



Creating a modern digital workplace

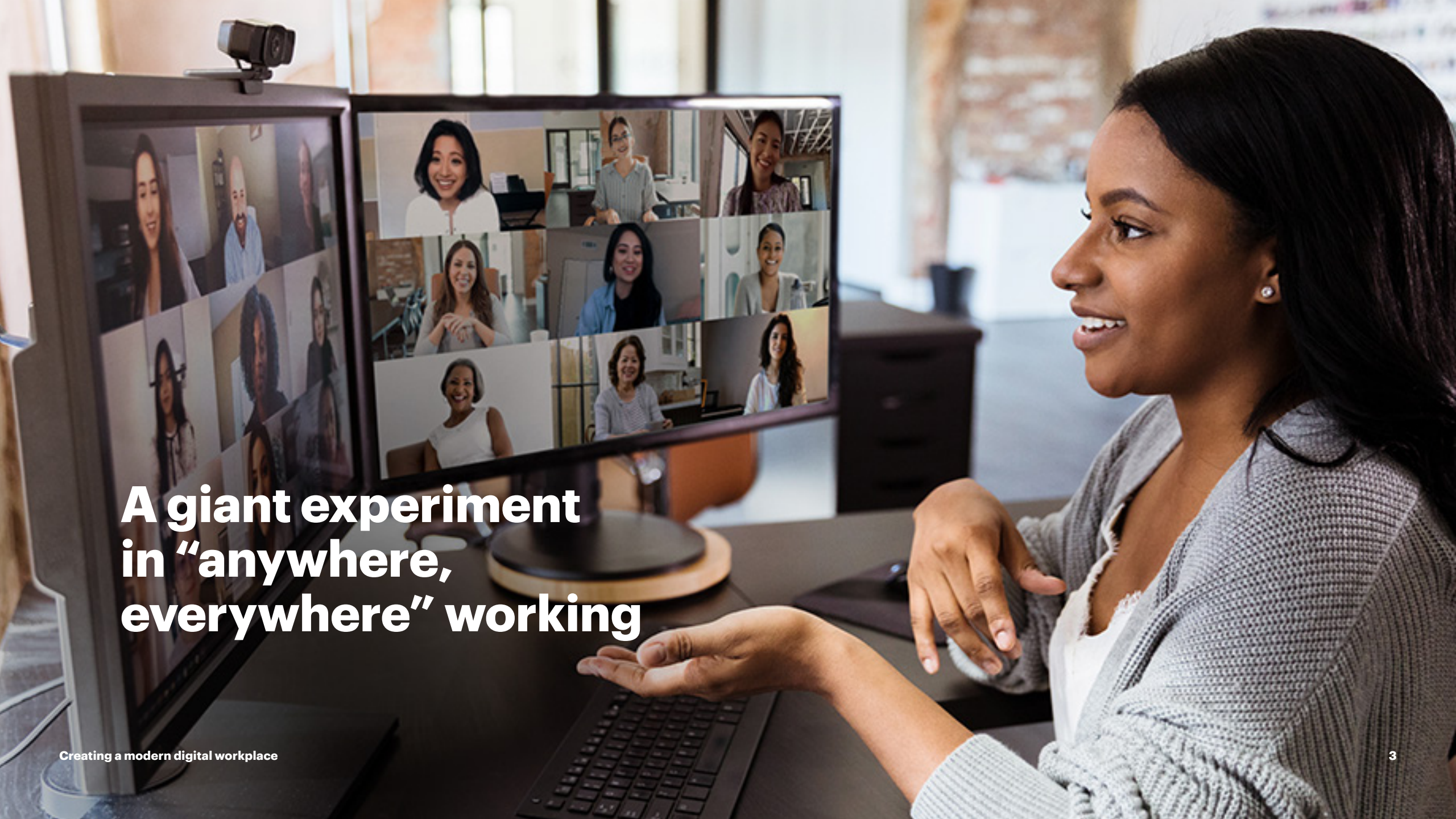
How the Cloud Continuum is changing the enterprise workplace—and how to respond

The enterprise workplace has permanently changed

The way people use and interact with physical and digital spaces at work has been evolving for years. In fact, the impact of digital technology on the workplace is a story, decades in the making. But what's changed recently is the growth of the cloud. Enterprises have recognized the efficiency, scalability, resilience, and performance that platforms like Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace bring—and they've migrated their workspaces accordingly.

