

National College of Ireland

Project Submission Sheet

Student Name: Anna Gordova
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Programme: Master of Business Administration **Year:** 2
Module: Dissertation
Submission Due Date: 10 August 2024
Project Title: Perceptions and Challenges faced by Irish Tech sector employees around strict return to the office policies.
Word Count: 18900

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MBA

Dissertation: Perceptions and Challenges faced by Irish Tech sector employees around strict return to the office policies.

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AI Acknowledgment

This section acknowledges the AI tools that were utilized in the process of completing this assignment.

Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
Grammarly	Spell checking tool	https://www.grammarly.com
Chat GPT	Brainstorming ideas and exploring of potential dissertation topics at the beginning of the research.	https://chat.openai.com

Description of AI Usage

This section provides a more detailed description of how the AI tools were used in the assignment. It includes information about the prompts given to the AI tool, the responses received, and how these responses were utilized or modified in the assignment. **One table should be used for each tool used.**

Grammarly	
Grammarly was a tool used for spellchecking throughout writing of this dissertation. Grammarly was installed on the researcher's machine as a Word Extension.	
N/A	N/A

ChatGPT	
ChatGPT was used for generation of ideas and exploring of potential dissertation topics at the beginning of the research process. All of the information provided by ChatGPT was then researched via real human research in the relevant areas.	
The researcher additionally used ChatGPT for interview preparation to ensure that the final version of prepared questions is relevant to the aims of the research. After providing ChatGPT with the outline of the research objectives, the prompt questions about it were asked.	
Sample prompt: "I am planning to write a dissertation about return to the office policies and its effects on employee turnover, is this a relevant topic in 2024?"	Sample response: "Yes, the topic of return-to-office (RTO) policies and their effects on employee turnover is highly relevant in 2024."
Sample prompt: "Based on the research objectives, how can I make sure the questions are	Sample response: "To ensure that your interview questions are open-ended and provide participants with ample opportunity to freely

open ended and will provide the participants the most opportunity to freely speak?”	express their thoughts, you can follow these guidelines”
Sample prompt: “What are the standard headings I can follow to ensure I have a good Literature review for a thesis project?”	Sample response: “Creating a well-structured literature review for a thesis project is crucial for laying the foundation of your research. Here are standard headings you can follow to ensure your literature review is comprehensive and organized”.

Evidence of AI Usage

This section includes evidence of significant prompts and responses used or generated through the AI tool. It should provide a clear understanding of the extent to which the AI tool was used in the assignment. Evidence may be attached via screenshots or text.

Additional Evidence A:

What are the standard headings I can follow to ensure I have a good Literature review for a thesis project?

Creating a well-structured literature review for a thesis project is crucial for laying the foundation of your research. Here are standard headings you can follow to ensure your literature review is comprehensive and organized:

1. Introduction

- **Purpose of the Literature Review:** Outline the purpose of the literature review in the context of your thesis.
- **Scope of the Review:** Define the scope, including what is included and excluded, and any limitations.
- **Organization of the Review:** Briefly explain how the review is structured.

2. Theoretical Framework

- **Key Theories and Models:** Discuss the major theories, models, and frameworks relevant to your research topic.
- **Relationship to Your Study:** Explain how these theories or models apply to your research and help to frame your study.

3. Historical Background

- **Evolution of the Topic:** Provide a historical overview of the topic, tracing the development of key ideas and debates.
- **Key Milestones:** Highlight significant research studies, discoveries, or events that have shaped the field.

4. Current State of Research

- **Key Themes and Trends:** Identify and discuss the major themes, trends, and gaps in the current research.
- **Methodologies Used:** Review the methodologies that have been commonly used in the field.
- **Major Findings:** Summarize the key findings of recent studies.

5. Critical Analysis of the Literature

- **Strengths and Weaknesses:** Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature.

Additional Evidence B:

Initial description of thesis for ChatGPT with to see how can the questions be made more open ended; prompt to ChatGPT:

I am writing a thesis exploring perception of tech sector employees in Ireland on the strict RTO policies. I plan to gather data by conducting semi structured interviews. I will be interviewing 10 participants each being a tech sector employee based in Ireland. The participants will be chosen based on the fact that they have had the opportunity to work both remotely and in strict RTO conditions.

Additional significant prompts:

What are some examples of good work-life balance?

How can I ensure purposed sample group is a fair representation of my research?

What are the standard headings I can follow to ensure I have a good Literature review for a thesis project?

Perceptions and Challenges faced by Irish Tech sector employees around strict return to the office policies.

Anna Gordova

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment for the award of Master of Business Administration.

Submitted for the National College of Ireland, August 2024.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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- (a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.
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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, especially in the technological sector, where employees had to adapt to remote work. As the pandemic came to an end, many companies are reassessing the return to the office policies. This sparks debates around the effectiveness of these policies and the effects they have on overall employee satisfaction, productivity and well-being. This study investigates the perceptions of Irish tech sector employees when it comes to challenges around strict return to the office policies. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation is used to analyse the factors that influence employee job satisfaction and turnover.

Ten professionals from the Irish tech sector, who have been recently asked to return to the office, participated in the semi-structured interviews to provide their perception and identify key issues contributing to dissatisfaction. The interview candidate pointed out problems such as rigid company policies, strict enforcement of office attendance by managers, and the physical and mental strain of long commutes. A common feeling among them was that inflexible office policies led to a sense of mistrust and feeling undervalued. While there were positive factors such as increased company culture and pleasant office settings, these were often overshadowed by the negative aspects.

The findings highlight that many participants felt that their work-life balance is being compromised, prompting them to consider seeking more flexible job options. This emphasises the need for tech companies to adopt more flexible, employee-centric practices to enhance satisfaction and retain talent in a competitive market.

To tackle these issues, the study recommends that companies should promote more flexible work arrangements, address commuting challenges, consistently acknowledge employee efforts, and ensure fair access to career development opportunities. Future research should focus on larger and more diverse groups, employing mixed methods to gain deeper insights into the long-term effects of mandatory office attendance across various cultural contexts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Background

1.1.1. Mandatory Office Attendance

The norm of work in the tech sector has shifted during the past decade. The traditional office based approach was replaced by more flexible arrangements due to the availability of new technologies and changing employee expectations. Previously, physical presence in the office was associated with productivity and engagement at work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). This however, was changed as the global pandemic as it forced many to work complete remote. This allowed employees to prove that productivity and engagements can be achieved outside of the traditional office based model (Bloom *et al.*, 2023).

Despite the fact that home based working model has proven to be successful, many companies in the tech sector are reintroducing office attendance policies. This reinforcement raises questions around how it will impact employee happiness, job satisfaction and overall commitment to employer. For this study, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a useful framework for examining the dynamics of negative factors such as the reinforcing policies, and motivators, such as employee recognition programmes and opportunities for growth (Herzberg, 1968). As one of the negative factors, the strict policy reinforcement could potentially lead to the increased dissatisfaction and turnover intentions among employees (Umer, 2024).

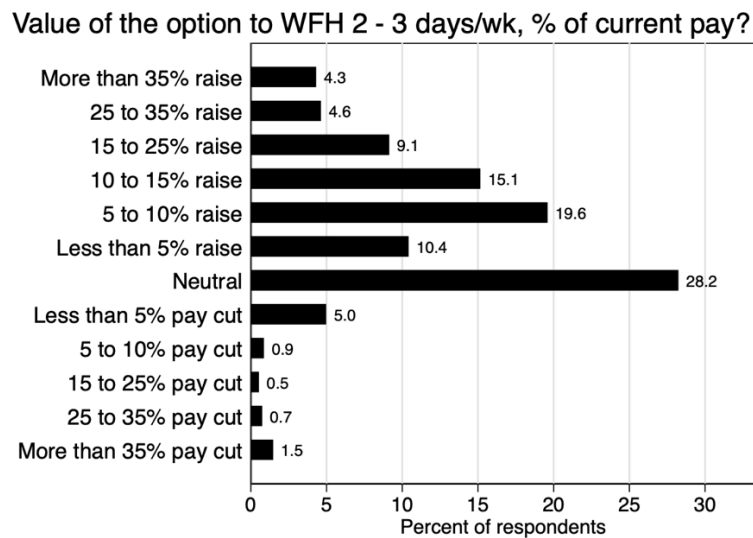
1.1.2. Employee expectations and preferences for remote work

A lot of tech sector employees in Ireland negatively reacted to the potential reintroduction of return to the office (RTO) policies. RTO has a lot of benefits for employees such as savings on childcare, well balanced family life and time saved commuting (Cassidy, 2014). Therefore the resent gradual reintroduction of RTO has sparked debates in the tech industry, particularly around its effects on employee satisfaction and overall well-being.

A study by Barrero *at al.* (2021) highlights that a significant portion of employees prefers to work remotely even after the pandemic. Their data shows that the demand for remote working days per week increased by 15% post pandemic. This preference is also supported by the findings showing that many employees are willing to accept a pay cut to maintain remote work as an option in their contract. Specifically, the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes

(SWAA, 2024) the willingness to take an average pay cut of 7% for the option to work from home two to three days per week (Barrero *et al*, 2021).

Figure 1. Why Working from Home Will Stick.



Source: Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., and Davis, S.J. (2021).

1.1.3. Impact on Job Satisfaction and Productivity

The same study outlined the notable positive impacts on job satisfaction and productivity of employees with remote working options. Employees have shared better-than-expected experiences working from home, with many showing increased productivity and a better work-life balance (Barrero *et al*, 2021). This is crucial as job satisfaction is closely tied to turnover intentions, and the enforced return to office policies would undermine these positive impacts.

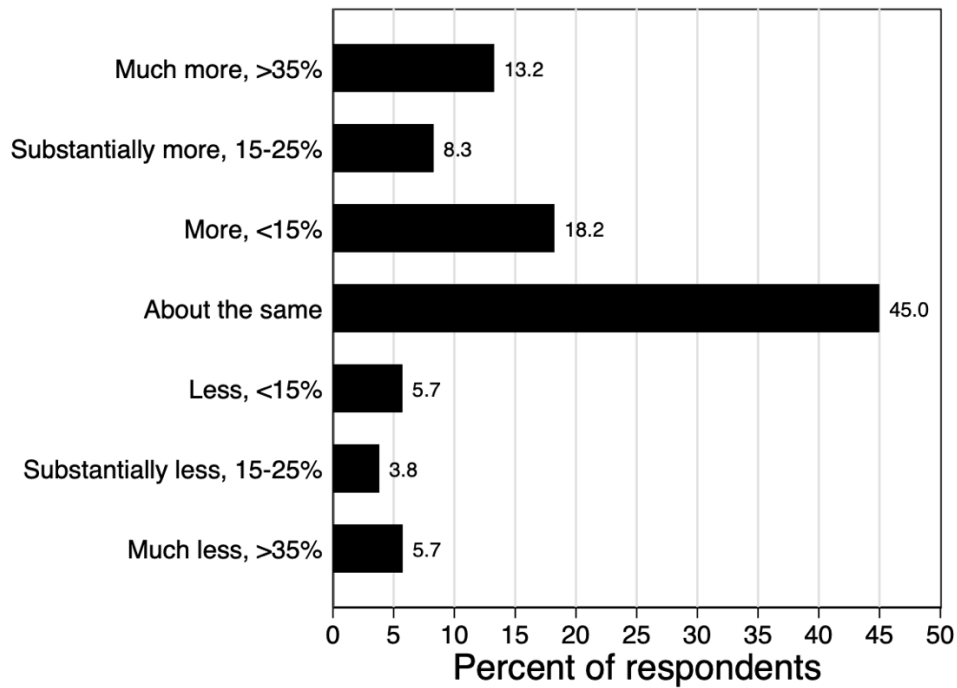


Figure 2: Efficiency of WFH vs. working on business premises. Source (Barrero *et al*, 2021).

