

## Your future work experience is Smart Work Anywhere.

### Hybrid isn't just a floorplan — it's a formula unique to each organization. We call it Smart Work Anywhere.

Designing the future work experience means being open-minded and experimenting with what the right version of hybrid looks like. Businesses that get it right will likely attract and retain the best talent in a competitive landscape.

When it comes to the future work experience, there's a lot of buzz in the business world about "hybrid" and "flexibility", but what would the reality look like, and is it really the right answer for every organization?

Employees are not the same people as they were in 2020, and neither are the organizations that employ

them. This means that companies may need to forge a new relationship with their employees, and make no mistake: right now, organizations are embroiled in a war for talent, so it's never been more important to offer the best employee experience.

We don't know what the future will throw at us — locations and formats will likely change. At Accenture, we've stopped looking for the hybrid model and are focusing on how we create experiences that give employees autonomy, support and purpose wherever they are. Reshaping the employee experience is fundamental to becoming a Business of Experience, which is the key to success.

Our research shows that Business of Experience leaders outperform their competitors in year-on-year profitability growth by more than six times.

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# Five beliefs and why they're flawed

We're hearing a lot of rumblings about how employers and employees envisage the future of their working experience, and some impassioned arguments in one direction or another. We've looked into them properly, and we think there's some critical thinking and adjustment to be done if companies are going to create a successful future work experience.

## 01

### Belief: Employees want "hybrid"

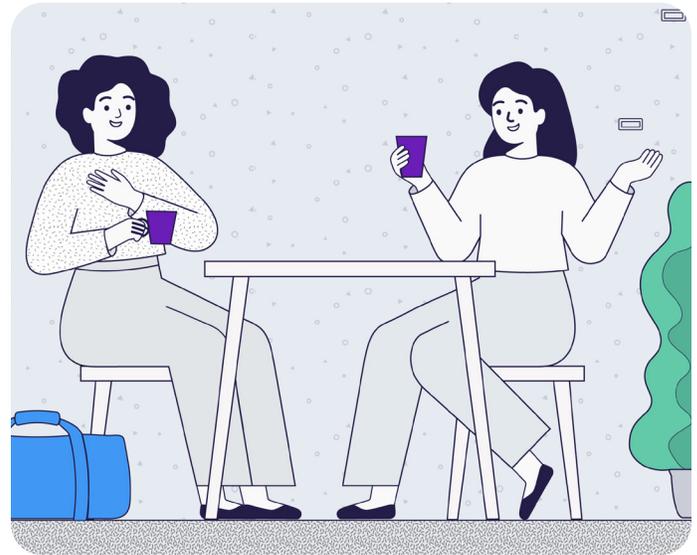
#### Reality: Employees want the freedom to choose

Everyone is talking about hybrid models as the future of work, and Accenture research finds that 83% of employees would like to work in some sort of hybrid way of working.<sup>1</sup> But what are they really asking for?

A quick online search will unveil academic analyses of how people define "hybrid working", and it's generally a formula that combines remote working with office working and a third space. An Accenture Research survey with 9,326 global workers found that when employees ask for "hybrid" they are really asking for three key things.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, autonomy – moving from a hierarchical relationship to an equitable one where employees are given the freedom to manage their own time. Secondly, they are asking for support to be the best they can be physically and mentally and to reach their career potential. Thirdly, they are asking for purpose – work needs to align with what's important to them and nurture a sense of belonging.

Employees have regained the time they used to spend commuting and have discovered the joy of gently working through the laundry pile while their coffee brews during the week, which frees them up for more meaningful, restorative weekends. Many are fighting to keep things this way. Hard evidence that many people can do their jobs just as effectively from home has sparked a fundamental shift in power between employers and their employees.



*When employees ask for hybrid, they really want autonomy, support and a sense of purpose and belonging.*

The next generation of workers prize the freedom to choose even more highly: a recent Forbes survey revealed that 38% of Gen-Z regard work-life balance as a top priority when choosing an employer.<sup>3</sup> This is reportedly more than previous generations and suggests a growing demand for freedom to choose how they work.