This cloudification of the workplace is by no means finished. But as enterprises adapt their infrastructure strategies for the emerging **Cloud Continuum**, it's both accelerating and becoming more complex. In particular, companies are challenged to not only implement these continuously evolving cloud platforms, but also to ensure the whole business can actually use their full capabilities to drive growth and innovation.

Success in the Continuum isn't about simply doing the same old things on a new cloud platform—it's about rethinking what you do, as well as how you do it.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey cardigan, is sitting at a desk and smiling while looking at a large monitor. The monitor displays a video conference with multiple participants in a grid layout. A webcam is mounted on top of the monitor. The background is a bright, modern office space.

**A giant experiment
in “anywhere,
everywhere” working**

Of course, no-one can ignore the other great recent driver of change in the workplace: the COVID-19 pandemic. The disruption it caused forced the world into a giant experiment in remote working. And an omnichannel or hybrid way of working has emerged.

Some organizations have adapted quickly, particularly those who had the foresight to adopt the flexibility of the cloud early on. Others are still figuring out how to enable their people to connect and work from everywhere and anywhere.

This isn't only driving a more technology-enabled way of working; it's also impacting the way organizations build and sustain a coherent culture. Even in a part-remote, part-office based workplace model, employees won't be reconnecting with enterprise culture in a physical sense like they used to.

For many workers, the primary interface to the enterprise culture is now their screen. It's a genuinely radical shift that most organizations have only started to think through.



Workplace, workspace, workforce: How should enterprises respond?

A good way to think about responding to these dramatic changes is to consider the question in three interrelated parts: the human, the physical, and the digital. In other words, you need to think about both the digital and the physical spaces the enterprise has (the workspace and the workplace), as well as the people who use them (the workforce).

01

The changing workplace: bringing automation to the masses

The Cloud Continuum offers enterprises a step change in compute power, data storage, insight generation, and information accessibility. The challenge? To find a way to bring all this together in a way that works for employees in their day-to-day activities.

It's about empowering them with the right tools and insights at the right time, in the right way, via the right devices and platforms.