Due to the fact that employees demonstrated the same or higher levels of productivity while working remotely, the sudden reinforcement of return to the office policies may lead to the loss of trust from employees (Bloom *et al.*, 2023).

1.2. Gaps in Literature

1.2.1. Tech industry specific research

Despite the availability of research around flexible working arrangement, there is a lack of literature available around the effects of the mandatory office attendance in the tech sector in Ireland. This lack of literature is around understanding of experiences specific to tech employees, as this sector possesses unique characteristics and employee expectations (Umer, 2024; Allen *et al.*, 2021). The majority of available research is focusing on US based companies and provides general overview of trends, rather than focusing on employee experiences and challenges associated with employee's country, industry and even culture. There is also limited analysis that compared differences between cultural and regulatory contexts regarding mandatory office attendance (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

1.2.2. Culture specific research

Furthermore, currently available studies do not focus specific cultural groups, gender or age groups, regardless the fact that this can majorly impact employee's perception towards RTO. These studies do not provide longitudinal overview of the impacts of the mandatory policies on job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Most of the currently available studies looks into short term impacts (Wang *et al.*, 2021). The longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of the potential impacts keeping in mind perceptions and challenges faced by each one of those groups. The gaps and shortcomings of the available literature are further discussed in Chapter 2.

1.3. Research justification and rationale

Tech industry is classified as one of the most competitive and therefore there's a need to retain highly skilled talent (Francis, 2023). For such industry it is crucial to understand if the RTO policies would affect the ability to retain skilled workforce to remain competitive on the market. Additionally, to bridge the gap in research it is crucial to investigate how specific company policies and managerial practices can affect employee satisfaction, productivity, motivation and overall intentions to leave the company. As studies outlined, flexible work arrangements lead to increased job satisfaction, it is important to provide more clarity around the effects of strict RTO policy reinforcement. This would provide companies with a toolkit to achieve highly motivated and productive workforce (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2021).

This study aims to additionally bridge the gap by looking into Ireland specific tech sector, which provides an outlook into unique challenges and employee perspectives. The overview of methods used for this research is provided in section 1.6. and further in Chapter 3.

1.4. Overall aim of the study

Based on the literature gaps identified, this study aims to bridge these gaps by providing perceptions of Irish tech sector employees on strict RTO policies and the potential challenges they face leading to further intentions to leave their employer. The study aims to investigate the effect of specific managerial practices associated with strict RTO policies and further

understand the challenges experienced by the employees based in Irish tech sector. This aim will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

1.5. Research Questions

To achieve the overall aim, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key hygiene factors (such as company policies, managerial practices, and work conditions) that affect tech industry employees in Ireland due to mandatory office attendance requirements?
2. What motivators impact job satisfaction for tech sector employees required to return to the office?
3. How do hygiene factors and motivators interplay to influence job satisfaction and turnover intentions among tech sector employees in Ireland?

1.6. Research Methods for the present Study

As mentioned previously, there is a lack of research in relation to country specific, and sector specific perceptions. Furthermore, the available research focuses on the overall picture of pros and cons about return to the office, however this study aims to understand how these perceptions affect employee decisions around staying or leaving their workplace. The research questions listed in section 1.5 seek to understand key factors, their impact and relationship between the perceptions affect the decisions of the employees. To get the depth of perceptions and fully understand the experiences of employees, this study adopts a qualitative research methodology (Brand, 2009). It uses semi-structured interviews to gather data around the insights from tech sector employees in Ireland. The interpretivist approach guides the research, emphasising the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants. An inductive approach is then used to analyse the data thematically, allowing for the new themes and understandings to emerge based on the primary data collected.

1.6.1. Primary research sample group

A number of factors were considered in selecting the sample for this study in order to obtain the most relevant information for the study, according to Robinson (2014).

According to secondary data, the Irish tech industry is highly dynamic, with employees experiencing significant changes in their work environments as a result of the switch from

remote work to mandatory office attendance (Cunningham *et al.*, 2020). To understand employees' perceptions and experiences within this sector, this study focuses on them.

The sample was selected through purposive sampling to include tech sector employees who have experienced both remote work and mandatory office attendance. This method is chosen for its ability to get rich, detailed information relevant to the research objectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The sample consists of ten employees from various tech companies in Ireland, ensuring a diverse representation of roles and experiences within the industry. According to Hogan *et al.*, (2009) qualitative research aims to gain deep insights into specific contexts. The purposeful sampling was chosen to allow for this deep insight as the participants were chosen based on their ability to provide insight into the research objectives. Professional networks and online platforms were used to recruit participants, focusing on those who worked in the tech industry during transition periods.

1.6.2. Scope of the study

Based on the 10 interviews conducted with Irish tech sector employees, the researcher aimed at getting an understanding of the perceptions around the strict return to the office policies implemented by the tech organisations. The researcher focused on understanding how these perceptions are affected by both, policies and managerial practices and furthermore how it affected employees' decision to leave or stay in the organisation in order to satisfy the research questions listed in 1.5. Due to the small sample size the researcher was able to conduct the analysis of the primary data to result in meaningful discussion which is presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

1.7. Overview and Structure

The research project is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction: This section sets the background for research with outlined gaps in the literature. It provides the overall aim of the study with underlining research questions. Furthermore it touches on research methods and provides an overview of the research structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This section of the study reviews existing literature on remote work, mandatory office attendance, and employee motivation theories.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology: The methodology chapter details the research design, outlines chosen philosophical approach and data collection methods. This section outlines instruments used during this study and shared details of the sampling process.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion: This chapter presents the findings from the primary research, the data is presented based on the thematic analysis relevant to the research objectives from Chapter 3. Furthermore, this chapter provides a discussion section, where the researcher shares the reflection and provides a theoretical understanding of the research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations: The final chapter provides an overview and reflects on the conducted research. This chapter outlines whether or not the objectives from Chapter 3 were met. Furthermore, this chapter provides recommendations for future research in the area of remote work.

By following this structure, the study is able to provide a meaningful and insightful analysis of the impact of mandatory office attendance on tech sector employees in Ireland.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction to the Literature review

2.1.1. Overview of the topic

The tech industry has been evolving rapidly which created a necessity for continuous adaptation of the workforce practices. The recent and significant development was the transitioning from traditional office based work environment to flexible or remote working arrangements. This shift was in particularly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Strict lockdown forced many companies to quickly adopt remote working models. As the world exited the pandemic and social life normalised, some technological companies in Ireland are reintroducing mandatory office attendance. This dissertation explores the perceptions and challenges of mandatory return to the office faced by the employees in the tech sector in Ireland.

2.1.2. Importance of understanding employee perception and challenges

It is crucial to dive deeper and understand employee perceptions and challenges that they face around mandatory return to the office. First, organisational productivity and success are directly affected by employee satisfaction and motivation. Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, categorises workplace factors into hygiene factors (for example, company policies or work conditions) and motivators (for example, opportunities for growth within the company or recognition). This theory provides a framework which can be used to for analysing these issues as reintroduction of mandatory office attendance could impact overall employee satisfaction and turnover (Herzberg *et al*, 1959).

Second, Irish tech sector is a competitive job market. It demands highly skilled workers therefore organisations are required to carefully consider policies that would ensure company's ability to retain good talent. If mandatory return to the office has negative perceptions, it would affect turnover rates and therefore, create higher recruitment costs and subsequently the loss of competitive edge.

Thirdly, contemporary work environments puts significant focus on work-life balance. Mandatory office attendance can potentially disrupt this balance and affect employee's well-

being and job satisfaction rates (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Once the organisation understands these dynamics, it can help create such policies that would support both: the well-being of employees and organisational goals.

2.2. Background

2.2.1. Tech Sector in Ireland: A Brief Overview

Irish technology has grown significantly over the past two decades, becoming a significant player in the global technology industry. The Irish economy is hugely influenced by major tech companies such as Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft, whose European headquarters are in the country. Recent reports indicate that over 250,000 people work in the tech sector of Ireland's economy (Central Statistics Office, 2023) and that it is a key driver of the country's GDP.

Ireland's economic growth can be attributed to its competitive corporate tax rates, highly skilled workforce, and robust innovation and technology infrastructure (Cunningham *et al.*, 2020). Tech companies have access to a steady stream of graduates from the country's education institutions in STEM fields.

2.2.2. Changes in the tech sector's work environment

Due to technological advances and changing societal expectations, the workplace in the tech sector has evolved significantly. The traditional office model has been a significant contributor to productivity and collaboration for tech companies in the past. Cloud computing and digital communication tools, however, facilitated a shift towards more flexible working patterns well before COVID-19 (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2023).

As a result of the pandemic, companies all over the world adopted remote work models rapidly. As a result of lockdowns and social distancing measures in Ireland, tech companies quickly adapted their operations by leveraging their digital infrastructure. Over the past few years, remote work has proven to be more effective than traditional office-based work, which has caused many employees to prefer flexible working arrangements.

Future of work has been a subject of intense debate since the pandemic. In order to foster collaboration and innovation, some companies advocate mandatory office attendance, while

others use hybrid models that combine remote and office work. Increasing employee interest in work-life balance and autonomy is driving this shift toward flexibility in work environments (Santana, 2023; Sostero *et al.*, 2022).

2.2.3. Ireland's Office Attendance Policy: A Historical Perspective

As a result of economic, social, and technological changes, office attendance policies in Ireland have evolved. There has historically been a rigid attendance policy, with fixed work hours and mandatory attendance at work. As technology enabled more flexible working arrangements in the 20th and 21st centuries, this changed.

Despite its slow growth, telecommuting gained traction in the 2000s as companies began recognising the benefits of letting employees work from home. Remote work, however, was not widely adopted until the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a sudden and comprehensive shift (Bassey *et al.*, 2023). Many companies have permanently re-evaluated their office attendance policies as a result of the success of this transition.

Some companies have reinstated mandatory office attendance after the pandemic, arguing that physical presence is vital to certain types of work and company culture. In contrast, hybrid models have been adopted by some organisations, reflecting a balance between organisational needs and employee preferences (Smite *et al.*, 2023).