### What do organizations need to do?

#### Rebuild your employee-employer relationship.

Employers need to re-evaluate their relationship with their employees, including how and when they communicate. No two organizations will be starting from the same point, so solutions will look different for each setup but all will have one thing in common: an open-minded approach to change, to negotiation, and to compromise — like any good relationship.

<sup>1</sup> Accenture Research survey during March 2021 with 9,326 global workers across the following countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Sweden, UK, and US, and the following industries: Banking/Insurance/Capital Markets, High Tech, Retail, Customer Goods and Services, Public Sector, Healthcare, Communications and Media, Utilities, Energy and Life Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Accenture Research Productivity Anywhere <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work?src=SOMS>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work?src=SOMS>  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2019/09/10/how-generation-z-will-revolutionize-the-workplace/?sh=4052558f4f53>



# 02

## Belief: Employees want to work at home

### Reality: Employees should be asked what they want regularly

To get the future of work right, many organizations are asking employees how they want to work. At Accenture, we're doing the same, and our results show that what employees think they want (e.g., "to work from home") and where they feel they work best (e.g., "I work best when I can bounce ideas off other people face to face"), don't always match up. Of the workers who said they wanted to work remotely for half (or more) of their time, 55% reported in the same survey that they would be most productive on site.<sup>4</sup>

A potential explanation for this inconsistency is that their knee-jerk response is to keep tight hold of the setup that has enabled them to do online yoga at lunchtime or spend quality time with their children after school, but they haven't necessarily played out how to balance what they want and how they work best. It's easy to answer each question in isolation, but the combined answers are difficult to reconcile. In short, how do they work out when they're getting on a train and when they're staying home?

In addition, there's the fact that people may understandably be concerned that this will be the only time they're asked this question by their employer. This pandemic has (we can only hope) been a once-in-a-lifetime experience, upturning everything we had taken for granted. Is this, therefore, a once-in-a-career opportunity for workers to make a bid for remote working? People's responses to employers' surveys are influenced by the assumption that they won't be asked the same questions again in six months, a year, or five years from now. They don't think they'll have the chance to change their minds.

There's a lesson to learn: people are probably answering the question about how they want to work based on complex factors that include their future aspirations, fears and assumptions on what the



*"How do you want to work?" is a question heavy with implications and complexities. Businesses must rethink how, when and how often they ask such questions.*

future will be like. The key is to dig deeper into how people make their decisions and allow for nuance and the flexibility for things to change – an approach we describe as Expressive Segmentation.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly of all, organizations should pledge to ask the same questions on a regular basis – and follow through.

### What do organizations need to do?

**Rethink the way you communicate.** Before they sell off their real estate, organizations should think beyond asking employees in a survey, "How do you want to work?". Getting foundational research right to uncover tacit needs is key, and the best way to get accurate responses that can be converted to action is to be transparent and creative in communications – that means asking in different ways and explaining how employees' answers will be used and how often they'll be asked. Employers can't stop at asking once. It's critical to measure behaviors to understand if the changes you're implementing are having a positive impact, or if needs are changing. Organizations that don't do this risk investing in costly solutions that won't work.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work?src=SOMS>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/blogs/interactive-insights-blog/expressive-segmentation-demystifies-liquid>



# 03

## Belief: Pandemic work challenges will pass

### Reality: Employers and employees will need to **unlearn bad habits**

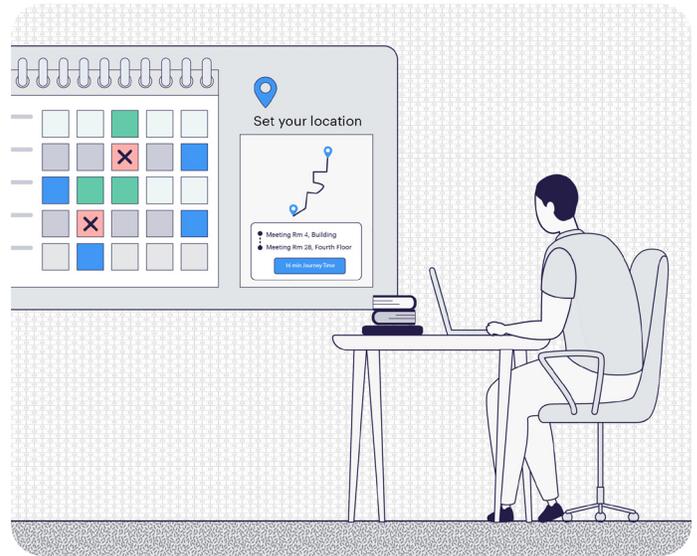
Some pandemic-driven changes were beneficial, and we won't want to lose them, like replacing a stressful commute with more sleep or a local walk, or being home for children's bedtimes. But some bad habits have formed, and it'll take time and conscious effort to reverse them.