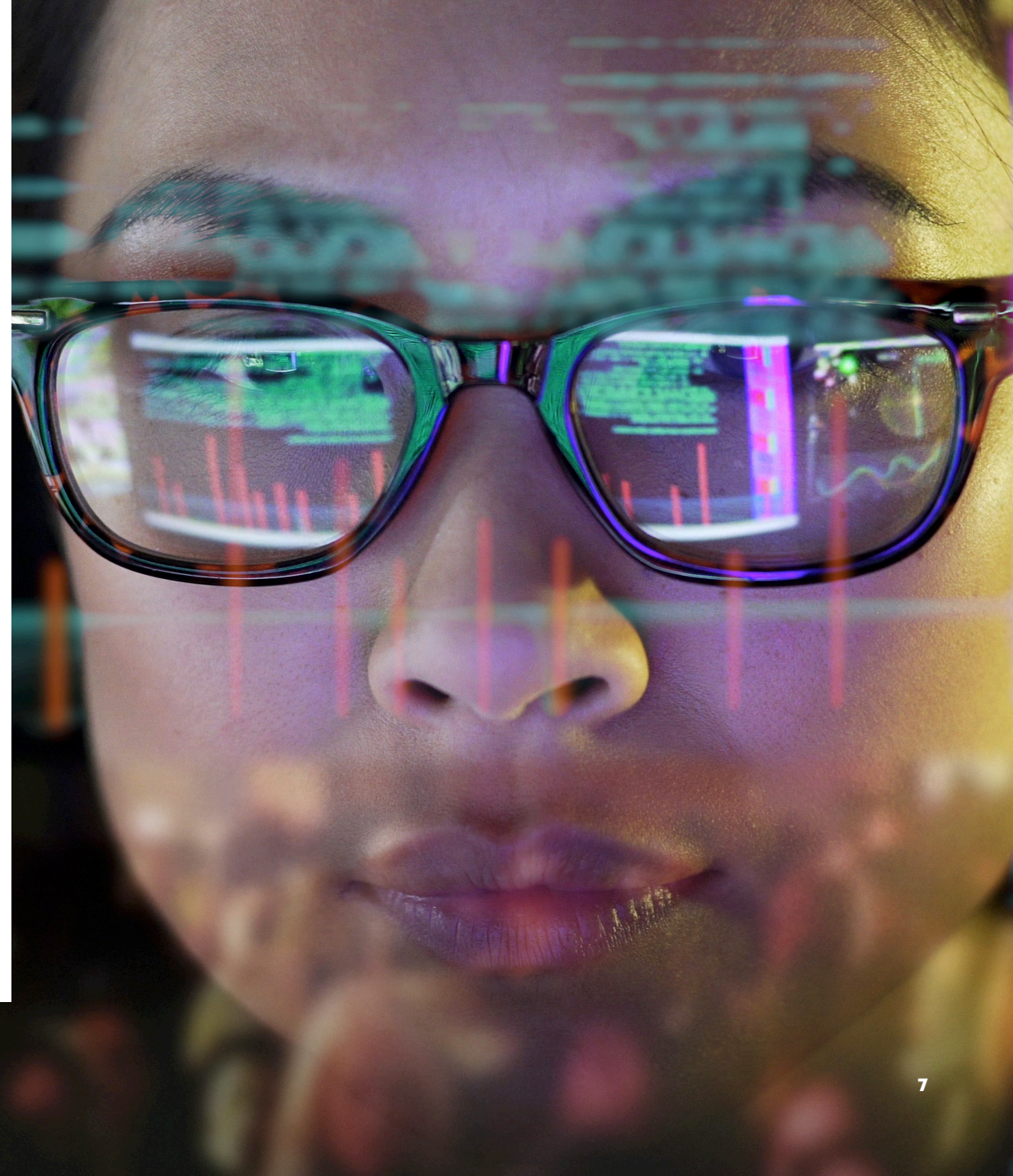
Automation for the people

One of the most effective ways of doing this can be to give more of the levers of control to individuals themselves. For example, there are now a range of low-code/no-code platforms that democratize the digital enterprise, enabling workers to augment their own decision-making, automate their own processes, or solve their own business problems with data.

This puts the power of automation and data insight in the hands of the people who can ultimately make best use of it, at the moment they most need it. It's true that not every worker has the skills to use these platforms from the get-go, and business leaders need to consider training and upskilling programs to get the most from them.

Process improvement as a service

Another option is to consider "process improvement as a service." In this model, the enterprise uses a centralized hub of process improvement talent (either internally or from an external provider) to help teams and individuals solve their unique business challenges. A good example is Microsoft Avanade's productivity studio concept. Here, a cadre of specialized process improvement experts help the business create new solutions to specific problems, which can then be spun off and reused elsewhere in the organization.



The integrated digital workplace

Any response to the Continuum should also consider workplace integration. Even today, workers frequently have to deal with a fragmented environment, with dozens of siloed solutions used for different daily activities.

Leading organizations are rethinking this, however. They're starting to build intelligently designed systems that give a worker what they need, when they need it. So, instead of having to go to 20 different applications to do their job, they can access the tools they need through their primary environment, whatever that may be (email, Microsoft Teams, or any other enterprise workspace).

It's about instrumenting the workplace to allow work to happen in a more integrated way. But there's no denying the trade-off between an integrated platform and a best-of-breed point solution. Best-of-breed solutions may be ideal, but they won't necessarily bring together everything workers need for their jobs. There's no simple answer to this. It's a balance between having a narrow solution that's exceptional at what it does versus an integrated platform that's good enough but brings everything together.



Interventions don't have to be radical to be effective. Accenture worked with executive leaders in one **healthcare company** to help them maximize the value of their Microsoft Teams platform. From simple actions like recording meeting notes to more extensive real-time collaboration, it's helped the organization's people make better use of the cloud technology they already had.

02

The changing workspace: everything is connected

A key objective for enterprises is to use Continuum capabilities to reduce friction in the workplace. And as everything gets connected, more and more opportunities are opening up. When assets and systems in the workplace are all able to gather and transmit data, information awareness is transformed.



What could you do with a digital twin of your workspace?