There is a wide variety of policies available in the current workplace, with some companies maintaining strict attendance requirements and others offering significant flexibility. The differences reflect ongoing debates regarding how remote work should be balanced, and how it affects productivity, employee satisfaction, and organisational culture (Dey and Mishra, 2024).

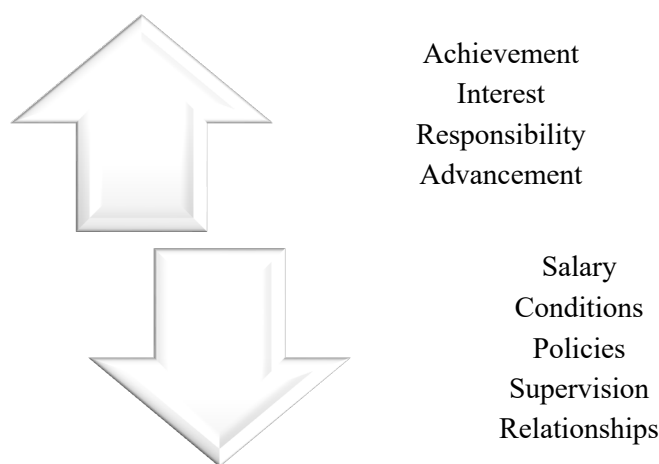
2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. An overview of workplace attendance and employee satisfaction theories

A comprehensive review of existing theories related to workplace attendance and employee satisfaction is necessary to understand the perceptions and challenges of mandatory office attendance among Irish tech sector employees. In this section, key psychological and sociological theories will be discussed, providing insights into employee behaviour and attitudes toward mandatory attendance requirements.

Herzberg's (1968) Two-Factor Theory of Motivation is a foundational theory in this area. It posits that workplace factors fall into two categories: hygiene factors and motivators. A hygiene factor involves elements such as company policies, management practices, work conditions, and salary security. Employees may not be motivated by these factors, but if they are insufficient, they might cause dissatisfaction. In contrast, motivational factors, including recognition, the nature of work, responsibility, and growth opportunities, directly affect job satisfaction. According to this theory, hygiene factors play a vital role in preventing employee dissatisfaction, while motivators play an important role in increasing productivity and employee satisfaction.

Figure 1: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory Framework



Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) is another relevant theory for understanding how job demands and resources are balanced in different working environments. Physiological and psychological costs are associated with certain job demands according to the JD-R Model. Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require sustained effort. On the other hand, job resources are those aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands, or encourage personal growth. To maintain employee performance and well-being, it is important to balance demands and resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Employee outcomes are examined using the model in the context of mandatory office attendance (e.g., commuting stress) and available resources (e.g., supportive management).

2.3.2. Employee Attitudes and Behaviour when It Comes to Mandatory Attendance: Psychological and Sociological Theories

To understand employee attitudes toward mandatory office attendance, Ajzen (1991)'s Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is another relevant psychological framework. A person's behaviour is determined by their behavioural intentions, which are a function of three factors: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived control over it. An employee's attitude (e.g., perceived benefits or drawbacks of office work) can determine whether they will comply with or resist mandatory office attendance policies. Social pressures (e.g., expectations from colleagues and supervisors), and their perception of control over the situation (e.g., flexible working options) can also influence their decision.

By emphasising the reciprocal nature of the employee-employer relationship, Blau (1964) developed the Social Exchange Theory (SET). Employees' perceptions of their employer's relationship are formed as a result of their exchanges with them, according to SET. Feelings of obligation, loyalty, and an increased willingness to reciprocate with positive behaviours (e.g., fair policies, recognition) can result from positive exchanges (e.g., fair policies, recognition). On the other hand, negative exchanges (e.g., mandatory attendance policies perceived as unfair) can result in dissatisfaction and withdrawal behaviours as a result of negativity.

2.3.3. Introduction to Organisational Culture Models of Mandatory Attendance

It is possible to contextualise mandatory office attendance within an organisation's larger culture using several models and frameworks. Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) developed the Competing Values Framework (CVF), which categorises organisational culture into four types: Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy. Each type emphasises different values and approaches to work. Compared to a Hierarchy culture, which emphasises control and formal procedures, a Clan culture, which emphasises collaboration and employee well-being, may be more flexible with attendance policies. In order to understand how mandatory attendance policies are implemented and perceived by employees, it is helpful to understand the predominant cultural type within an organisation.

It is also useful to understand employee expectations and obligations through Rousseau's (1995) Psychological Contract Theory (PCT). Psychological contracts refer to the unwritten

set of expectations between employee and employer. It is possible for mandatory attendance policies to negatively impact the psychological contract if employees feel their expectations of flexibility and autonomy have not been met, potentially leading to perceived breaches. As a result, their engagement with the organisation can be affected, as well as their commitment.

2.4. Mandatory office attendance and employee perceptions

2.4.1. How mandatory office attendance affects employee morale and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction and morale can be significantly influenced by employee perceptions of mandatory office attendance. Job satisfaction is a complex construct influenced by a variety of factors, such as the work environment, autonomy, and work-life balance. Depending on individual preferences and organisational context, mandatory office attendance can have mixed effects on job satisfaction.

Researchers have reported that mandatory office attendance can negatively impact remote workers, negatively impacting their job satisfaction and morale, according to Nasir (2023). This is especially true for employees who have experienced the benefits of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased flexibility, reduced commuting time, and better work-life balance. Mandatory attendance, however, can enhance employee job satisfaction for those who value face-to-face interactions and the collaborative environment of an office (Gunter, 2022).

This dynamics can be understood through Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Hygiene factors, such as attendance policies, can cause dissatisfaction if they are perceived as rigid or unfair. Despite mandatory attendance, motivators like recognition and opportunities for growth can help mitigate some negative perceptions if employees feel valued and engaged.

2.4.2. Mandatory office attendance and work-life balance perceptions

A mandatory office attendance policy can also negatively affect work-life balance. Balance between work and personal life is becoming increasingly important for employees, especially in the tech sector, where long hours and high workloads are common.

Many employees have appreciated the flexibility remote work offers during the pandemic, which has helped them manage their personal responsibilities and reduce stress (Allen *et al.*, 2021). This balance can be disrupted by mandatory office attendance, increasing stress and

burnout. According to Wang *et al.* (2021), employees who were required to return to the office full-time reported higher levels of work-life conflict and a lower sense of well-being than those who worked remotely or in hybrid models.

Some employees, however, report that returning to the office allows them to differentiate work and home life, which improves work-life balance (Bloom *et al.*, 2015). When implementing attendance policies, it is important to understand individual preferences and circumstances.

2.4.3. Mandatory office attendance: factors influencing perceptions

Mandatory office attendance is influenced by a number of factors, including:

1. **Personal Preferences and Work Styles:** Personal preferences in terms of work style play a significant role. Despite the structured environment and social interactions of office work, some employees prefer the autonomy and flexibility of remote work.
2. **Commuting Time and Location:** Long commute times can negatively impact employee perceptions of work. Employees who commute longer distances tend to report lower job satisfaction and higher stress levels, creating a less attractive work environment (Farré *et al.*, 2023).
3. **Culture:** Employee perceptions are influenced by the company's culture, which includes its commitment to flexibility and employee well-being. Mandatory attendance policies tend to be perceived more positively by companies with a supportive culture that emphasises employee autonomy (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021).
4. **Roles and Responsibilities:** The nature of the job itself can influence the perception of mandatory office attendance. The presence of an office is more likely in roles requiring frequent collaboration, access to specialised equipment, or direct supervision (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

2.5. Mandatory office attendance challenges

2.5.1. Employees' Practical Challenges

In the tech sector, where remote work is becoming increasingly prevalent, mandatory office attendance can pose several practical challenges to employees. The commute is one of the primary practical challenges. Employees' daily routines can be significantly impacted by

commute time, leading to longer workdays and reduced personal time. Long commutes have been associated with higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction (Farré *et al*, 2023). When mandatory office attendance is reinstated, it will require employees to readjust their schedules, which will disrupt their work-life balance.

In addition, there are logistical issues related to workspace and resources. If employees have adapted their home environments so that they can work efficiently, transitioning back to the office can be challenging as they may encounter a variety of distractions and disruptions. Moreover, the office environment may not be as flexible in accommodating personal productivity tools and setups that employees have customised at home (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007).

2.5.2. Psychological Challenges (Stress, Burnout, etc.)

In addition to increasing stress and burnout among employees, mandatory office attendance can have a significant psychological impact. It can be mentally exhausting to transition from remote work to mandatory office attendance, especially for those who are used to working at home with autonomy and comfort. Compared to employees working remotely or in a hybrid model, employees who were forced to return to the office experienced higher levels of anxiety and stress (Wang *et al*, 2021).

It is not uncommon for employees' mental wellbeing to be disrupted by abrupt changes in work settings, exposure to new social dynamics, and adhering to a strict schedule. Employees may also feel as if they are losing control of their work environment and time, which can exacerbate burnout (Allen *et al.*, 2015).

2.5.3. Organisational Challenges (Productivity, Employee Turnover, etc.)

Employee retention and productivity can be impacted by mandatory office attendance policies from an organisational perspective. In-office work is often argued to promote collaboration and innovation, but evidence suggests that mandatory attendance does not boost productivity. Individual productivity can suffer due to commuting fatigue and increased office distractions, according to Bloom *et al.* (2015).

One of the most significant issues is employee turnover. Mandatory office attendance can discourage employees from working remotely or valuing flexibility. Particularly relevant is

this in the tech sector, where skilled professionals have numerous opportunities and can easily move to companies that offer more flexible working conditions. According to Nasir (2023), rigid attendance policies can cause employees to seek employers who offer a better work-life balance and more flexibility.

The maintenance of a cohesive corporate culture in a hybrid or mandatory workplace environment is also a challenge for organisations. It requires careful management to ensure inclusion and prevent division among employees who prefer remote work and those who prefer in-office work (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

2.5.4. Benefits of mandatory office attendance

Despite its challenges, mandatory office attendance has many advantages that can benefit employers and employees alike. In-person interactions can facilitate more effective teamwork, spontaneous idea generation, and faster decision-making processes. Employers often cite improved collaboration and communication as key benefits. Taking part in face-to-face interactions at the workplace can lead to enhanced cohesion and a stronger sense of community, according to a study by Yang *et al.* (2023).

In addition, physical presence in the office can strengthen organisational culture. Being physically present can help to focus on company values and norms more effectively. Having an opportunity to interact in person with colleagues is particularly important for new employees, who may find it easier to integrate into the company's social and professional fabric (Sostero *et al.*, 2022).

Mandatory office attendance can facilitate the separation of professional and personal lives for some employees, resulting in improved productivity and focus from their perspective. In contrast to a home environment, a dedicated office space might allow some individuals to concentrate better and avoid distractions (Bloom *et al.*, 2015). For roles requiring frequent interaction with multiple departments as well as frequent collaboration and interaction, an office setting offers immediate accessibility to resources and support (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2016).