First, the way we work has become unsustainable: scheduling back-to-back meetings without a bathroom break for five hours has become normal, even though we all know it's not healthy. Among many challenges the pandemic wrought on employees was an increased risk of redundancy at the hands of employers who reluctantly had to make big changes to ensure survival. This prompted employees to make a desperate bid to be constantly "on", and to be seen to deliver maximum value, which is infinitely harder to do remotely than from the office — and certainly not workable long-term.

Of course, since then, the landscape has shifted and organizations have ramped up recruitment drives, which puts employees in a stronger position to choose the employer that offers them the healthiest, most rewarding work experience.

Second, inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. A survey by the Office For National Statistics (UK) showed that as people began to return to work in April 2021, men spent 18 minutes less doing unpaid household work on an average day. Women, on the other hand, continued to perform just as much household work as they did during lockdown. This could, in theory, mean that men get a headstart on increasing their performance, leading to women missing out on promotions.<sup>6</sup>

New joiners are finding themselves on the back foot, missing out on building relationships with colleagues



*Going back to the office will mean unlearning some bad habits. Organizations will need to intentionally design for healthy behavior change.*

through chance interactions at the coffee machine or in the elevator, plus they're not getting the benefits of informal mentoring. Yet another inequality is felt by people of an introverted nature, who may feel their voices have been lost behind the screen during the pandemic, which can make them feel unsupported, and certainly means neurodiversity is compromised.

Our research finds that there are specific groups of people who prefer to work remotely: women, people who have been at organizations longer and part-time workers, for example. Flexible working risks widening gaps and creating new ones.

### What do organizations need to do?

**Design for positive behavior change.** The future work experience will need to reinforce positive behaviors and discourage negative ones. Key to this is an employer/employee relationship built on trust, that enables employees to return to a healthy workload, wherever they're working. The physical space, digital tools and culture may need to reset boundaries — and every person at every level should be vigilantly nurturing that culture. And, of course, inclusion and diversity must be at the core of every touch point — and that means neurodiversity as well as demographics.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/anewnormalhowpeoplespenttheirtimeafterthemarch2020coronaviruslockdown/2020-12-09>



# 04

## Belief: Success means maximum productivity

### Reality: Maximum productivity comes at a cost

Workers are more productive than ever, but they also seem to be more burnt out. According to an Indeed survey, over half (52%) of respondents are experiencing burnout in 2021 — up from the 43% who said the same in Indeed’s pre-Covid-19 survey.<sup>7</sup> So maximum productivity may not be sustainable. This means that, to retain employees, businesses should shift their focus away from increasing productivity and decreasing office space. Employees are people, not resources, and businesses rely on these people being able to work.

When we return to work, productivity may even go down so organizations may need to adjust their expectations. The intensity of the pandemic has seeped through to the way we work, and it simply isn’t reasonable to expect people to continue at such a level. Intensity does not equal productivity. Some of the most productive days at work center around spontaneous, lively conversations in the break-out space, which aren’t possible when people feel they’re under immense pressure.

Now, more than ever, employers must put purpose and wellbeing at the top of their success metrics – and it can’t simply be lip service. Rather than just giving people the opportunity to take a break, organizations should insist upon it. They should set boundaries and actively enforce them so that people can find and maintain a healthy line between their professional and private lives.

Get this essential reset wrong, and the risk is that people may simply walk. If the pandemic has taught us nothing else, it’s taught us that life is precious, so why work yourself sick for one employer when you know there are others that will value your wellbeing?



