NANO GCC REAL ESTATE · POINT OF VIEW

The First Office Is a Talent Decision

Candidates judge a nano GCC by its office before they meet the team. Why the first workplace belongs in the employer proposition, and how to test it before you sign.

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AT A GLANCE

- For a nano GCC (20 to 200 people), the first office is often the first proof a candidate sees that the India operation is real.
- The bar is rising: 70% of GCCs in CBRE's 2026 survey treat workplace design as a branding and talent tool, and fully in-office GCC roles are becoming the norm[1,2].
- Brief the first office on five moments, not a seat count: the interview, the first week, calls with headquarters, leadership visits and the commute.

01 The trap

A company opens a 40-seat centre in Bengaluru and takes the suite with the lowest rent. Six weeks later a senior engineer weighing two offers comes in for a final round. Reception is unattended for ten minutes. The only free room sits next to the pantry, and the video link to the hiring manager in Boston drops twice. Nothing about the role has changed, yet she leaves wondering whether this company will back its India team when it matters. She takes the other offer.

The cause is rarely a bad building. It is a brief written as a seat count. The first office is usually treated as a real estate line item: sign a lease, keep the commitment small, revisit later. That is sound on cost, but in year one the office is where candidates are interviewed, where new joiners spend their first week and where visitors from headquarters form their view of the India team. In a team of 40, each of those moments is a hiring or retention decision, and one poor service pattern reaches everyone within a week.

> *Size need not decide quality; the brief does. The first office is part of the employer proposition and should be judged as one, alongside rent and fit-out.*

02 Why the stakes are higher in 2026

CBRE's 2026 India Office Occupier Survey, covering more than 200 occupier CXOs between April and June, found that 70% of GCC respondents are prioritising workplace design and identity as a branding and talent-attraction tool[3]. Across all respondents, 65% named brand- and culture-led design as their main focus for improving

[1] CBRE, "65% of occupiers rank brand and culture as the top office design priority" (India Office Occupier Survey 2026, September 2026). www.cbre.co.in/press-releases/65-occupiers-rank-brand-and-culture-as-the-top

[2] CIEL HR, "CIEL Works: GCC – Talent Trends and Insights" (June 2025). cielhr.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/51-of-GCCs-in-India-Cite-Talent-Retention-as-Top-Concern-Reveals-Latest-Study-by-CIEL-HR.pdf

[3] CBRE, see note 1.

workspace experience, and 52% are adding enclosed, soundproof video-call spaces, the highest uptake of any workplace setting. People are also expected in the office more: in CIEL HR's analysis of 675 GCC job openings, fully in-office roles rose from 51% in 2023 to 66% in 2025, and 51% of GCCs named talent retention as their top challenge[4]. On the candidate side, Randstad's 2026 Employer Brand Research found that work-life balance is the top reason for choosing an employer in India (60%), with a good work environment named as its biggest contributor (52%)[5].

These are surveys of intent and preference from different sources, and none of them shows that a particular office design improves offer acceptance or tenure. We have not seen India data that isolates the workplace as the cause of hiring outcomes, and would be wary of anyone who claims it. Together, though, they point one way: peers are spending on the workplace as a talent tool, more of the working week is spent in it, and keeping people is the hardest part.

03 Looking ahead: 2027 and beyond

Competition for the same people is set to intensify. FICCI–ANAROCK projects more than 2,400 GCCs employing 2.8 million people by 2030[6], and Colliers names nano and mid-sized GCCs as a driver of the next growth phase[7]. Three shifts follow for nano GCCs:

- **Small centres compete with campuses for the same hires.** A 40-person centre cannot match a campus on amenities, but it can match it on what candidates notice first: a proper welcome, private rooms and technology that works.
- **AI changes the room mix before it changes the seat count.** In CBRE's survey, 95% of GCCs reported active AI integration, and CBRE's leasing head observed that AI is influencing "the type of space occupiers seek well before it alters the quantum of space they require"[8]. Expect project rooms, call booths and secure lab space to matter more than desks, and keep the first fit-out easy to reconfigure.
- **The commute becomes part of the offer.** CBRE found 70% of occupiers prioritise commute infrastructure when choosing a location[9], and Colliers expects a "hub-plus-one" model to gain ground in Tier II and III cities[10]. For some centres, a well-connected site or a second city is a better talent decision than a prestige address.

04 Three rules for the first office

Brief the journey, not the seat count. Before shortlisting sites, walk the candidate, new-joiner, team-member and visiting-leader journeys and write down what each needs. The output is a one-page minimum standard covering welcome, access, privacy, acoustics, meeting technology and support.

[4] CIEL HR, see note 2.

[5] Randstad Employer Brand Research 2026, as reported by Business Today (August 2026). www.businesstoday.in/jobs/story/google-tata-group-and-amazon-are-indias-most-attractive-employers-but-work-life-balance-not-pay-is-the-biggest-talent-magnet-547458-2026-08-05

[6] FICCI–ANAROCK, as reported in "India to host more than 2,400 GCCs, employ 2.8 million professionals by 2030" (Business Today, February 2026). www.businesstoday.in/amp/real-estate/story/india-to-host-more-than-2400-gccs-employ-2-8-million-professionals-by-2030-ficci-anarock-514378-2026-02-03

[7] Colliers, GCC outlook, as reported in "GCC office leasing to reach 40 million sq ft annually by 2027" (The Realty Today, July 2026). therealtytoday.com/news/market-insights/gcc-office-leasing-to-reach-40-million-sq-ft-annually-by-2027-colliers-india-report

[8] CBRE, "Limited impact of AI on office leasing strategy in India" (India Office Occupier Survey 2026, August 2026). www.cbre.co.in/press-releases/limited-impact-of-ai-on-office-leasing-strategy-in-india

[9] CBRE, "India Office Occupier Survey 2026: How is AI influencing leasing decisions?" (August 2026). www.cbre.co.in/insights/reports/india-office-occupier-survey-2026-how-is-ai-influencing-leasing-decisions

[10] Colliers, see note 7.