Take something like workplace occupancy. In the past, if they wanted to understand how well their buildings were being used, organizations would have to employ people to walk the floors, validating that desks were occupied, meeting rooms were being used, and so on. But thanks to cloud, it's now relatively simple to connect the dots between different systems, work out who's doing what, and where, at any one moment, and analyze this information in real time.

Taking this a step further, the enterprise can start to build a "digital twin" (a real-time digital representation) of its entire physical workplace. The insights generated can be transformative, not only for the efficient use of physical infrastructure, but also for other activities, such as capacity planning, energy consumption, and the enforcement of COVID protocols. For example, sensors monitoring pollen levels in real-time can activate additional filtering systems and improve health yet remain inactive, saving energy, when levels are at a satisfactory level.



What about access and security?

Many enterprise protocols and systems are still catching up with the fact that just about every employee—and every guest too—who enters the workplace has a high-powered smartphone in their pocket, many of which contain biometric security features. In conjunction with the Cloud Continuum, it's now entirely possible to use this to “2FA” the person. In other words, use the smartphone as a badge for authenticating individuals and giving them access to whichever spaces and systems they need. Given how cumbersome and manually intensive many of these processes still are today, the potential to reduce workplace friction is huge.



03

The changing workforce: instrumenting the human

So much of what we do in digital spaces produces data. And, increasingly, the same is true in physical spaces. With modern analytics technologies, it's becoming increasingly possible to pull workforce signals and individual insights out of this vast volume of information.




A digital twin of the individual?

In fact, it's likely we'll soon be able to build real-time digital twins of people, just as we do for buildings and systems. Consider, for example, how data from Human Capital Management systems might be used in conjunction with other system data to determine whether an individual has the right skills for their role, or for the particular location or task they've been assigned on any one day.

Or what about monitoring an individual's well-being? One of the downsides to working anywhere/everywhere in a Cloud Continuum environment is the risk of individual cognitive overload. Sometimes, there's simply too much information for any one person to process at once. This is a real issue already and is only set to grow as the continuum expands its footprint into day-to-day working life.

However, armed with the right data, in real-time, plus the correct data privacy and consent model, it will soon be possible to develop systems that can spot the signals of worker burnout or dissatisfaction as they happen—maybe even before the individual realizes—and intervene accordingly.



One pharmaceuticals company set out to improve workforce satisfaction by treating employees as if they were customers. Accenture helped the organization introduce new analytical models—many based on longstanding insights from customer research—to interpret employee reactions to corporate initiatives and inform a more targeted and intelligent approach.

Four key questions

Just as with all aspects of enterprise infrastructure, the Cloud Continuum calls on leaders to be bold in reenvisioning how their workplaces need to evolve. Here are some of the key things to think about first:

01 How are your people using your spaces today?

Every journey of transformation begins with understanding your starting point. So it pays to map out a typical day for each different persona who uses enterprise infrastructure—employees, guests, the wider workforce, and so on. The goal is to understand what they're doing, where, with what resources and systems, and where the friction lies in their day-to-day experiences.

02 Can your digital infrastructure support your workplace needs?

Consider what technology changes would alleviate workplace friction. That might mean, for example, improving network latency and/or instigating zero-trust secure access. It might mean upgrading device management in the cloud, introducing self-healing solutions that fix device issues in the background without disrupting the employee experience. Or it could mean pivoting to a remote self-service automated model, where employees can report problems themselves, and get them fixed automatically, without needing to wait for a technician's assistance.



03

How will you maintain your culture in the Continuum?

The goal should be to use the combination of the workplace and the workspace as a cultural anchor for the organization. Hybrid working is the future. And so, this is an opportunity to be bold and reconsider how spaces are best used, and how people can best be empowered to reconnect with the cultural identity of the enterprise.

04

Can your organization measure ROI in terms of wellness?