*Productivity isn't the way to measure hybrid success. A focus on employee wellbeing and belonging will lead to talent retention and customer value.*

Get this reset right, and businesses will reap the rewards: improved employee experience leads to improved customer experience and increased customer retention. This is reflected in our Business of Experience research, which reveals the benefits of shaping the entirety of a business to deliver excellent customer experiences. And it works: when Accenture Interactive helped a UK-based building society to re-orient to employee experience, average branch NPS increased to +90 and customer satisfaction increased to 99%.<sup>8</sup>

### What do organizations need to do?

**Measure for sustainable productivity.** This means abandoning presenteeism and aiming instead for high quality outcomes that can be maintained long term. An example of this would be measuring your customers’ relationship with your employee – did they feel listened to? Was your employee motivated to support the customer because they were being supported in turn? For organizations, that might mean delivering the same exceptional results but on a more reasonable timeline. Designing a workplace experience focused on outcomes and wellbeing will attract and retain the best talent out there and increase customer satisfaction, loyalty and value.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2021/04/05/indeed-study-shows-that-worker-burnout-is-at-frighteningly-high-levels-here-is-what-you-need-to-do-now/?sh=2f134cac23bb>

<sup>8</sup> Fjord Coventry Building Society project



# 05

## Belief: Location is the most important factor

### Reality: The most important thing to figure out is how we enable smart work anywhere

The literature on hybrid working is dominated by calls to action to update floor plans, invest in remote working tools and update employee contracts to flexible working. These are not wrong, but the full extent of the reality is more complex, so we need to think more deeply:

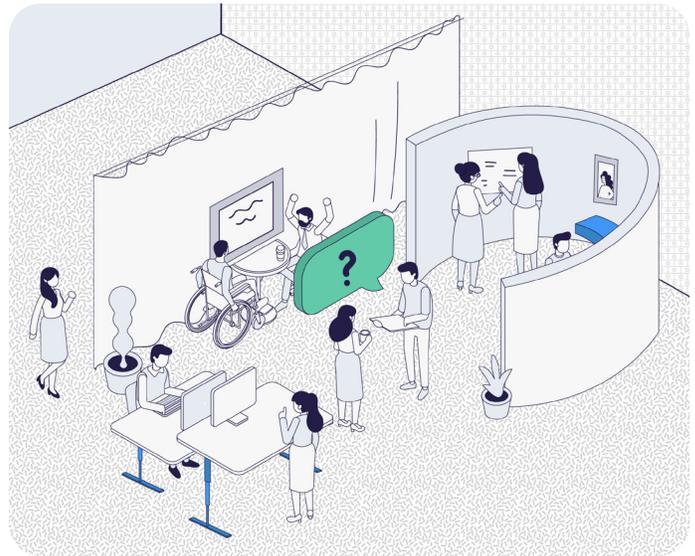
**Space:** space is a combination of elements like format, ergonomics, furniture, lighting, acoustics and branding – to name a few – that need to be applied across offices, the home and third spaces, such as co-working sites.

**Digital:** technology infrastructure and remote working tools are key, but if you don't invest in support and training it doesn't matter how snazzy they are – employees won't be able to use them.

**Culture:** the personality of your organization needs to be felt across every touch point. This means creating rituals, support programs and incentives that build a sense of belonging wherever your workers are.

**Operations:** these are the policies, standards and processes that enable you to diffuse culture and positive experiences consistently across digital and physical spaces.

And finally, **responsibility:** inclusion, diversity, sustainability, wellbeing. In a brave new world where organizations are expected to take a stance on right and wrong, these are the ethical fibers that should run through the heart of your future work experience.



*There is no single hybrid template to suit every business. Organizations need to be open-minded and ready to experiment.*

## What do organizations need to do?

**Don't look for a silver bullet.** We recommend not worrying about finding the dream hybrid model – solutions will look different for every organization and we are in uncharted territory, so seeking out a magic formula won't yield the right results. Organizations who will get this right will be prepared for experimentation. Testing low-tech solutions that focus on culture and responsibility across physical and digital experiences will help to achieve success. In parallel, they will likely invest in support and training, and create policies and processes that can be replicated across any future models.