2.5.5. Productivity in Mandatory Attendance Settings and Flexible Environments

In the literature, there are mixed findings regarding the impact of mandatory office attendance on productivity. In an office setting, certain tasks that require direct collaboration and immediate feedback may increase productivity. According to Biron and van Veldhoven (2016), spontaneous interactions and face-to-face communication can improve efficiency and effectiveness when it comes to complex, interdependent tasks.

For tasks that require focus and little interruptions, remote or hybrid work models can provide greater productivity. Choudhury *et al.* (2021) found that remote work can reduce commute time, allowing employees to devote more time to their work and personal interests, thereby enhancing productivity as a whole. Moreover, remote work can enable a more tailored work environment that suits individual preferences and optimises performance.

It is often up to the nature of the work and the individual characteristics of the employees to strike a balance between these models. To maximise the benefits of both mandatory office attendance and flexible work arrangements (Felstead and Reuschke, 2020), organisations may have to adopt a hybrid approach.

2.5.6. Examples of Tech Companies Advocating Mandatory Attendance

In recent years, several tech companies have been making headlines with their stance on mandatory office attendance, offering valuable insight into how such policies are perceived. Google, for example, uses a hybrid work model that balances remote work with in-person collaboration to balance the advantages of remote work. A cohesive company culture can be fostered and maintained through office interactions, according to Google CEO Sundar Pichai (Kelly, 2022).

The hybrid model also has been implemented by Apple, which requires employees to return to the office several days a week as another example. Although remote working has proven effective, Tim Cook (Gurman, 2022) emphasised that serendipitous interactions and collaborative energy in the office environment are essential for creative processes and complex problem-solving.

Although Microsoft offers a flexible approach, they are still committed to enhancing team dynamics and project outcomes through in-office work. The CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella,

indicated that hybrid models are capable of supporting both employee well-being and productivity while maintaining the benefits of in-person collaboration (Microsoft Hybrid Work Model, 2022).

According to these case studies, although flexible work arrangements are clear benefits, the tech industry also recognises the irreplaceable advantages of mandatory office attendance for certain aspects of the work.

2.6. Impact of Remote Work and Flexibility Trends

2.6.1. The effects of recent trends in remote work on perceptions of mandatory office attendance

Employee perceptions of mandatory office attendance have been significantly altered by the recent trend towards remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The benefits of remote work have been extensively examined, including improved work-life balance, flexibility, and reduced commutes. Employee expectations and attitudes toward workplace policies have been shaped by these benefits.

According to Wang *et al.* (2021), remote work has increased employee satisfaction and productivity, primarily because of its flexibility. In addition to being able to manage both professional and personal responsibilities more effectively, employees have reported feeling more in control of their schedules. Consequently, people prefer flexible work arrangements to mandatory office attendance (Nasir, 2023).

Additionally, remote work has been linked to improved mental health and reduced stress. As a result of working remotely, Allen *et al.* (2021) found that employees were less stressed by commutes and office politics, contributing to an overall better quality of life. A return to mandatory office attendance has the potential negative impact of a positive experience with remote work.

2.6.2. Work Arrangement Flexibility and Employee Satisfaction

There has been an increase in employee expectations and satisfaction levels as flexible work arrangements have become increasingly common. Employees now expect greater control over their work schedules and the ability to choose where they work. Felstead and Reuschke (2020) point out that remote capabilities are particularly common in the technology sector.

A study by Choudhury *et al.* (2021) demonstrates that workers who have experienced flexible working arrangements are more likely to value and demand them in the future. When companies do not offer flexibility, employees are more likely to seek out employers who provide a better work-life balance and remote work options, resulting in a higher turnover rate. As a result of this shift in expectations, traditional office attendance policies need to be re-evaluated if we are to attract and retain top talent.

As well as enhancing employee satisfaction, flexible work arrangements can also benefit organisations. By allowing employees to customise their work environments and schedules to meet their individual needs, organisations can ensure that their employees are motivated and engaged. Those companies that adopt hybrid models, combining in-office and remote work, tend to have higher employee satisfaction rates and lower turnover rates, according to Caligiuri and De Cieri (2021).

2.6.3. An examination of employee attitudes after the pandemic

A significant finding of multiple studies is the enduring preference for flexible and remote work options. Surveys and studies conducted post-pandemic provide a wealth of data on employee attitudes toward work arrangements. In the survey conducted by Bloom *et al.* (2023), a majority of tech sector employees preferred hybrid work models to mandatory office attendance for improved work-life balance and reduced stress.

Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2021) found that employees who had experienced remote work during the pandemic were less likely to support a full return to mandatory office attendance. It was especially common for younger employees and those who had caregiving responsibilities to oppose remote work, because of its flexibility.

Employee expectations have shifted dramatically as a result of the pandemic, and organisations need to adjust their workplace policies so that they align with the new norms. Employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention tend to be higher in companies that embrace flexible work models.

2.7. Comparative Analysis

2.7.1. How does Ireland's tech sector compare with other regions?

Among the major tech hubs in the world, Ireland has unique characteristics that distinguish it from others. There is a high level of skilled workforce, a favourable tax regime, and a strategic location within the EU that has attracted multinational tech companies to Ireland (Cunningham *et al.*, 2020).

The Silicon Valley, on the other hand, is known for its high concentration of start-ups, venture capital, innovation, and risk-taking culture. It has traditionally been a culture of long working hours and in-office presence in Silicon Valley, but this has been shifting towards more flexible working arrangements since the pandemic (Chandler, 1995).

Berlin and Amsterdam, two European tech hubs, are known for their strong emphasis on work-life balance and employee wellbeing. As a result of regulatory support and cultural preferences for flexibility, these regions have also adopted more progressive remote work policies (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

2.7.2. Mandatory attendance policies: Cultural, Economic, and Regulatory Differences

Different regions have different mandatory attendance policies based on a variety of factors, including cultural, economic, and regulatory differences. Tech industry growth in Ireland has led to diverse work practices, with many companies adopting flexible policies to attract global talent (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). In spite of this, the implementation of these policies varies significantly by company origin and management culture.

Due to the competitive nature of the tech industry and high cost of living in Silicon Valley, companies have offered more flexible work arrangements to attract and retain talent. As a result of the cultural shift to value employee wellbeing and work-life balance (Choudhury *et al.*, 2021), these changes have also been influenced.

While companies adopt a more flexible work policy as a result of strong regulatory frameworks supporting employee rights and work-life balance, EU countries have strong regulatory frameworks that support employee rights and work-life balance. According to the EU Working Time Directive (Kossek *et al.*, 2023), working hours are limited, rest periods are mandated, and remote and flexible work options are encouraged.

As a result of these regional differences, workplace policies must be shaped within context. To meet employee expectations and comply with local regulations, companies operating in multiple regions must take cultural, economic, and regulatory factors into account when developing attendance policies.

2.8. Existing Literature gaps and shortcomings

2.8.1. Existing Literature Gaps

Even though remote work and flexible working arrangements have been extensively researched, there are still noteworthy gaps in the literature, especially regarding mandatory office attendance in the tech sector in Ireland. There is a lack of research addressing the nuanced experiences of tech employees, a sector with unique characteristics and demands (Umer, 2024; Allen *et al.*, 2021). Much existing research focuses on broad trends and general outcomes of remote work, but there are few studies addressing these experiences.

It is also rare to find longitudinal studies that examine how mandatory office attendance policies affect employee well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity over the long-term. Currently, most studies examine short-term impacts, leaving a gap in understanding how these policies affect employees for an extended period of time (Wang *et al.*, 2021). The effect of sustained office attendance on career development, job satisfaction, and mental health could be explored through longitudinal data.

It is also important to analyse mandatory office attendance policies from various regions and cultures in comparison. Although some studies have compared remote work practices globally, there is limited research specifically comparing mandatory office attendance policies across cultures and regulatory environments (Kossek *et al.*, 2023). For multinational tech companies operating in diverse contexts, understanding these differences could provide valuable insights.

It is also underexplored whether demographic factors like age, gender, and family responsibilities affect mandatory office attendance. According to Wang *et al.* (2021), employees perceive and are affected by attendance policies in significant ways based on these factors. In order to develop policies that are inclusive and equitable, more focused studies on how different demographic groups perceive mandatory office attendance could be conducted.

2.8.2. Potential Areas for Future Research

In order to provide a more complete understanding of mandatory office attendance, future research should address the following gaps:

Industry-Specific Studies: Specifically, studies into how mandatory office attendance policies affect the satisfaction, productivity, and retention of tech workers. Qualitative studies capturing the lived experiences of tech workers in Ireland might fit into this category.

Longitudinal Studies: Studies conducted over a long period of time to determine the effects of mandatory office attendance. Employee attitudes and career progression, as well as organisational loyalty, could be explored in these studies.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Analysing the implementation and perception of mandatory office attendance policies across cultural and regulatory contexts. By tailoring policies to local contexts, multinational companies could gain a competitive advantage.

Intersectional Analysis: Considering age, gender, caregiving responsibilities, and socioeconomic status in studies of mandatory office attendance. More inclusive workplace policies could be developed as a result of this research.

Policy Impact Studies: Assessments of different mandatory attendance policies aimed at balancing organisational goals with employee well-being. Such case studies could include examples from companies that have implemented such policies successfully.

2.9. Conclusion

2.9.1. Key Findings from the Literature Review

According to the literature review, mandatory office attendance policies in Ireland are complex and multifaceted. Key findings include:

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Morale: Employees who prefer remote work and value flexibility may be negatively impacted by mandatory office attendance (Nasir, 2023; Allen *et al.*, 2021).

Challenges and Benefits: Although mandatory attendance can strengthen organisational culture and enhance collaboration, it can also present practical and psychological challenges, including increased stress and disruptions to work-life balance (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2016; Bloom *et al.*, 2022).

Shift in Employee Expectations: Remote work after the pandemic has led to new employee expectations on flexibility, affecting their satisfaction and retention (Choudhury *et al.*, 2021; Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021).

Regional and Cultural Differences: Office attendance policies are implemented and perceived differently across regions, depending on cultural and economic factors (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

2.9.2. Relevance of the Findings to the dissertation topic:

A literature review of mandatory office attendance among Irish employees in the technology sector provides valuable insights into the perceptions and challenges of mandatory office attendance. These findings provide a framework for exploring the effects of such policies on job satisfaction, productivity, and employee retention within a sector that places a high value on flexibility and innovation.

Several critical research questions and hypotheses are posed as a result of the literature review:

Research Question: What are the perceptions and challenges of mandatory office attendance among tech sector employees in Ireland?

Hypothesis: Employees who have experience working remotely suffer from low job satisfaction and morale as a result of mandatory office attendance.

Research Question: How do mandatory office attendance policies affect job satisfaction and morale among tech sector employees in Ireland?