Buy reliability before finish. A marble lobby does not help if the interview room echoes. Spend first on what fails in public: enclosed rooms, acoustic treatment, video that connects first time and IT support with a stated response time. Finish can follow; a poor first impression is harder to reverse.

Score the commute like rent. Test the journey at peak hour from the areas where target talent lives, and check safe late-evening travel for teams working US or European hours. A site that saves 10% on rent but adds an hour to every round trip may be the expensive option.

05 What friction costs

Return to the opening scenario. Option A is the cheapest suite: ₹12,000 per seat a month, shared meeting rooms and a longer commute for most of the team. Option B costs ₹13,500 per seat (12.5% more), with two enclosed interview rooms, video-call booths and a site near the metro. For 40 seats the premium is ₹7.2 lakh a year. The comparison has to include what Option A's friction costs in return.

EXHIBIT 1 · ANNUAL COST OF WORKPLACE FRICTION, 40-SEAT CENTRE (ILLUSTRATIVE)

Friction under Option A	Assumption	Annual cost
Disrupted video calls	3 a week, 20 minutes lost for 4 people, 48 weeks, ₹1,500 loaded hourly cost	₹2.9 lakh
One avoidable early resignation	Replacement at 50% of a ₹25 lakh annual cost to company	₹12.5 lakh
One declined senior offer	Search re-run at one month's pay on a ₹40 lakh package	₹3.3 lakh
Total cash cost of friction		**₹18.7 lakh**
Option B premium	**₹1,500 per seat a month, 40 seats**	**₹7.2 lakh**
Longer commute (not a company cost)	40 extra minutes a day, 40 people, 3 office days a week, 48 weeks	3,840 hours

Assumptions chosen for clarity, not market quotes. Replacement costs and search fees vary widely by role and firm. Vertara Global analysis.

On these numbers, Option B pays for itself if it prevents a single early resignation. If it prevents nothing, ₹7.2 lakh is the full price of the insurance. The commute line never reaches the P&L: employees pay it every working day, and some settle the bill by leaving. Boards should weigh the range of outcomes, not the monthly rent.

06 How to run the decision

Test each shortlisted site against five moments before the commercials are final.

Moment	What good looks like	Decision test
Candidate interview	Someone expecting them, a quiet private room, video that works first time	Run a mock interview on site, including a call to headquarters
First week	Desk, laptop and access ready on day one; a named buddy	Check IT and access lead times against the first start date
Calls with HQ	Enough enclosed call space for the overlap window	Count rooms and booths against peak call demand, not the average
Leadership visit	Space for a town hall and a private client conversation	Confirm one space can flex to host the whole team
The commute	Reliable transport and safe late-evening travel	Travel the route at peak hour and after 9 pm

- **Compare on one scorecard.** Put the five moments beside rent, fit-out, term and exit on the same page, so experience is weighed against cost rather than after it.
- **Assign owners and response times.** HR owns the candidate and joiner journeys, workplace owns rooms and service, and IT owns connectivity and meeting technology. Every recurring problem gets an owner and a time to fix.
- **Listen at 30 and 90 days.** Ask new joiners whether the office helps them do their work and feel part of a team. Track meeting failures, service tickets and how long each takes to close.
- **Read the declines.** When a candidate turns down an offer, note whether the workplace came up. Use it to find avoidable friction, not to prove that the office drives retention on its own.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BOARD

1. What will a candidate see, hear and experience on a first visit?
2. Can someone in India join an 8 pm call with headquarters without hunting for a room?
3. Which workplace issue would make a valued employee start looking elsewhere?
4. What does the cheaper site really cost once friction is priced in?

07 How Vertara Global helps

We join before the site shortlist, while the brief can still shape the choice. Working with HR and business leaders, we map the candidate, new-joiner and visiting-leader journeys and turn them into a minimum workplace standard. Shortlisted sites are tested against that standard alongside rent, term and exit, so leadership sees the experience trade-off in the same numbers as the commercial one. The deliverable is a decision brief: the preferred site, the standard it must meet and the true cost of the cheaper alternative.

Whichever operating model the client chooses, we can stand up the opening workplace, run joiner reviews with HR and hand over a standards and service register, staying engaged into year two. The test of success: an early team that does credible work and can see a future with the company.

ABOUT VERTARA global

Vertara Global is a practitioner-led GCC advisory firm. We help mid-market companies across sectors and geographies design, set up, scale and transform their Global Capability Centres, from the first business case and location choice to the operating model, entity, talent and workplace.

Our services span five pillars:

1. **GCC Consulting**
2. **Legal & Entity Support**
3. **People Advisory**
4. **Digital & AI**
5. **Engineering GCC Solutions**

Client-first and leader-led: senior practitioners run every engagement, and we stay involved after handover, because year two is where many GCCs are tested.