# What To Do Next

**We're questioning these five beliefs to design a future work experience that lasts. Will you join us?**



## **01 Rebuild relationships**

Build a new relationship with employees based on freedom of choice.



## **02 Rethink communication**

Work with employees to understand the role of work for them but remember that sometimes we're at our best when we are pushed out of our comfort zone.



## **03 Design for change**

Consciously design the future of work around keeping positive behaviors and reversing those that lead to burnout and exclusion.



## **04 Sustainable productivity**

Defining success as employee wellbeing, belonging and the outcomes they produce will help to ensure you get the best, from the best.



## **05 No silver bullet**

Don't get hung up on locations. Use physical space, digital support, and culture as lenses to test and learn your future work experiences.

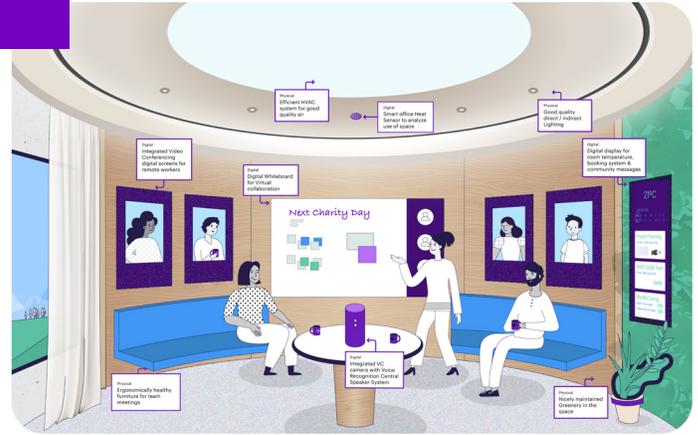
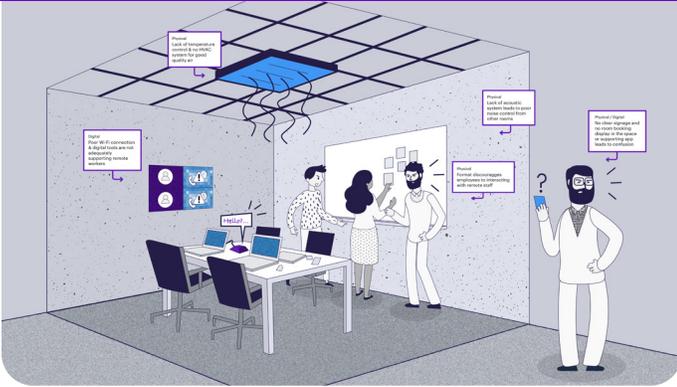
Reimagining the employee experience is an important step on the journey to becoming a Business of Experience, which we believe is the key to securing long-term growth. It falls within the fourth "winning way", which is to sync the tech, data and human agendas.

Some variety of hybrid working may be exactly what many companies need to succeed — the challenge is defining what exactly that looks like and how to evolve it in response to people's needs as they change.

# Let's Imagine The Near Future

The future of work experience is not going to be easy – we'll need to test and learn. Let's see what could make the difference between a good and bad experience.

## Working from the office



### Bad hybrid experience

The train was packed at peak time. When you arrived at the office, you needed some time to decompress from the stressful journey.

You booked a space, but the temperamental technology failed, so colleagues working remotely couldn't join the meeting. You had to reschedule and push the timeline back.

At lunch, you had to eat at your desk as there was no space in the eating area.

After lunch you had some focused work to do, but your desk is located underneath the air con, which is cold and noisy. Also, you were distracted by your colleagues talking and having meetings in the open plan office.

The journey home was the same as the journey in – hot and busy. When you arrived home, you planned to go to the gym, but you felt drained from the day, so chose to have an early night. You couldn't sleep, due to worrying about how much work you needed to catch up on and the idea of doing it all again.

### Good hybrid experience

You got up early to miss the rush hour, knowing you can leave earlier in the afternoon, which suits you. As you were one of the first people in, you got some focused work done in the social garden area.

You joined your team in one of the collaboration spaces, which you'd prebooked via an app, where you specified the number of people and setup you needed so the space is a suitable size to stay safe. The rest of the team joined virtually and raised their hands digitally, so their voices were heard.

