# Disrupting workforce stereotypes through digital transformation

December 2017

# In a nutshell

The workplace has always been the visible face of change, shifting between evolution and revolution and varying by country, industry and job role. In the modern era, the knowledge worker has typically driven business productivity and value creation within the organisation, but digital transformation is now disrupting workforce stereotypes.

Driven by innovation in mobile devices, cloud services and new application delivery models, digital transformation is changing the way that organisations sense and respond to change. In some organisations, manual workers are just as likely to interact with digital business systems as are knowledge workers, and sales and service workers are likely to be the most frequent users of digital communication and collaboration technologies.

A recent study of managers and CEOs shows that business professionals are increasingly involved in shaping the digital workplace, and this in turn is reshaping the products, services, and customer experiences that organisations deliver.
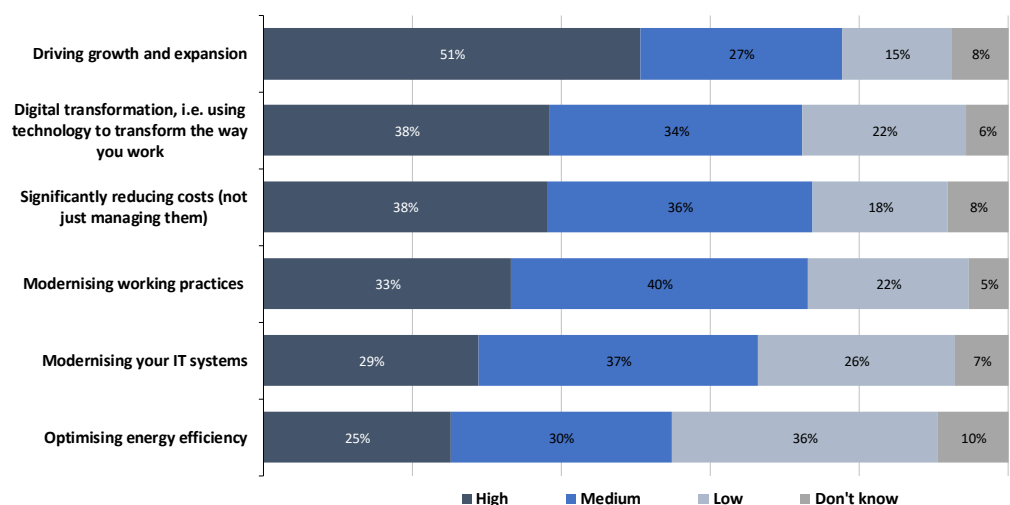
# Digital workplace: It's where customer value is designed, developed, managed and delivered

Historically, we've seen a clear division of responsibility between IT departments and the business side of the house when it comes to shaping the technology agenda of organisations. However, this has started to change in recent years, and a UK-wide survey of 734 online readers of The Independent ([www. independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)) and Evening Standard ([www.standard.co.uk](http://www.standard.co.uk)) websites confirms that this demarcation line is now well and truly blurred.

*Growth and expansion are high priority business goals for many companies.*

Growth and expansion are high priority business goals for many companies, and the survey respondents (see Appendix A for details of the research sample) tell us that their organisations are no different (Figure 1). It's the talent, commitment, creativity and ingenuity of the workforce that propels an organisation towards its goals, and with digital transformation also high on the agenda, we can see why digital workplace strategy and investment decision making are of equal importance to both employees and employers.

*Figure 1*
**Would you regard the following as a high, medium or low priority for your business at the moment?**



| | High | Medium | Low | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Driving growth and expansion | 51% | 27% | 15% | 8% |
| Digital transformation, i.e. using technology to transform the way you work | 38% | 34% | 22% | 6% |
| Significantly reducing costs (not just managing them) | 38% | 36% | 18% | 8% |
| Modernising working practices | 33% | 40% | 22% | 5% |
| Modernising your IT systems | 29% | 37% | 26% | 7% |
| Optimising energy efficiency | 25% | 30% | 36% | 10% |

*Digital transformation is primarily about changing the way your organisation goes about its business.*

Digital transformation is primarily about changing the way your organisation goes about its business, using a mix of digital technologies – including workplace technologies – to increase market relevancy and business opportunity. Tinkering around the edges is unlikely to produce the kind of step-change that some organisations are looking for, so significant, and sometimes quite radical, IT modernisation programmes will be required to facilitate new ways of working. Therefore, the input from business professionals and their teams is relevant and useful; complementing the views and insights of CIOs and IT managers.