Hypothesis: A mandatory office attendance policy is likely to decrease employee job satisfaction and morale in the Irish tech sector.

Research Question: What impact do regional and cultural differences have on policies requiring mandatory attendance at the office?

Hypothesis: Regional perceptions of mandatory office attendance policies vary significantly, dependent on local culture and regulations.

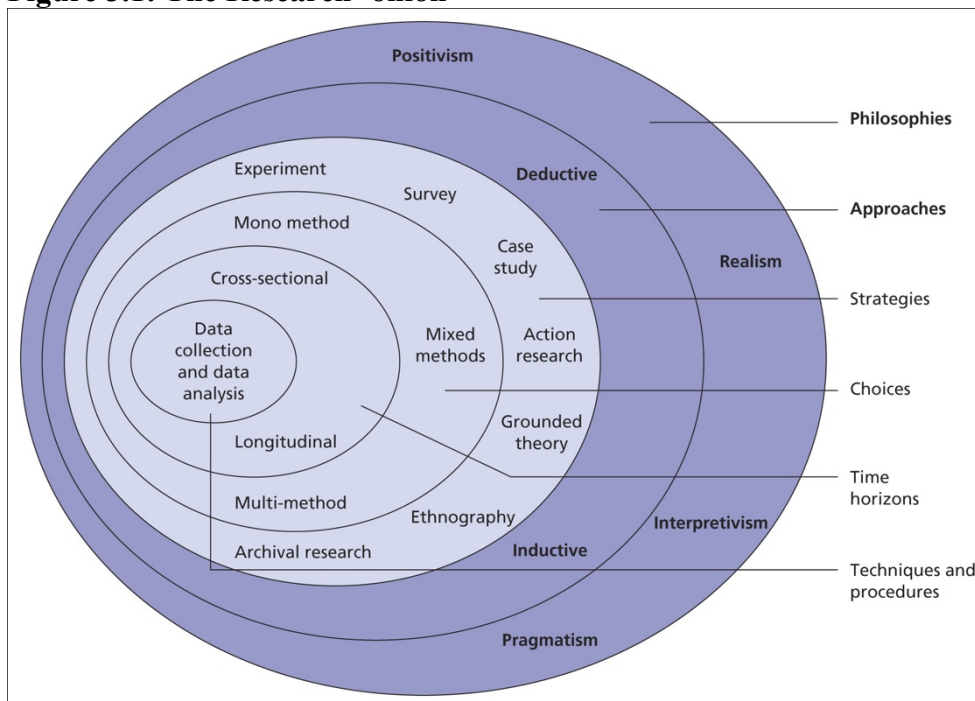
This dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing debate about work in the tech sector by addressing these questions and hypotheses and to inform attendance policies that are more effective and employee driven.

Chapter 3: Research Design, Process and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe in detail the primary research methods used in this study to explore perceptions and challenges of mandatory office attendance among Irish tech sector employees, based on the gaps in the literature identified in Chapters 1 and 2. In order to address the research questions presented in Chapter 1, the methods chosen align with the various methodological elements outlined by Saunders *et al* (2019) in the research onion framework (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: The Research ‘onion’



Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019 p. 108)

As part of this chapter, the research methods and instruments considered are discussed as well as a summary of the sample selection. Despite the possibility that alternative methods could be used to accomplish the study's research objectives, the chosen methods are critically analysed for their potential advantages and disadvantages. As a conclusion, the chapter discusses the limitations and ethical considerations of the study, as well as the methods of data analysis used.

3.2. Research Aims and Objectives

According to Fisher and Buglear (2010), the research methodology helps the researcher to guide the research by outlining the data collection techniques most relevant to the proposed

research topic and it therefore guides the overall research process. The aim of this study is to understand the perceptions on the mandatory office attendance among Irish tech sector employees and further identify the turnover intentions. Using the Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, this study examines employee satisfaction and turnover intentions in the context of hygiene factors and motivators. This objective has been met by setting the following research objectives (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Research Objectives

Research Objective 1	Identify key hygiene factors (company policies, manager practices etc) affecting tech industry employees in Ireland because of the mandatory office attendance requirements.
Research Objective 2	Understand motivators that affect job satisfaction for tech sector employees required to return to the office.
Research Objective 3	Learn about the relationship between hygiene factors and motivators in job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

3.3. Research Philosophy and Design

Saunders *et al.* (2019) define research as a structured effort to gather knowledge to enhance understanding of a specific subject. Blumberg *et al.* (2011) outlines that a well-defined methodological framework is crucial for successful research outcomes. It provides researchers with the tools and concepts to get the expertise required to address the research question.

Represented as an outer layer of the research onion (Figure 3.1) is the philosophy in the research process. This is further highlighted by Quinlan (2011) as an important part of the research process, noting that all research is influenced by an underlying philosophical framework that reflects the researcher's worldview. Collis and Hussey (2009) compare this philosophical framework to a research paradigm, which guides scientific inquiry. Quinlan (2011) further explains that a methodology's philosophical framework is shaped by the researcher's epistemological and ontological views.

Ontology, as explained by Saunders *et al.* (2019), concerns the nature of reality. Bryman (2016) identifies two main ontological perspectives: subjectivism and objectivism. Epistemology, on

the other hand, pertains to the nature of knowledge and includes two primary orientations: positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2016). These epistemological approaches will be examined in more detail.

Table 3.3: Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies.

Aspect	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Nature of Data	Numerical, statistical	Non-numerical, descriptive
Research Approach	Deductive (testing hypotheses)	Inductive (generating theories)
Data Collection	Surveys, experiments, structured observations	Interviews, focus groups, participant observations
Objective	To quantify data and generalise results	To understand meanings, experiences, and perceptions in depth

Source: Bryman, 2011, p. 75.

3.3.1. Interpretivist and Positivist Approaches

As defined by Bell *et al.* (2022), epistemology is the notion of what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a discipline. In sociological research, it is divided between positivism and interpretivism. A positivistic approach focuses more on generating accurate information from physical reality through scientific methods, aligning with objectivism, which argues that reality is not influenced by social actors (Bryman, 2016). In contrast, interpretivism views human information as having meaning (Saunders *et al.*, 2015), making it most suitable for the 3.2 research objectives.

In an interpretivist epistemology, meaning is created through social experiences that cannot be examined or quantified experimentally on the basis of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, all understandings of reality are social constructions. As outlined by Collis and Hussey (2011), subjectivist or interpretivist positions

assume that there is no one right answer to the questions being explored, as each individual perceives reality differently within multiple dimensions. The main objective of this research is to explore tech employees' perceptions regarding mandatory office attendance in Ireland, which is why interpretivism was chosen as the research philosophy. This study focuses on human perceptions of their roles as "social actors" rather than objects in order to better understand this topic (Saunders *et al.*, 2015).

3.3.2. Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research Strategies

As a result of the recent emphasis on remote work and mandatory office attendance, this research seeks to understand tech employees' perceptions and motivations. It is valuable to conduct exploratory studies in order to discover new phenomena, ask new research questions, and evaluate phenomena from a different perspective (Robson, 2002).

According to Maylor *et al.* (2017), a research approach must match the research question. It has been claimed (Bell *et al.*, 2022) that quantitative methods are more time-efficient than qualitative ones, as well as removing bias from the research process. Research that aims to understand why phenomena occur can, however, benefit from qualitative approaches. There is little research on how the tech industry responds to mandatory office attendance, indicating the potential effectiveness of qualitative methods.

According to Boodhoo and Purmessenger (2009), a qualitative approach is necessary to gather rich data about the perceptions and experiences of tech employees in Ireland. Kahlke (2014) explains that qualitative researchers strive to understand how people interpret experiences and the meaning they associate with these experiences, making qualitative research a good fit for the proposed research.

3.3.3. Inductive Versus Deductive Research

According to the research onion, there are two approaches to the theory deployment that are identified: inductive and deductive approaches to theory development. The inductive approach is associated with qualitative method, which is used in this study (Lin, 1998). The inductive

method derives conclusions thematically, it allows for the deeper understanding of the research topics that have not been extensively studied yet. This is due to this method not relying on pre-existing theoretical framework availability. Therefore it is an ideal method for investigating to be used in this study as the researcher is looking into an understudied research topic without a detailed theoretical framework already in place (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, an inductive approach is appropriate for this as the researcher seeks to understand the perceptions of the tech employees' rather than testing a hypothesis.

To draw contrast, deductive research allows researchers to prove and disprove a theory. This research is commonly associated with quantitative methods as it requires gathering of quite a large sample of data to be able to make generalisable conclusions around hypothesis (Lin, 1998; Bell *et al.*, 2023). The researcher considered this method, however as qualitative approach was deemed more suitable to allow for emerging themes to show and allow for perceptions of the employees to show. The inductive method is more suitable to achieve this.

3.4. Data Collection Method: Semi-structured Interviews

It is common for interpretivist methodologies to be accompanied by qualitative research strategies (Hiller, 2010). In Quinlan (2011), qualitative data include thoughts, feelings, and understanding, which are not numerical data. In qualitative studies, interviews are often used to collect rich data from a subjective perspective (Lin, 1998; Bryman, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2015). Interviewing has a variety of benefits. Compared to other data collection methods, qualitative interviews may provide more authentic accounts of participants' experiences, reducing the likelihood of social desirability bias (Hiller, 2010).

Qualitative interviews, on the other hand, can be classified into two categories: semi structured and unstructured (Bell *et al.*, 2022), while quantitative interviews take a mainly structured approach. A semi structured interview allows the researcher and the participant to cover a broad range of questions and themes, which can be expanded as the interview progresses. As a result, data collection across participants is consistent and flexible, allowing for the development of a data set that can be compared analytically (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). The conclusions and findings from this primary data collection and analysis will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.1. Enabling the Semi-structured Interviews

As part of the interviews, the interviewer used a pre-designed list of open-ended questions to allow the interviewee to deviate from the list to discuss unanticipated topics. By doing so, the interviewee is able to respond based on their own experiences and perceptions (Fisher, 2007), resulting in a safe and comfortable environment where rich and detailed data can be collected. Using this method of in-depth interview, Kvale (1996) explores perspectives determined by the informant or the 'emic'.

A list of interview topics was included in Appendix 2, ensuring relevant points were discussed throughout the interviews. Three sections of the interview were conducted: past involvement and perceptions of office attendance, present involvement and opinions about mandatory office attendance, and future considerations and improvements to mandatory office attendance policies. Based on the framework of a qualitative study by Hiller (2010), this design follows the same approach.

Prior to conducting the interviews, a pilot study was completed. This included a small group and allowed to ensure the questions asked were valid and could be used during the actual study. This also allowed the researcher to understand how long on average each interview section would take, prior to approaching the interview candidates for the study.

In order to ensure accurate and genuine responses, ethical considerations, such as anonymity, were addressed. Participants were provided with the interview topic guide and the study's rationale. Face-to-face interviews provide a better opportunity for the interviewer to probe for additional information than quantitative interviews, which provide more insights. The interview lasted about 60 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded for subsequent analysis. Note-taking was not allowed during the interview to maintain a conversational and natural flow.