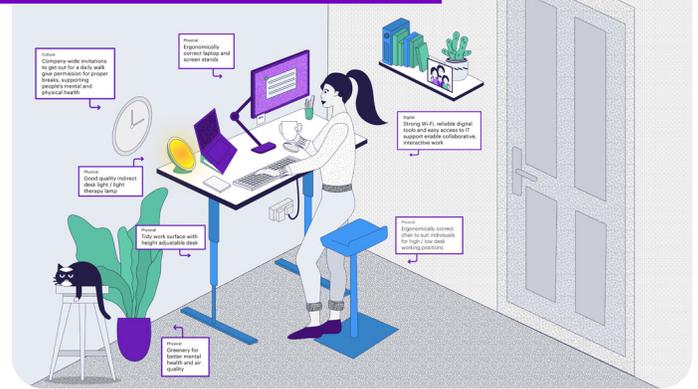
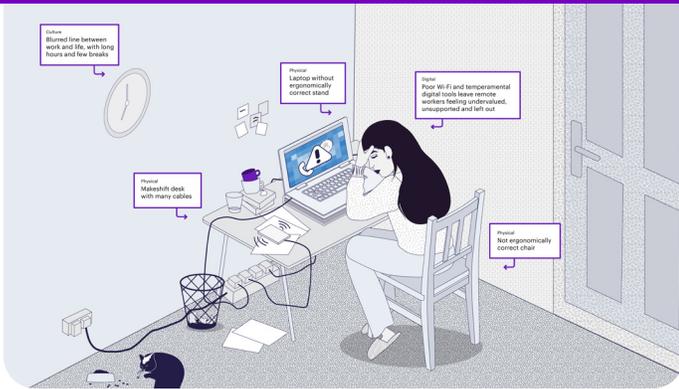
The team was buzzing after the collaboration session with the client, so they, as well as a few others from the office, all went to lunch together. You set your status to "out to lunch" so colleagues knew you were unavailable.

You had a private meeting with a client virtually, so you went into one of the available private sound-proof booths. In the booth you set the temperature and lighting to suit you. After your meeting, you headed home before the rush hour, as arranged.

Once back in your hometown, you went to the gym. The gym was quiet as most people work 9 to 5. After your gym session, you met some friends for dinner locally.



# Working from home or a third space



## Bad hybrid experience

You didn't sleep the night before because you saw an instant message come in late from your boss.

You went straight from your bed to your computer. You were going to have breakfast but one of your colleagues rang. The conversation went on longer than planned, and you had another meeting straight after, so you lost the time you'd set aside to prepare for the meeting. In addition, the internet connection was slow and you were worried about using the virtual collaboration tool so you didn't use it.

Every time you got up for a break, you heard the chat notifications or your phone ringing. In the end you didn't leave your desk.

You were so far behind on your work, you worked into the night. Once you'd finished, you ate some food out of the freezer – not a healthy option but quick and easy.

You felt completely overwhelmed and anxious, but you didn't feel like you could talk to your boss or colleagues, as you believed this would come across as weak, and that you can't do your job.

## Good hybrid experience

You listened to a podcast whilst eating breakfast. Before 09:00, you checked your e-mails for meetings. You felt prepared for the day.

You ran a collaborative session from home with colleagues in the office as well as some virtually. The session went well – everyone contributed, and you felt confident using the tool because you'd had training.

You were concerned that one of your team wasn't coping, so you offered to meet them in a third party place of their choice. This allowed them to open up in an environment they felt comfortable in. You met in a cafe workspace, where the colleague shared a few concerns. The talk really helped the colleague.

You had some focused work to do, so you clicked your Teams to busy, had a cup of tea in your branded mug that your team sent and began to work. Your home office has great WIFI, the option of a standing desk, as well as lots of natural light.

You're a keen gardener and your office faces your balcony where you've got some pot plants that work sent. It is the perfect place for focused work.

You worked a little later, but you didn't mind as you were in a flow. Once you finished, you read a book to close out the day.



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**Together, we can pioneer your future work experience, from space to culture and digital. Let's get ready for Smart Work Anywhere.**

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