and that 81% of Germans and 60% of Tanzanians (PWC Report, 2021) of non-managerial employees oppose strict return-to-office policies. Most prefer hybrid models, with around three days of remote work per week (Speck, 2024). Strict mandates, like those at SAP, led to dissatisfaction and increased turnover risk (Deutschlandfunk, 2024; Beck, 2024). Remote workers showed 13% higher productivity due to fewer distractions (Bloom *et al.*, 2013; PwC, 2024). Hybrid workers report higher job satisfaction. Remote workers average 8 sick days/year vs. 13 for in-office workers (DATEV Magazin, 2022).

4 Methodology

This research study includes mixed-methods comparative research design. The mixed method approach was most suitable because: the study explored perceptions, experiences, and motivations (qualitative depth) and also compared patterns and differences across countries (quantitative rigor) of home office preferences and workplace attractiveness in Germany and Tanzania. The scope of the study covered a broad organisational and social issues influenced by age, gender, education, job positions and sector (demographic). Quantitative data was collected from staff-level employees with nonexecutive job titles working in hybrid or face-to-face roles in sectors with comparable structures in both countries: manufacturing, financial services, higher education, telecommunications and public administration through structured questionnaires distributed to respondents-employees in both countries, yielding a $n=205$ responses from primarily manufacturing companies in Germany and $n=336$ responses from public and private organizations in Tanzania and being able to compare different groups and show diversity. Sampling technique stratified random sampling to ensure a fair representation of key employee categories and valid cross-country comparison. Strata was included in sector, job level- managerial vs non-managerial and fully on-site against hybrid. After stratification a simple random sampling within each stratum. On qualitative phase, purposive sampling was applied to select participants with direct experience and insight. The participants were HR managers responsible for workplace policy and employees with experience of remote and face-to-face work. The study indicative sample size included Germany: 200–300 respondents and Tanzania: 200–300 respondents which seemed sufficient for comparative statistical analysis and regression or SEM if needed.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following sample unit $n=17$ in Germany and $n=11$ human resource representatives in Tanzania, providing qualitative insights into organisational strategies and employee expectations regarding hybrid and in-person work models.

5 Description and Analysis of Data

5.1 Tanzania

Data was collected using a sample of 336 employees from public and private sector. Data was analysed using frequencies, percentages, thematic and inductive themes. The data was grouped using cross tabulations, and presented visually in tables, charts and graphs.

Table 2 Crosstabulation: Age Group and Home Office Preference

Age Group	0 Days	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days	4 Days	5 Days	Total
25–30	10 (25%)	12 (27%)	50 (50%)	35 (44%)	12 (41%)	12 (29%)	131 (39%)
31–40	12 (30%)	14 (32%)	35 (35%)	30 (38%)	16 (55%)	16 (38%)	123 (37%)
41–50	9 (23%)	8 (18%)	10 (10%)	10 (13%)	8 (28%)	15 (36%)	60 (18%)
51–60+	9 (22%)	10 (23%)	5 (5%)	5 (6%)	3 (10%)	2 (5%)	22 (6%)
Total	40 (100%)	44 (100%)	100 (100%)	80 (100%)	29 (100%)	42 (100%)	335 (100%)

Table 2 above has given a comprehensive result of a survey ($n=336$) of the different age groups and their preferences in working from home. Young professionals choosing remote work had the greatest responses to the home office question, whereas elderly adults (41–50+) who wanted to work 0–1 day had the lowest responses. More flexibility is preferred by young professionals (25–30 years old): 50% of them wish to work from home two days a week. 44% desire a three-day home office. They are the biggest organisation that supports hybrid work. Although significantly less, the mid-age group (31–40 years) likewise favours flexibility: 38% want three days, and 35% want two. They do, however, also hold the largest percentage of the 4-day preference (55%). Workers between the ages of 41 and 50 are divided: A larger percentage falls into the 0–1 day category, indicating a preference for in-person work. This age group makes approximately 36% of the 5-days home office group. Senior employees (ages 51–60+) exhibits less.

Current literature (Bloom *et al.*, 2023; McKinsey, 2023) supports hybrid work as the ideal ratio of adaptability to cooperation (ATE, 2024). The difficulties with transport and infrastructure in Tanzania make hybrid approaches even more alluring. Sectoral viability differs, though: healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics need more full-time presence, whereas ICT and finance sectors can adjust more readily.

