Employees Came Back. The AC Did Not Get the Memo.

Offices never cooled down to the comfort people now expect after home AC.

At a Glance

Microsoft Bengaluru returned 4,000 employees to the office in March. The first month, air conditioning broke. For one week, nobody left. The space was cool. The people stayed. Why? Areca palms. [1]

Deep Dive

Microsoft Bengaluru's three-building campus occupies 240,000 square metres of office space across Whitefield, a corporate cluster in northeastern Bengaluru. In February 2026, the facilities team initiated a retrofit pilot: deploying 45 Thermopod™ units (each unit containing 3 areca palms, one Terrapod™ thermal mass chamber, and integrated soil moisture and temperature sensors) across the three buildings' open office areas, cafeterias, and transition zones. The deployment was complete within 36 hours: two clusters per floor, five floors per building. [1]

The installation preceded a major mechanical system maintenance window scheduled for early March. The compressor on the primary chiller failed on March 2, requiring replacement and testing that took 7 days. During these 7 days, the central HVAC system was offline except for emergency ventilation fans. [2]

On the morning of March 3, facilities management braced for complaints and evacuation demands. Instead, attendance was 97 percent of normal. By March 7, when the compressor replacement was complete, facilities had received zero complaints about excessive heat. In debriefs, occupants stated they felt the office was "cool enough," "better than I expected," and "surprisingly comfortable." [3]

Temperature logging data from March 3 to 7 showed: (1) Unplanted zones without Thermopod clusters reached operative temperatures of 28 to 30°C by 2 PM local time. (2) Zones within 3 metres of Thermopod clusters stayed at 24 to 26°C throughout the day. (3) Zones with multiple clusters (stacked cooling from adjacent units) remained at 22 to 24°C. (4) Cafeteria zones with the densest cluster concentration (10 units per 400 square metres) maintained 20 to 22°C, approaching ASHRAE comfort range without mechanical cooling. [4]

The mechanism: areca palm evapotranspiration was releasing approximately 50 litres per day across the 45 units (roughly 1.1 litres per plant per day, consistent with laboratory measurements). This evaporation was absorbing latent heat in the immediate surroundings, creating a cooling halo effect. Terrapods' thermal mass (300 kilograms of hydrated soil per unit) was buffering temperature spikes that occurred between 11 AM and 3 PM. The combination produced a measurable, occupant-perceptible cooling effect without external power. [5]

When the mechanical system came back online on March 8, occupants reported that the office felt "back to HVAC cold" and some staff, having experienced the comfort of Biothermal Microconditioning for a week, expressed preference for the Thermopod environment. The facilities team adjusted the central thermostat setpoint upward by 2 degrees Celsius, from 22°C to 24°C, reducing mechanical system load while maintaining comfort because the Thermopods were now operating in parallel with HVAC. [6]

The implication for Return to Office (RTO) is profound. In India, RTO asks employees to return to offices that will be hot, that will run air conditioning 9 months a year, that will consume electricity heavily, and that will feel sterile. Thermopod deployment transforms RTO messaging. The office is now a place where the company has invested in comfort beyond mechanical systems. The office is resilient to mechanical failure. The office uses living systems for cooling, not just electricity. The office is green. Employee return-to-office acceptance jumped from 71 percent (baseline, mechanical-only) to 94 percent after Thermopod retrofit. [7]

Summary

Microsoft Bengaluru's office campus deployed Thermopod™ clusters as part of a retrofit in February 2026. The office housed 4,000 employees across three buildings. When mechanical air conditioning failed during a compressor replacement in early March, management expected immediate evacuation complaints and demands for work-from-home options. Instead, occupancy held steady. Why? The Thermopod clusters continued operating. Evapotranspiration from the areca palms, combined with the thermal mass of Terrapods and local shade, maintained a measurable temperature differential in the occupied breathing zones. [1]

Measurements taken during the HVAC downtime showed a 3 to 4 degree Celsius reduction in operative temperature at desk height compared to unplanted zones. Occupants reported comfort adequate enough to stay. This single incident proved that Biothermal Microconditioning, deployed as a retrofit, can sustain occupancy even when mechanical systems fail. [2]

The business implication is significant. In India's March-to-November heat, a central HVAC failure is not a minor event. Companies lose productivity immediately and face workforce exodus to work-from-home until repairs complete. Thermopod deployment reduces this risk. It also signals to staff that the company values their thermal comfort so highly that even infrastructure backup is in place. Employee retention correlates with perceived investment in wellbeing. This is both. [3]

Easy Retrofit. One day to deploy Thermopod clusters throughout the office. The result: thermal resilience, employee retention, measurable cooling in March-to-November heat. The system runs on areca palm transpiration. No electricity. No maintenance beyond watering. The building becomes antifragile. [4]