3.4.2. Sample Selection Technique and Justification

In order to understand the experience of the employees fully, the participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling does not choose the participants based on the random basis, rather it looks for them in a strategic way (Bell *et al.*, 2023). For this study this was done to ensure the participants are relevant to the research questions. The researcher chose relevant characteristics for the participants to have in common, which were: the participant is a

tech sector employee, has experienced both remote work and mandatory office attendance. The researcher however also ensured that there is plenty of variety in the sample used such as gender, age, office attendance requirement.

A convenience type of sampling was also considered by the researcher, sample would have been based on simply the participants that were available by chance (Brand, 2009; Bell *et al.*, 2023). This type of sampling however would not ensure the participants had both perspectives of working remotely and in the office, which is crucial for this research. Furthermore, the theoretical sampling was considered, where the collection of data would generate theories and collect more data in order to support the emerging theories further (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However this method of sampling is time consuming as it is iterative, meaning it entails multiple stages to gather enough data for the theories to evolve (Bell *et al.*, 2023).

To purposefully seek the participants to fit this criteria, the researcher created an “Expression of interest” form using Google forms. This form aimed to collect contact details and allow potential participants share their interest to participate in the study. The link to the form was shared through Linked In and internal channels through colleagues of the researcher. Together with the Google form a short explanation of the study was shared to explain the requirements to be considered as a participant. The researcher received fifteen completed forms back, ten of which became the participants of this study. The table below provides details of the sample group:

Participants	Role	Gender	Office Attendance Requirement
1	Software Developer	Male	2-3 days/week
2	UX Designer	Female	5 days/week
3	Developer	Male	2 days/week
4	IT Support	Male	2 days/week
5	Software Developer	Female	2 days/week
6	Product Manager	Male	2 days/week
7	Network Engineer	Male	2 days/week

8	Product Manager	Male	5 days/week
9	IT Support	Male	2 days/week
10	Tech Support	Female	2-3 days/week

3.5. Ethical Considerations

3.5.1. Ethical Approval

In any research process, potential ethical issues may arise, which necessitate appropriate consideration, according to Blumberg *et al.* (2011). Ethical Review Application Form has been completed and submitted to the National College of Ireland by the author, to outline and ensure that participants will be treated in an ethical manner.

3.5.2. Gaining Access and Informed Consent

According to Robson (2002), building relationships is essential to gaining access and cooperation. The study purpose and participation were explained to all participants in an email. Participation was completely voluntary, with the possibility of withdrawing at any time. An informed consent form was included in the email and signed by the participant, ensuring their access to the audio recordings, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. In order to maintain anonymity, all files were stored in a password-protected folder, which will be deleted after the study is complete.

3.5.3. Anonymisation of the Companies

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, references to specific tech companies have been anonymised. Given that the research topic is not concerned with exploring perceptions of a particular company, but instead the wider tech sector in Ireland, naming of the companies has been deemed unnecessary and potentially inappropriate from both a legal and ethical standpoint. To prevent any potential ethical or legal issues, each company was given a pseudonym throughout the study (for example, Company A to Company J).

3.6. Data Analysis Method: Thematic Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used in qualitative research (Bell *et al.*, 2023). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is more accurate than narrative analysis or content analysis as it is the closest to grounded theory, which is based on the production of codes (Bell *et al.*, 2023). Codes and themes are arguably more or less the same, however some literature suggests that themes include groups of codes (Saunders *et al.*, 2015).

For this study, the researcher identified themes based on the repetition as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2009), which is looking for topics that occur multiple times. Furthermore the researcher paid attention to topic transitions, meaning how certain topics shifted from one to another. The focus on the repetition allowed to establish patterns within the data (Bell *et al.*, 2023). Braun and Clarke (2006) also note that repetition alone is not a sufficient criteria for theme identification, it also must be relevant to research and research question to be considered as a theme.

This method is criticised for being too flexible due to the fact that it can be used to analyse a very wide variety of qualitative data (Bell *et al.*, 2023). However the researcher used this method due to its usefulness in the analysing data and easiness of application.

To identify the themes, each interview was audio-recorded and later by the researcher. The transcripts were then analysed and recurring significant statements which were later categorised into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bendassolli, 2013; Namey *et al.*, 2016).

Thematic analysis is approached in six steps, where the author took time to understand and familiarise herself with the data. This involved highlighting of themes and physically underlining repetitive words to further analyse for themes. Similar to a lot of other forms of analysis, the next step involved generation of initial themes or codes ensuring these align with the research objective.

Once initial themes were outlined the author combined close in meaning themes to create a new theme. For example Candidate 1 “makes me feel like the company doesn’t trust us to manage our own time” and Candidate 2 “made me feel untrusted and undervalued” created an emerging theme of “feeling untrusted and undervalued”. Emerging themes are outlined in Table 3.6.

The researcher then checked emerging themes across the entire data set to ensure there is an overlap (Bell *et al*, 2023). Due to the limited time and ten conducted interview this could be considered as a limitation. Limitations are further discussed in section 3.7.

Table 3.6.: Themes Emerging Based on Research Objectives

Research Objective	Themes Emerging
Identify Key Hygiene Factors	- Rigid company policies
	- Managerial practices enforcing strict office attendance
	- Physical stress of commuting
	- Feeling untrusted and undervalued
	- Lack of flexibility
Understand Motivators	- Slower career development
	- Negative office dynamics
	- Demotivating atmosphere
	- Positive aspects of face-to-face collaboration (limited impact)
	- Negative influence of rigid policies on motivators
Explore the Relationship Between Hygiene Factors and Motivators	- Decreased job satisfaction
	- Increased turnover intentions
	- Importance of balancing flexibility, work-life balance, and compensation
	- Suggestions for increased flexibility and support for commuting

These themes provide structure to the overall research framework to provide discussion point for the findings in detail in Chapter 4.

3.7. Limitations of the study

There is a limited number of participants in this study, based on specific tech sector employees in Ireland, which limits the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, this study included 10 participants, however a higher number would allow the researcher to identify more potential themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) Also, bias can influence participant responses throughout the interview process. Even when the interview questions are carefully planned and executed, responses may not be entirely accurate or reliable.

If there had been more time, follow-up interviews would have been conducted with participants to reassess their observations, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding. However, the researcher was limited to conducting one in-depth interview per participant due to time constraints.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses findings from ten semi-structures interviews which were done with employees in the Irish tech sector. The interviews were carried out in June 2024. The data analysis was done according to the methodology which was presented in Chapter 4. Based on this methodology, the researcher identified themes, related to the research objectives of this study and presented in Table 3.6. The main objective was to understand the key hygiene factors and motivators affecting job satisfaction of the employees, their turnover intentions in circumstances when the employees were asked to return to the office. The analysis focuses on understanding these factors, relationships between them.

4.2. Key Hygiene Factors Affecting Employees Due to Mandatory Office Attendance

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, hygiene factors are aspects of the work environment that can cause dissatisfaction when lacking. Company policies, managerial practices, work conditions, salary, and job security are some of these hygiene factors. In this study, the focus is on how mandatory office attendance affects these hygiene factors.

Based on the emerging themes presented in Table 3.6. the researcher has identified “strict policies and manager practices”, “feeling of being undervalues and untrusted”, “physical and psychological impact” as a key hygiene factor leading to dissatisfaction at work. For motivators, the researcher has outlined “collaboration” and “career development” as key motivators identified during the interview process. These are discussed further in this chapter.

4.2.1. Changes in Company Policies and Managerial Practices

The mandatory return to work led to a significant number of changes in company policies and, including strict enforcement of office attendance and lack of flexibility. The reinforcement of these policies also requited some strict management style. For instance, Participant 1 stated their commute to the office takes around three hours on office days and it negatively impacts their work experience. Similarly, Participant 2 noted that their manager's approach to the enforcement of office attendance policies made them feel untrusted and undervalued.

One participant stated, "*The strict office attendance policy makes me feel like the company doesn't trust us to manage our own time*" (Participant 2). This was also echoed by other participants who felt that the policies did not consider individual circumstances of each employee or how well these employees performed during remote working period. This aligns with findings by Bloom *et al.* (2023), who emphasised that inflexible workplace policies can lead to employee dissatisfaction and decreased morale. This aligns with the themes of strict policies and even further with with "feeling undervalued and untrusted".

4.2.2. Physical Work Environment

The interview participants noted that in situations where they are happy with their office environment (physical environment while being in the office), it has been overshadowed by stress of long commutes. Participants 1, 3, and 4 reported that commuting significantly reduced their productivity and further led to less job satisfaction. According to Participant 4, the commute from County Wicklow to Dublin is tiring and parking facilities are insufficient, which increases the stress on a daily basis. "*The daily commute is draining, and it affects my energy levels at work,*" explained Candidate 1, highlighting the toll of commuting on overall wellbeing.

Long commutes have been associated with higher stress levels and reduced job satisfaction (Farré *et al.*, 2023). A few participants have also mentioned that Irish public transport plays a role in their commuting time being so extensive. Participant 4 mentioned that Irish public transport system does not allow for them to commute to the office from their home, therefore they are "*forced to drive to work*" and if they are late "*all the parking spots are work are gone*" which forces them to pay to external parking adding to stress levels and further dissatisfaction (Participant 4). The commuting times mentioned by the respondents suggest that mandatory office attendance policies does not take in to account the effects on employees' well-being and negatively impacts their overall job satisfaction. This aligns with the theme of "physical and psychological impact".

4.2.3. Factors Contributing to Employee Dissatisfaction: The feeling of being unvalued

Further discussion with the participants around the commuting times the researcher tried to understand the underlying theme of employee dissatisfaction. A theme that was recurring among multiple participants was related to the feeling of being untrusted by the employer.

Participants 1 and 5 felt unvalued as they were being productive while working remotely and did not understand why this was not taken into account into the newly introduced practices. Additionally, the lack of flexibility in choosing office days contributed to dissatisfaction, as highlighted by Candidate 4, who struggled to manage childcare due to the new office schedule.

Candidate 4 stated, *"My current office schedule doesn't take into account crèche working hours. It's like they expect us to just adapt without any support."*

4.3. Motivators Related to Job Satisfaction with Mandatory Office Attendance

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, motivators are factors that lead to job satisfaction and motivate employees to perform better. These are recognition, the nature of the work the employee does, responsibilities given to the employee, opportunities for growth and advancement. The next section seeks to understand how these motivators are affected by mandatory office attendance.

4.3.1. Positive Influences on Job Satisfaction

Only a few of the participants outlined positive impacts of returning to work on job satisfaction. In-person meetings, as well as spontaneous interactions in the office, improved participant 2's productivity. However, this opinion was not widespread. Many felt that the return to office policies did not have a positive impact on recognition or professional development.