Engaged employees care about the tools they use to do their jobs and the results they help them achieve. There will always be those who feel ambivalent about technology, but 75% of business professionals surveyed in this study say that they care a lot about the technology they personally use to do their job.

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The use of personal mobile devices for business purposes has driven competition within some segments of the collaboration market, such as with file sync and share applications. No one wants to be reprimanded for losing company data, but the need and urgency of getting the job done has pushed some employees towards the use of apps designed for the consumer, not the enterprise market.
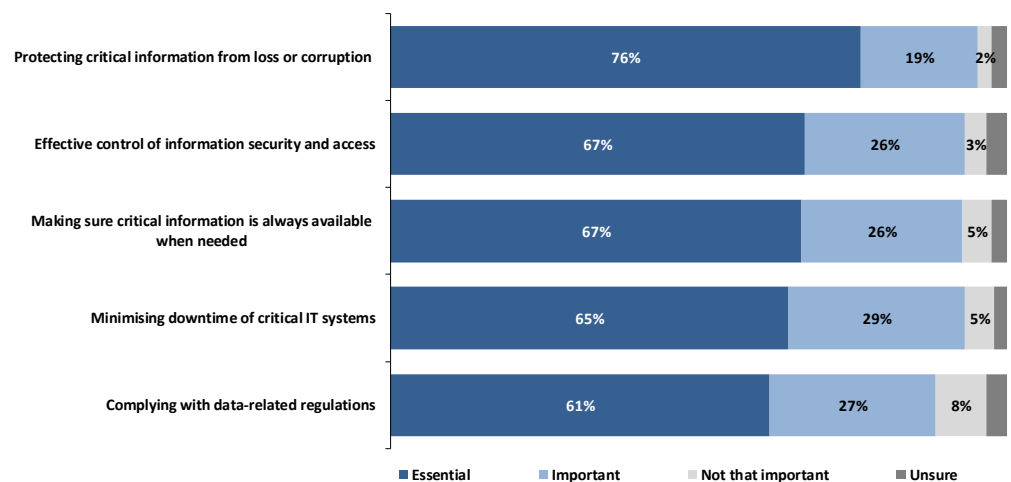
# Managing the confidentiality, integrity and availability of workplace data

With cyber threat levels rising, organisations are urged to proactively protect the digital workplace, including data integrity and customer privacy. However, the digital workplace has to be permeable to accommodate the flow of business information.

*The protection of critical data still sits at the top of the information management business priority list so far as IT professionals are concerned.*

Business leaders are constantly looking for ways to reduce friction and streamline operations, so in the digital age this means making information management a core business competency, especially when it comes to employee handling of sensitive data.

The protection of critical data still sits at the top of the information management business priority list so far as IT professionals are concerned (Figure 2), but it will be interesting to see how this changes during the runup to May 2018 when General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) kicks-in. GDPR is clearly a business responsibility, but we're already seeing IT departments carrying much of the burden as organisations make their preparations.

*Figure 2*
How important are the following to your business?

