

# What ACTUALLY brings employees back to the office?

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With hybrid working now firmly embedded, organisations face a pressing challenge: how can the office become a place employees actively choose to be? The latest research from [Colliers](#) Workplace Advisory moves beyond speculation, delivering robust data on what truly influences office attendance – and what does not.

## The office attendance challenge: why traditional incentives fail

Colliers' latest research reveals a critical challenge: office attendance remains low. With average peak occupancy below 40% across EMEA and North America, and workplaces lacking vibrancy 83% of the time, it is difficult to foster meaningful collaboration and engagement when so many employees are not present in the office; empty offices do not attract other people to come in.

JanJaap Boogaard, Director and Head of Workplace Advisory (EMEA) at Colliers, explained: "Organisations need rethink how to create dynamic, purpose-driven office environments that encourage in-office presence. Many have attempted to entice employees back with free meals, attendance-based incentives, and social events, yet research shows these strategies have little to no impact on attendance in the long term. Nor are employees drawn in by acoustic comfort or open-plan layouts, and leadership presence alone is insufficient unless accompanied by clear expectations."

"To truly re-engage staff, businesses must adopt data-driven approaches that address real attendance drivers and significantly boost in-office presence," added Sven Moller, Director and Head of Nordics Workplace Advisory at Colliers. "Without these factors, offices risk becoming underutilised spaces that fail to deliver the collaborative and dynamic environments employees need to thrive and maintain

productivity.”

#### What actually encourages office attendance?

Colliers’ findings identify five key factors that significantly boost in-office presence:

1. Assigned desks ‘for a day’ – Employees with a guaranteed workspace when present in the office, attend up to 1.3 days more per week. Knowing they will have a designated space when present in the office makes returning to the office more appealing.
2. The right workspace for the right task – Employees want purpose-designed environments that support both collaboration, but also deep focus. Offices that provide these task-focused workspaces increase attendance by up to 0.6 days per week.
3. Colleagues being present – Social connection is a major driver of attendance. Employees are significantly more likely to come in when they know their collaborators will be on-site, leading to an increase of up to 0.6 days per week. Team-based office days maximise this effect.
4. A structured office routine – Employees who follow set in-office schedules attend 0.7-1.1 days more per week than those with complete flexibility. Predictability helps embed attendance into their routines.
5. Manager expectations – When managers clearly signal that office attendance is expected, employees attend up to 0.9 days per week more. Leadership plays a critical role in shaping workplace behaviours.

#### How can organisations implement these findings?

Rather than relying on outdated incentives, businesses should adopt data-backed strategies to overcome attendance barriers:

1. Balance flexibility with structure – Instead of enforcing rigid mandates, establish clear expectations around in-office days. A structured routine ensures employees know when they are expected to attend, increasing engagement.
2. Make the office a destination, not an obligation Employees should feel that the office adds value to their workday. Investing in dynamic, purpose-driven spaces that support both teamwork and individual focus – while ensuring that people have guaranteed desks when present in the office – makes the office a more attractive and productive place to be.
3. Facilitate purposeful presence – Employees are most engaged when their colleagues are also present. Organisations should implement team-based office schedules to encourage collaboration and social interaction.
4. Enhance ease of access – Commuting barriers remain a major deterrent. Ensuring that the office is centrally located, easily accessible, combined with offering subsidised transport, parking benefits, or flexible start times can significantly improve attendance rates.
5. Reframe leadership approaches – Managerial expectations matter. Employees respond positively when leaders actively communicate the benefits of in-office work rather than enforcing attendance as a requirement. Creating a culture where leadership is visible and engaged fosters a sense of belonging and