"The only good thing about being back in the office is the occasional spontaneous brainstorming session," noted Candidate 2, *"but that's not enough to outweigh the negatives."*

4.3.2. Changes in Office Dynamics and Motivation

Candidates 2 and 5 mentioned that the office dynamics were generally negative after the return to office policies were implemented. Colleagues frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the return policy and the focus on the negative aspects created demotivating and unpleasant work environment. Candidate 4 talked about constant complaints about commuting and inflexibility by his colleagues, which is tolling on the overall environment.

"The atmosphere has become quite toxic. Everyone is just complaining about the commute and the lack of flexibility," said Candidate 5.

4.3.3. Impact on Career Development and Aspirations

Many participants stated that the new office policies negatively impacted their career development. Commuting was mentioned multiple times again as something that leaves little time and motivation for learning. Participant 3 and 6 were limited in their opportunities for professional development activities. In addition, a very important point was made by Participant 10 who noted that management efforts were going to enforcing office attendance policies instead of developing the team.

"Since we have to be in the office, I barely have time for the online courses and certifications I used to do," mentioned Candidate 3, highlighting the impact on professional growth.

4.4. Relationship Between Hygiene Factors and Motivators in Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions

4.4.1. Influence on Job Satisfaction and Thoughts About Staying or Leaving

The strict reinforcement enforcement of the new policies, which are also hygiene factors, have left most of the participants feeling very low in relation to job satisfaction. Because of their employers' lack of flexibility and trust, candidates 1, 4, and 5 discussed leaving their jobs. In particular, Candidate 6 expressed stress caused by the new policies, which led them to consider finding a remote job.

"I've started looking at job postings again because I was doing my job remotely for 2 years and now, all of a sudden, my employer thinks I can't," said Candidate 6.

Based on data collected during the interviews, the negative hygiene factors led to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions. Employees feel that their ability to manage work-life balance and career development is compromised, prompting them to consider leaving for more flexible work environments. This further highlights that companies need to take into account the hard work employees do remotely and also a critical need for tech companies to reassess their policies. This will ensure they support both the operational needs of the business and the well-being of their employees.

4.4.2. Weighing factors on the decisions to leave

The decision to stay or leave was mostly influenced by the balance between work-life balance, flexibility, and compensation packages provided by the company. Participants 5 and 8 talked about the fact that while the compensation and benefits were attractive, the lack of flexibility was a significant drawback. Participant 4 highlighted that if another company offered similar pay but more flexibility, they would seriously consider leaving.

"If another company offered the same pay but allowed me to work from home, I'd switch in a heartbeat," expressed Participant 4.

4.4.3. Suggested Changes to Balance Hygiene Factors and Motivators

Participants suggested several changes which they believe would improve job satisfaction and lower their intentions to leave. The most common recommendation was increased flexibility, particularly in choosing office days, as mentioned by Candidates 3 and 7. Additionally, providing support for long commutes, such as flexible working hours, was suggested by Candidate 5. Candidate 10 recommended reducing the mandatory office attendance requirement to one day a week to better balance productivity and personal well-being.

"I think if we had the option to choose our office days, it would make a huge difference," said Candidate 7, which was a common sentiment.

4.5. Discussion of Findings

This section will discuss key findings from the semi-structured interviews drawing similarities and differences between the findings in the available literature provided in Chapter 2. The discussion section is broken down by objectives.

4.5.1. Objective 1: Identify Key Hygiene Factors and Employee Perceptions

The findings show that key hygiene factors that negatively impact employees are strict company policies and manager practices to enforce strict office. All of these factors contribute to a feeling of being untrusted and undervalued, which subsequently affects employee job satisfaction. The lack of flexibility in the return to the office policies has been a major source of dissatisfaction, as employees feel their needs and prior good performance while working

remotely are being ignored by the management. This aligns with Wang *et al.* (2021) who also outlined that mandatory office attendance causes conflicts between work life balance therefore leading to dissatisfaction. This is also further supported by Allen *et al.* (2021) who highlights that employees who have had the opportunity to work remotely will always appreciate remote work. This aligns with the findings, as all of the interviewed participants have had the opportunity to work remotely.

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, hygiene factors such as company policies and work conditions are essential in preventing dissatisfaction but do not motivate employees (Herzberg, 1968). The study findings aligned with this view, as the negative hygiene factors were in most cases outweighing the motivators even if those were present and acknowledged by the employees. This was also seen in the analysis further, where the rigid enforcement of office attendance did not take into account consideration for individual circumstances. This reflects a failure to adequately address these factors. Further supported by Wang *et al.* (2021), who emphasise that inflexible workplace policies can lead to employee dissatisfaction and decreased morale. Participants have stated that the policies that are being enforced do not take into account their needs, therefore lead to dissatisfaction.

The stress of commuting, was a theme highlighted by several participants and would fall under the hygiene factor, further shows their dissatisfaction. Long commutes have been associated with higher stress levels and reduced job satisfaction (Farré *et al.*, 2023). The significant commute times mentioned by the respondents suggest that mandatory office attendance policies do not account for employee's needs. Even though some researches highlight that there are positive effects of strict office attendance policies, such as face to face interactions and collaboration, employees in this study highlighted that there are more negatives that outweighs these positives (Gunter, 2022).

As the employees in this study were based in Ireland only, it is worth exploring if the "long commute theme" is a shortcoming of the employer or the government. McDonagh (2006) suggests that there is a lack of integrated transport system policies in Ireland and especially rural Ireland. Covid-19 encourages and allowed to move further away from the major tech location of Dublin, a lot of tech employees are now commuting from more rural locations. During the interview process and the analysis of the data the theme of "long commute" surfaced multiple times and is contributing to the employee dissatisfaction which leads to further increase in the intentions to leave the company.

4.5.2. Objective 2: Understand Employee Perceptions on Motivators

There were some positive aspects of returning to the office mentioned by the participants. The recurring one was collaboration, however the overall impact on job satisfaction was quite minimal. The enforcement of strict policies has overshadowed these motivators, leading to a predominantly negative perception among employees. This aligns with Barrero et al. (2021) research which shows that remote work is something employees are actively seeking and even willing to take a pay cut to have this option.

Herzberg's theory states that motivators such as recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth are crucial for enhancing job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Based on the responses during interviews, employees felt that there was a lack of recognition for the hard work they have done during the remote work period. The fact that employers failed to recognise this work and take it into account when designing the new policies is negatively affecting motivators such as recognition and responsibility. The lack of recognition and perceived career stagnation reported by respondents indicate a failure to use these motivators effectively. Participant 3's comment about reduced opportunities for professional development highlights how mandatory office attendance policies can negatively affect personal and professional growth which is critical motivator for job satisfaction (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020).

Furthermore, the negative dynamics and demotivating atmosphere when being in the office reported by participants undermine the potential benefits of in-person collaboration. Even though some participants did highlight collaboration as a positive, the negatives outweighed the positive according to them. Overall stress and dissatisfaction expressed by respondents reflect a work environment that does not support or enhance employee motivation, aligning with the findings of Allen *et al.* (2021), who argue that a supportive work environment is crucial for maintaining high levels of motivation and job satisfaction. Findings by Nasir (2023) further support this, stating that a change to mandatory attendance for previously remote employees negatively impacts their job satisfaction.

4.5.3. Objective 3: Learn about the relationship between hygiene factors and motivators in job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

From the conversations with the interview participants it is evident that the employers failure to provide adequate hygiene factors, in this case policies and manager practices, have

negatively influenced job satisfaction and outweighed the motivators, leading to increased turnover intentions. Employees feel that their ability to manage work-life balance and career development is compromised, prompting them to consider leaving for more flexible work environments. The findings highlight that employees place remote work as one of the most important hygiene factors, even above compensation according to Barrero *et al.* (2023) as employees are willing to take the pay cut to have an option of remote work.

The interplay between hygiene factors and motivators is evident in the responses, with the new policies reducing the value of potential motivators. This is consistent with Herzberg's view that dissatisfaction can overshadow potential motivators (Herzberg, 1968). The consideration of leaving the job due to lack of flexibility, as mentioned by several participants, shows the importance of balancing hygiene factors and motivators to retain talent.

Research by Bloom *et al.* (2023) supports the need for flexible working arrangements to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions. The respondents' suggestions for increased flexibility and support for long commutes align with these findings, indicating that addressing these concerns could significantly improve job satisfaction and retention. Employee turnover was outlined as one of the most significant issues by Nasir (2023). Especially for the tech sector, which is very competitive and employees have options. This was also reflected in the responses of the participants as a lot of them are searching for more flexible options on the market.

Yang *et al.* (2023) outlined the benefits of the office attendance, such as spontaneous idea generation and strengthening of the company culture. Some responses suggested that they see benefit in spontaneous collaboration, however once again, the negatives outweigh the benefits. Company values are an important aspect that every employer supports and these values make it easier for employees to integrate into the company when being present in person (Sostero *et al.* 2022). It is possible to argue that some employees, for example participant 2, have onboarded into the company completely remotely during lockdown due to Covid-19. The fact that the company does not take this into account leads to further dissatisfaction and leaving them feeling undervalued as the employer does not recognise the hard work the employees have done during the remote working period.

4.5.4. Mandatory Office Attendance and Work-Life Balance: Employee Perceptions

In the Tech sector, where long hours and high workload is common, the ability to work remotely has always been appreciated by the employees as it allowed for better work-life balance (Allen *et al.*, 2021). The findings align this this view, as participants highlighted the fact that they feel more stressed and get to spend less time with their loved ones.

This however can be contrasted by research findings from Bloom *et al.* (2015) who state that for some employees, it created a better work-life balance, as it separated the work from home and creates a divide to allow for better balance. In this study the participants did not share this view. Furthermore, the nature of the job itself and work style would also affect the preference of the employee. Employees whose role requires frequent collaborations could prefer being in the office rather than working from home. (Farré *et al.*, 2023; Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). This further supports the idea that the RTO policies should take into account individual circumstances and preferences of the employees to ensure the policies contribute towards employee satisfaction.

4.5.5. Employee Perceptions on Challenges

4.5.5.1. Practical Challenges

As notes by Barrero *et al.* (2023), there is an expectation and a demand for remote or hybrid work option from the employees, therefore the remote work is becoming more popular and more desired. This study aligned with the secondary research that outlined potential challenged posed by the strict RTO policies. The secondary research noted that commute is one of the primary practical challenges faced by the employees (Farré *et al.*, 2023). The interview participants of this study referred to the commute time as “*draining*” and “*exhausting*” (Participants 1, 4, 5). Secondary research also points out to logistical challenges related to workspace, which is also aligned with the participants view, as they noted “*insufficient*” parking facilities and not having enough meeting rooms as some of the challenges (Participant 7, 3).

Secondary research also outlines that the RTO could be challenging as employees meet more distractions, that they would not normally have at home (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). This was supported by Participants 2, 3, 5 and 10, however Participant 7 found that home environment is more distracting than the office, due to their individual circumstances.