5.1.1 Reasons for Using Home Office in Tanzania-

The survey ($n = 196$) on why employees use or would use home office—if permitted—revealed three main reasons: time Savings: 82.7% of respondents ($n = 162$) cited time savings as a key reason for using home office. This is primarily due to the elimination of commuting time to the workplace. Flexibility:74.5% of respondents identified flexibility as a key factor for working from home. For these employees ($n = 146$), being flexible at work is of high importance. Noise Levels: 34.7% of respondents cited noise as a significant reason for using or wanting to use home office. This is mainly due to the elevated noise levels in open-plan offices, which negatively affect concentration. Additionally, workspace design was mentioned by 9.7% of respondents as another reason, along with cost savings due to the elimination of commuting expenses ($n = 4$).

In Tanzania, the adoption of the home office is driven not only by efficiency considerations but also by structural realities such as urban congestion, cost pressures, and evolving digital infrastructure. However, its effectiveness depends on task suitability, managerial capability, supportive organizational policies, work-life balance, internet connectivity, and improved work spaces.

5.2 Germany

Analysis of the Germany context were as follows;

5.2.1 Results of Online Survey

The sample $n = 205$ consists of various age groups: 18–24 years ($n = 128$), 25–34 years ($n = 43$), 35–44 years ($n = 11$), 45–54 years ($n = 7$), and over 55 years ($n = 16$). The majority of respondents are male ($n = 158$). The proportion of female respondents is significantly lower at 22.9% ($n = 47$).

5.2.2 Need for Home Office

The evaluation of the employee survey shows that only 9.8% of respondents ($n = 20$) would like to work in the office five days a week. In contrast, 4.9% ($n = 10$) would prefer to work from home five days a week. A total of 85.3% of respondents ($n = 175$) stated that they would like to work from home one to four days per week if their employer allowed it. This result confirms the assumption that the majority of employees prefer a hybrid work model. The most preferred hybrid arrangement, chosen by 34.6% of respondents ($n = 71$), is two days of home office and three days of in-office work per week.

5.2.3 Current Status Quo of Home Office

The survey on the number of days employees are currently allowed to work from home revealed that 34.1% ($n = 70$) are not permitted to work from home at all. This relatively high proportion is likely due to the inclusion of many dual-study students in the survey. Overall, the evaluation shows that more employees wish to work from home at least one day per week ($n = 185$) than those who are actually allowed to do so ($n = 135$).

5.2.3.1 Reasons for Using Home Office in Germany

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5.2.4 Factors for Increasing the Attractiveness of In-Person Work

The following $n=193$ employees identified several key features that would make working on-site more appealing. Respondents could select multiple options.

- More Retreat Spaces (46.1%, $n = 89$): Employees desire quiet areas such as phone booths, meeting rooms, or silent workspaces to escape noise and concentrate better—addressing one of the main reasons for preferring home office.
- Improved Food and Beverage Options (35.8%, $n = 69$): Many employees see better access to quality meals and drinks as a motivator for returning to the office. This may reflect either a lack of canteen services or dissatisfaction with existing ones.
- Access to Sports Facilities (35.8%, $n = 69$): On-site gyms or partnerships with nearby fitness centers are seen as valuable. They offer convenience, time savings, and cost benefits.
- More Comfortable Seating (28.5%, $n = 55$): Comfortable seating options such as sofas or beanbags are associated with a more human-centred and flexible work environment.
- Better Technical Equipment (27.5%, $n = 53$): Outdated or insufficient technology frustrates employees. Upgrading equipment could boost productivity and make office work more attractive.
- More Natural Light (20.7%, $n = 40$): Many workplaces lack sufficient daylight. Employees value the flexibility of choosing well-lit spots at home, which is often limited in office settings.

In an open-ended question, 70 employees shared additional ideas for making in-person work more appealing. A notable number ($n = 14$) suggested reducing office size to lower noise levels. Others emphasized the need for a more humanized work environment, including elements like sofas, plants, and colour schemes. Nine respondents highlighted the importance of a positive work atmosphere, noting that in-person work often feels more stressful than remote work. They suggested that a relaxed environment and opportunities for social interaction would improve the experience. Additional suggestions included: flexible working hours and commuting cost coverage (each mentioned by 5 respondents), improved food options ($n = 9$), better workplace equipment ($n = 7$), a four-day workweek ($n = 2$).

5.2.5 Results of Interviews with HR Representatives

A total number of respondents ($n=17$) was employed. All companies of the interviewed HR representatives agree to a hybrid work model regarding the workplace for office-workers. For workers at the production side home office is not possible.

The main reasons for at least some days in the offices are direct and short-line communication which optimizes the organizational problem-solving process and customer satisfaction HR representatives identify an increase in team identification and team affiliation which enhance staff retention when staff is in the office. Further-

more, an on-boarding process is more efficient when new employees are in the office. They also point out that defined boundaries between work and private life seems to be better for the work-life-balance of employees. To increase attractiveness of in-office days, companies schedule team meetings on defined in-office days, offer shared meals and sports activities and taking care programmes for plants in the office. Some companies support employees by financing commuting costs. Furthermore, companies optimize office design, work place equipment and retreat areas for their employees. The HR representatives report that while some employees – particularly younger ones- prefer working more days from home, others appreciate the opportunity to spend part of the week in the office.

6 Comparison between Germany and Tanzania

This survey included a sample from Germany and Tanzania as follows: in Germany had a similar age group (25-40), 77% male and 23 % female participants while in Tanzania: Most respondents fell between 25–40 years old, with a balance of male and female participants.

Figure 1 and figure 2 below display the average preferences of the staff-level perspective on how they want their workplace attractive to enhance organizational performance.

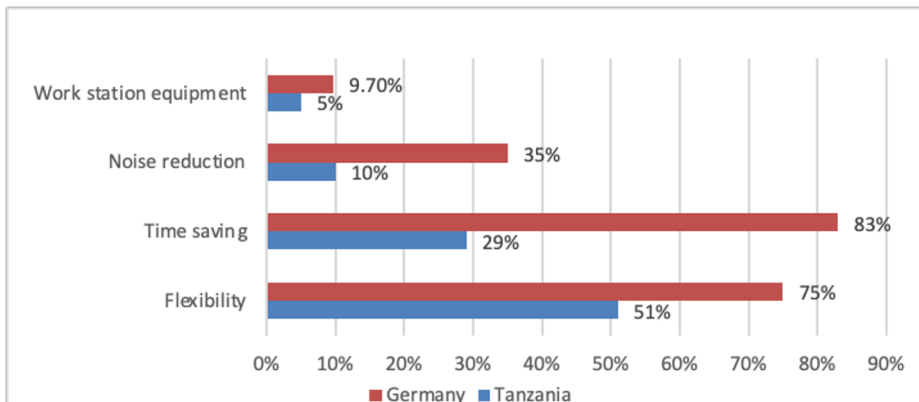


Figure 1: Reasons for Working from Home – Employees ‘Perspectives Germany and Tanzania

The results above indicate that both Germany and Tanzania employees prefer working from home office for time savings, cost reduction, and flexibility amongst other factors. However, in Germany, the push is more about the quality of life and professional expectations while in Tanzania, the push is strongly tied to avoiding traffic jams, saving costs, and lack of office attractiveness. Infrastructure challenges make remote work harder in Tanzania compared to Germany.

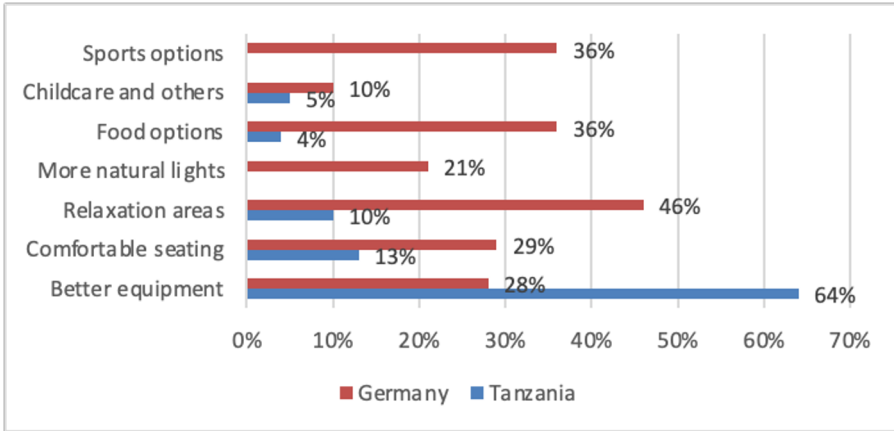


Figure 2: Factors for Workplace Attractiveness – Employees ‘Perspectives Germany and Tanzania

Workplace attractiveness is not just about appealing to the senses in terms design, beauty, style and harmony but rather creating an environment where all employees feel supported, motivated and valued. This further leads to higher employee satisfaction, productivity, better retention and stronger organizational performance.

Apart from the survey, an interview was scheduled for Human Resource representatives from both countries (Germany $n=17$ and Tanzania $n=11$). The main objective was to establish their preferences when it came to reasons for work regulations back to the office from home office. The German HR experts ($n=17$) indicated that the representatives wanted direct and short-line communication that will help in problem solving process and customer satisfaction, increase in team identification and team affiliation which in turn will influence staff retention, provide efficiency of on-boarding process and exchange of knowledge that will enhance organisational productivity and lastly define boundaries between work and private life-work-life balance (health) while, Tanzanian experience showed flexibility 45%; working from office gave them a better environment to concentration 27%; and 18% believed it will ease in provision of services. While the.

To improve the work environment the representatives were asked to come up with ideas that create workplace attractiveness, and these were the results, smaller offices (decrease in noise), improved work atmosphere, food options, sports programs, better workplace equipment, team events, flexible working hours,

7 Discussion, Recommendation and Limitation of Research Study

The results of the surveys and the interviews in Germany and Tanzania show that hybrid working places will be the future for employees in some departments where home-office is possible. Similar to a research study of Kunze & Hampel (2025), the possibility of working from home is preferred by employees. In line with the CISCO

Study (2024) the results of this study demonstrates that employees generally welcome the return to office work, but expect significant changes in design and functionality. While many organizations promote in-office-presence, the advantages of hybrid models are widely acknowledged. Although managers think that employees might be less productive at home compared to working in the office, there is no evidence that productivity of employees in Germany is lower in the home-office (Alipour, 2023). According to the findings and expectations of employees, organizations should foster a sustainable and attractive return to the office through prioritization the strategic design of hybrid work environments that balance flexibility with engagement. This includes offering employees` autonomy in scheduling, enhancing the physical workspace through ergonomic and aesthetic improvements, and providing meaningful incentives such as subsidized commuting, healthy food options. Creating quiet zones and collaborative areas can further support diverse working styles. By investing in a culture of appreciation and modern infrastructure, organizations not only increase on-site attendance but also strengthen employee satisfaction, retention, and overall performance.

A comparison of employee expectations in Germany and Tanzania reveals differing priorities: German employees tend to emphasize the importance of relaxation spaces, access to sports facilities, and natural lighting, whereas Tanzanian employees primarily express a need for improved office equipment and infrastructure. The implementation of hybrid workplace models presents distinct challenges in both Germany and Tanzania, shaped by structural constraints and demographic factors. In Germany, hybrid arrangements are complicated by the nature of certain roles that cannot be performed remotely, alongside spatial limitations resulting from office downsizing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Tanzania, 39% of surveyed employees reported uncertainty about which measures would enhance workplace attractiveness. Additional barriers include potential resistance from management and limited resources for upgrading office infrastructure. Notably, in both countries, the predominant survey demographic—employees aged 18 to 25 - entered the workforce during the pandemic and therefore have limited experience with traditional office environments, which may influence their expectations and engagement with hybrid work structures. Fayard and Weeks (2025) emphasize that leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a positive in-office experience by cultivating a culture of care, actively nurturing interpersonal relationships with employees, and ensuring transparency regarding workplace policies and expectations. One key limitation of the surveys and interviews is the uneven distribution of age groups and industry sectors among the participating organizations, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. To address this, future research should prioritize examining workplace policies across a broader range of industries and incorporate longitudinal approaches to better understand the long-term effects of hybrid work models.

Study Implications for Multinational firms and Global HR practices: MNEs should stop enforcing uniform return-to-office mandates and instead design face-to-face workplaces that employees want to attend-learning, interactive tasks and job characteristics. Adopt context-sensitive HR global policies to national realities. The drivers of workplace attractiveness differ across countries.in Germany: emphasize autonomy, meaningful work, development, and work-life balance while in Tanzania: prioritize safety, reliable pay, infrastructure, belonging, and recognition. Integrate motivation

theories into workplace design. Physical workplaces must satisfy human needs, not just operational requirements; Maslow: ensure basic, safety, social, and growth needs are met, Herzberg: improve hygiene factors while strengthening motivators, Hackman & Oldham: redesign jobs to increase autonomy, feedback, and task significance. Strengthen managerial capability for hybrid and face-to-face work by training managers in: recognition and feedback, trust-based supervision, cross-cultural leadership and shift from control-based to outcome-based performance management. Use face-to-face work as a strategic HR tool for mentoring and socialization, team problem-solving and allowing remote work for routine or individual tasks. Enhance employer branding and talent attraction, a space for growth and learning, improve employee well-being and retention and support sustainable and ethical HR practices with ILO and UN rights standards to contribute to ESG and sustainability goals.

Conclusion: this study demonstrates that the attractiveness of face-to-face workplaces depends on how well they satisfy employees' motivational and job-design needs within specific national contexts. Multinational firms that align global HR strategies with local expectations—rather than imposing uniform workplace policies—are more likely to enhance employee engagement, productivity, and sustainable competitive advantage.

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