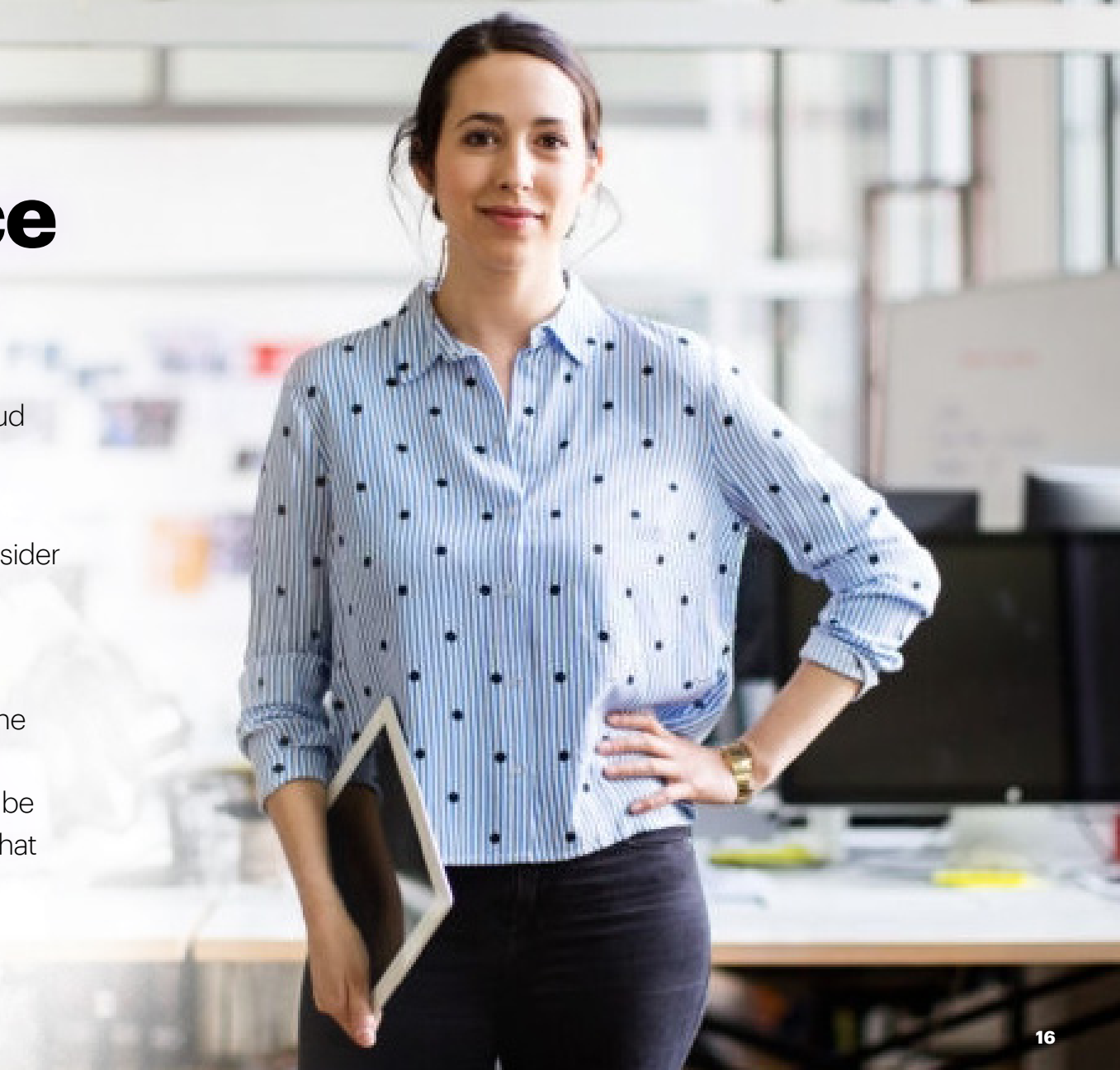
One of the hardest parts of investing in workplace reform? It's rarely a straight business case decision. There are few direct cost savings or quantifiable revenue uplifts to aim for. It's about being able to measure the overall "wellness" of the organization and its people. And using that insight to enable new ways of working and a more contented and productive workforce.



Get your workplace Continuum-ready

As enterprises shift their digital infrastructure towards the Cloud Continuum, new possibilities are opening up for physical and workplace infrastructure as well. And it's much more than a question of technology. It's creating new opportunities to consider the human aspect to enterprise infrastructure, as well as the physical and the digital.

In fact, employee experience is the core of the workplace in the Continuum. And with a human-centered strategy, enterprises can think radically about how the Cloud Continuum can best be leveraged to optimize the workplace for the benefit of those that matter most—the people who work there.



About the author



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Michael brings 20+ years of experience to the design and implementation of workplace technologies across almost every industry.

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