The main practical challenge that was highlighted by majority of the participants is commuting time, which could potentially be linked the lack of reliable public transport outside of the major cities. Participant 4 referred to the Irish public transport system as a “*joke*” and highlighted that “*living in a different county means that it takes hours to get to the office*”. For others, even when the office environment itself was pleasant, the commute topic did surface as well. This is an interesting topic which the researcher will suggest for future research as currently there are no studies available that would investigate the relationship between Irish tech workers dissatisfaction with commute times and Irish public transport availability.

4.5.5.2. Psychological Challenges

Wang *et al.* (2021) outlined that aside from the increased stress and burnout among employees, which was supported by Participants in this study, RTO can lead to bigger psychological impact. Themes of mental exhaustion and stress were seen in the participants answers throughout this study, referring to RTO causing more stress in their personal lives as participants “*struggle with managing childcare responsibilities*”. This further aligns with the secondary research highlighting that employees who are required to be in the office experience more stress and anxiety.

Anxiety and stress further affects productivity. Employees comfortable working environment at home was disrupted by the new social dynamic of sudden return to the office leading to less productivity. New social dynamics is something that is outlined in secondary research as well as found in this study where the participants were unhappy with the new dynamics after the reintroduction of the RTO. Sudden introduction of new social dynamic can impact employee’s mental wellbeing and productivity (Allen *et al.*, 2015) and further aligns with the findings. The researcher however finds that companies’ established culture would also be impacted, therefore this leads to some organisations challenges as well.

4.5.5.3. Organisational Challenges

As notes above, employee productivity is found to be impacted. Productivity is one of the most important topics from the organisational perspective. Based on the fact that the research suggests that the office attendance does not increase productivity due to commuting fatigue, increased distractions and stress. This poses a question to the employers as to why there’s such a big push for RTO (Bloom *et al.*, 2019). During this study, employee participants further

supported the fact that their productivity is better when they are based in the comfort of their own home.

Another organisational challenge is employee turnover which is further discussed in Section 4.5.5.4. The findings from this study clearly indicate that tech employees in Ireland are seeking more flexible opportunities to have better work-life balance which also aligns with Nasir (2023) who found that office attendance enforcements forces employees to seek better and more flexible options.

These challenges lead to difficulty in maintaining good company values and culture and also maintaining good operations model. This would require good management techniques to ensure both employees and company are satisfied with levels of productivity and work-life balance (Wang *et al.*, 2021). This study however did not find that employees are happy with the managerial practices, furthermore managerial practices were categorised as hygiene factor by the researcher and have shown to be causing demotivation from the employee side.

4.5.5.4. Turnover intentions

The turnover is one of the most significant issues for the employer (Nasir, 2023). During this study majority of the participants expressed intentions to leave their current company due to the imposed RTO policies. The main factors shown to be the feeling of being undervalued, stress and lack of work-life balance and are forcing employees to “consider looking for other job opportunities” (Participant 5). Participant 6 mentioned that they are “*looking for a fully remote*” job to restore the work-life balance. These findings are consistent with previous studies that show a strong relationship between rigid work policies and increased turnover intentions (Yang *et al.*, 2022; Bloom *et al.*, 2022).

Lack of trust is also a theme that occurred in multiple interviews, as participants expressed the feeling of not being trusted by their management, Participant 1 explicitly mentioned considering leaving the job due to a perceived lack of trust. This aligns with Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, which stated that negative hygiene factors such as lack of trust leads to job dissatisfaction, a key factor contributing to turnover intentions (Herzberg, 1968).

Furthermore, participants have repeatedly expressed the effects of long commute on their work-life balance and general levels of stress, which further contributes to the intentions to leave the current job. Participants 4, 6, and 8 all mentioned that commuting and lack of work-life balance were significant factors in their consideration of leaving the company. This is supported by research, suggesting that these factors are pushing employees to explore alternative opportunities that offer more flexibility (Allen *et al.*, 2021).

It is also important to highlight that tech sector in Ireland is highly competitive, with companies constantly trying to stay competitive to attract top talent. This could potentially indicate a broader trend, where tech companies that fail to offer flexible working conditions may struggle to retain talent (Smite *et al.*, 2023; Bassey *et al.*, 2023). Participant 8 however had a different experience where they have realised that *“the majority of the companies in Dublin have introduced some sort of policy around returning to the office”*.

4.5.5.5. Factors Outside Of Employers Control

Based on the analysis there are two themes that affect employee decisions, which are outside of the employer's control: public transport and housing crisis. Both participants 6 and 8 mentioned that the reason they are looking for another role is due to the draining commute, however it is the housing crisis in Ireland which has forced them to move away from Dublin, as Dublin house prices are high. Participant 6 stated: *“I am currently looking for a fully remote position. And this is not only because of the job but also as we are a young family, we want to be able to afford a house”*. The research by Wendy *et al.* (2024) suggests that in case of the Irish housing market in particular, the traditional financial sector is not able to support the credit demand for housing, further driving the prices up. This is an interesting note as this is not something any employer can control, but rather try adapt to the current crisis and be more flexible to retain talent.

4.6. Summary of the Chapter

The research findings highlight the critical impact of company policies, managerial practices, and commuting stress on employee job satisfaction and turnover intentions in the tech sector in Ireland. These factors, identified as hygiene factors according to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, have led to significant dissatisfaction among employees. Additionally, the lack of

effective motivators such as recognition and opportunities for career growth has further impacted the dissatisfaction and increased turnover intentions.

Tech companies must adopt more flexible policies, taking into account employee individual circumstances to create a work environment that addresses both hygiene factors and motivators effectively. This includes offering flexible working arrangements, recognising employee contributions, and providing opportunities for career development. By addressing these issues, companies can improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover intentions, and retain top talent in the competitive tech sector.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion To This Study

This study aimed to explore the perceptions and challenges associated with mandatory office attendance among tech sector employees in Ireland, using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation to understand the factors influencing job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Following the research objectives outlined in Chapter 2, and presented in Chapter 4, the researcher have gained a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the topic, therefore the research aims have been satisfied as a result. Following qualitative method the researcher took an inductive approach to analyse the data gathered during semi-structured interviews with tech employees, the study identified key hygiene factors and motivators, providing valuable insights that could inform more effective and employee centric attendance policies.

The interview process and the analysis of the data allowed the researcher to derive themes and explore those further to deeper understand the topic. RTO policies have shown to be ignorant towards individual circumstances of the employees and the current situation in the country with the housing crisis. The researcher further uncovered that the lack of flexibility in these policies contributes to a sense of being untrusted and undervalued among employees.

The stress of long commutes was a recurring theme, with several respondents indicating that it significantly reduced their productivity and overall job satisfaction. This theme is to be further explored by research as it is possibly linked to the lack of reliable public transport outside Ireland's major towns and cities.

The researcher has also understood that while there are positive aspects of returning to the office that were noted by the interview participants, the impact on job satisfaction was minimal. The rigid enforcement of office attendance overshadowed potential motivators, leading to a predominantly negative perception among employees. These findings reinforce the need for tech companies to reassess the policies. The rigid implementation of office attendance without considering individual circumstances and proven remote work success can lead to significant dissatisfaction and increased turnover intentions.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the discussions presented in Chapter 5 of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions among tech sector employees in Ireland:

To ensure that the employees continue feeling values, companies can consider implementing more flexible work arrangements, keeping in mind individual circumstances. Allowing employees to choose their office can significantly improve job satisfaction and work-life balance. Flexible work policies could address the stress and dissatisfaction stemming from inflexible office attendance requirements (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). An employer can alleviate the stress of commuting by providing an option of flexible working hours to avoid traffic hours. This support can reduce the physical and mental burden on employees (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2016). Based on this study it is believed to be beneficial for managers to adopt a more supportive approach, focusing on trust and empowerment rather than rigid enforcement of office attendance. This can promote a more positive work environment and enhance employee morale (Allen *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, employer should regularly seek feedback from employees about their work arrangements and make adjustments as needed. As this research shows, there are multiple factors that are at play when it comes to the suitable arrangement for each employee, which also can change with time. A continuous assessment of employee satisfaction and productivity can help in tailoring policies that meet both organisational and employee needs (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

5.3. Opportunities for Future Studies

Even though the current study has contributed to the qualitative data, there are multiple opportunities for future research.

There is an opportunity for the future research to explore the relationship between commute dissatisfaction seen in this study and the public transport in Ireland. Further learning how does the housing crisis in Ireland potentially plays part in the extended commute times. This would provide a better understanding of the factors that are outside of the employers control. Additionally, understanding how demographic factors such as age, gender, and family responsibilities affect perceptions of mandatory office attendance. During this study some

participants expressed clear dissatisfaction due to family commitments, therefore focusing on this aspect could help in developing more inclusive and fair workplace policies (Knight *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, future research should consider a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalisability of the findings, which would allow to understand if these perceptions the same outside of tech sector. Comparing the impact of mandatory office attendance across different industries and cultural contexts would help to identify universal trends. Additionally a mixed method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data could provide a more comprehensive understanding providing relevant statistics. Investigating the long term effects of flexible work policies and their impact on organisational performance and even would also be valuable (Kossek *et al.*, 2023).

By addressing these recommendations and exploring future research opportunities, tech companies in Ireland can create a more fair and flexible work environment that aligns with employee preferences and would focus on better job satisfaction. This would benefit not only employees but also contribute to the long term success of organisations in the tech sector.

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Appendix 1 - Informed Consent Sheet



Title: Perceptions and Challenges of Mandatory Office Attendance Among Tech Sector Employees in Ireland

INFORMED CONSENT SHEET

I hereby agree to give my consent for my responses to interview questions to be used and quoted anonymously in this project at the National College of Ireland.

Interviewer

Name _____ Module _____

Interviewee

Print Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Master's in Business Administration

Year _____ Programme _____

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

Objective 1: Identify Key Hygiene Factors Affecting Employees Due to Mandatory Office Attendance

1. Can you describe any changes in company policies or managerial practices that have impacted your work experience since the mandatory return to the office?
2. How do you feel the physical work environment and conditions have influenced your job satisfaction or dissatisfaction since returning to the office?
3. What specific factors related to mandatory office attendance do you believe most significantly contribute to employee dissatisfaction?

Objective 2: Identify and Understand Motivators Related to Return to the Office Policies

1. What aspects of returning to the office have positively influenced your job satisfaction, such as recognition or professional growth opportunities?
2. How have the changes in office dynamics since returning to the office impacted your feelings of motivation or demotivation at work?
3. Can you discuss how return to office policies have either supported or blocked your career development and aspirations?

Objective 3: Study the Relationship Between Hygiene Factors and Motivators in Relation to Turnover Intentions and Job Satisfaction

1. How do you think the company's approach to hygiene factors and motivators influence your overall job satisfaction and your thoughts about staying with or leaving the company?
2. In your experience, which factors weigh more heavily on your decision to continue working here or to look for another job?
3. What changes would you suggest the company make to better balance hygiene factors and motivators to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions?