

Work-from-office mandate? Expect top-talent turnover — unless you design it properly

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Mandating office attendance without measurable operational value risks attrition, disengagement and reduced delivery quality.



Mandates don't fail because people dislike offices.

They fail because leaders confuse presence with productivity — and because the office isn't engineered for the work.

If you're going to require office time in 2026, treat the office like a product:

- define outcomes
- price the trade-offs
- design the experience

Otherwise, budget for attrition and quiet quitting.

As a CIO, my stance is simple:

Tie any work-from-office (WFO) policy to measurable value — delivery speed, quality, security — not badge swipes.

Do that, and you can keep your best people and improve throughput.

Ignore it, and you'll lose both.

What the Data Actually Says

Pressure to return is real, especially in IT.

Ivanti's 2025 Technology at Work report found nearly two-thirds of IT professionals felt pushed to work from the office, while 83% rated flexible work as "high value" or "essential".

When mandates are blunt:

- hiring cycles lengthen
- voluntary attrition rises
- high performers leave first

Especially those who already know they can deliver from anywhere.

Source:

[Ivanti — Technology at Work](#)

The conclusion isn't:

“never mandate”

It's:

“only mandate when the work benefits — and prove it.”

Presence Is Not Productivity

Deep technical work:

- engineering
- data science
- architecture

...often performs better with fewer interruptions.

In-person time shines for:

- architecture reviews
- design sprints
- incident response
- onboarding
- mentoring

Tie your policy to work modes, not taste.

Policy by Role, Not by Preference

Location-Bound

- hardware labs
- device provisioning
- network operations
- in-room AV support

In-Person Bursts

- product discovery
- cross-functional design
- complex incident response

Remote-First

- focused IC work
- documentation
- analysis

Publish these archetypes and the rationale.

Staff understand trade-offs when the “why” is the work, not control.

Do the Mandate Maths Before You Announce It

If you can't model it, don't mandate it.

Build a simple comparison:

Seat Cost

- real-estate
- facilities
- commute subsidies
- on-site services

Attrition Cost

- fully loaded salary × replacement multiplier
- time-to-fill
- productivity drag

Outcome Deltas

- cycle time
- defect escape
- MTTR
- forecast accuracy
- lead response
- backlog burn-down

If the outcome uplift doesn't exceed attrition and seat costs, you don't have a business case.

Engineer the Office for Work — Not Attendance

If you want teams on-site, make the site a force-multiplier.

Network & Platform

- Wi-Fi 6E/7 density for peak days
- seamless roaming
- zero-trust readiness
- stable conferencing
- sensible room standards
- fast artifact caches
- VPN alternatives that don't throttle builds or data pulls

Spaces That Map to Modes

- quiet zones
- phone booths
- project rooms
- sprint spaces

- booking systems supporting whole-team co-location

Meeting Equity

Design for hybrid by default.

Remote participants should have equal presence, not second-class status.

Measure Outcomes, Not Bodies

Reporting badge swipes encourages gaming and resentment.

Measure what matters:

Throughput

- lead time
- deployment frequency
- story completion

Quality

- defect rates
- escaped defects
- action closure

Reliability

- MTTR
- change failure rate

Engagement

- regretted attrition
- offer acceptance
- internal mobility

Security

- access reviews
- DLP signals
- insider-risk indicators

Publish a small dashboard monthly.

If the numbers don't move in the right direction, adjust the policy.

A 30-60-90 Rollout That Works

Day 0 — Announce with Evidence

- why now
- where value improves

- how it will be measured
- when it will be reviewed

Link to:

- role archetypes
- exception criteria
- review process

Days 1-30 — Pilot

- select 2-3 teams
- fix the basics
- establish baselines
- capture pain points

Days 31-60 — Scale Carefully

- expand to similar teams
- publish wins and fixes
- schedule intentional team days

Days 61-90 — Prove or Pivot

- compare against baseline
- keep what improves outcomes
- drop what doesn't

Convert exceptions into patterns where justified.

Risks You Must Plan For

Top-Talent Churn

Senior engineers and security specialists will leave if autonomy disappears without a clear value story.

Insider-Risk Spike

Policy-change periods often correlate with increased data exfiltration attempts.

Tighten:

- DLP
- access reviews
- printing controls
- device controls
- offboarding rigor

Ghost-Badging & Presenteeism

Combine badge and IdP telemetry — with privacy and works-council alignment — to identify coercive or performative attendance patterns.

Manager Overload

Equip managers with:

- FAQs
- exception playbooks
- team-day templates

Managers should lead, not police.

CIO Checklist

- Publish work archetypes with the why.
 - Model seat vs attrition vs outcome uplift.
 - Upgrade network and rooms to remove collaboration tax.
 - Standardise team-day cadence by value stream.
 - Ship a monthly metrics dashboard.
 - Run a formal 30-60-90 review cycle.
 - Plan for an insider-risk bump during policy shifts.
 - Align with HR, Legal and Works Council early.
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Bottom Line

Mandates can work — when they improve the work.

If you can't demonstrate better:

- throughput
- quality
- security

...don't force it.

Treat WFO as a product with:

- customers
- SLAs
- telemetry

The moment you measure bodies instead of outcomes, you trigger turnover and culture rot.