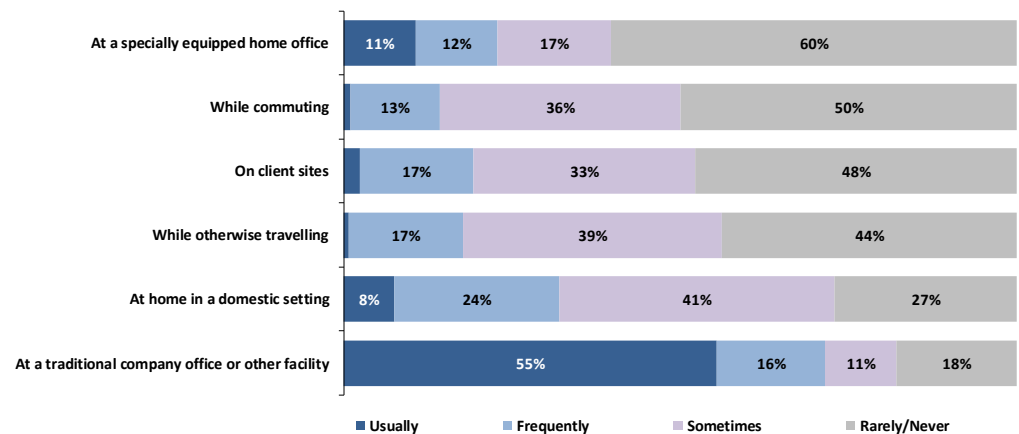| | Essential | Important | Not that important | Unsure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Protecting critical information from loss or corruption | 76% | 19% | 2% | |
| Effective control of information security and access | 67% | 26% | 3% | |
| Making sure critical information is always available when needed | 67% | 26% | 5% | |
| Minimising downtime of critical IT systems | 65% | 29% | 5% | |
| Complying with data-related regulations | 61% | 27% | 8% | |

*A third of respondents anticipate significant investments in the desktop computing environment over the coming year.*

Around a third of survey respondents anticipate significant investments in the desktop computing environment over the coming year, including spend in security and access facilities. Significant investments in storage, data protection and disaster recovery solutions are a sign-of-the-times too, highlighting the fact that information management and its supporting infrastructure are business critical elements.

The traditional company office is still the place where most business professionals go to do their job, but mobile devices, wireless networks, broadband connectivity, and cloud services are clearly enabling new workstyles and collaboration patterns (Figure 3). If anything, we're seeing a broader mix of working patterns emerging, with technology being more of an enabler rather than a driver.

*Figure 3*

**How much do you work in the following locations?**



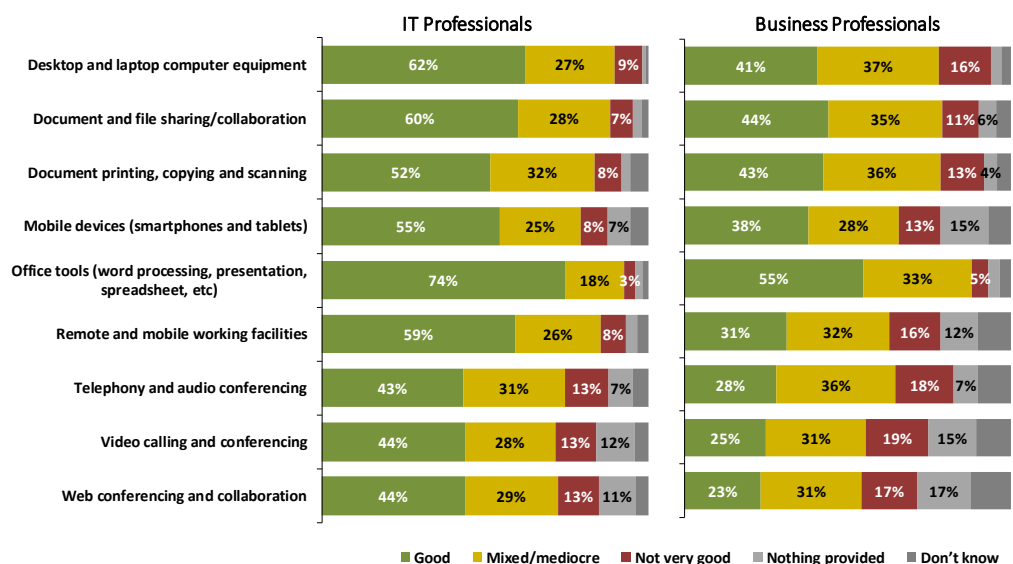| | Usually | Frequently | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| At a specially equipped home office | | 11% | 12% | 17% | 60% |
| While commuting | | 13% | 36% | 50% |
| On client sites | | 17% | 33% | 48% |
| While otherwise travelling | | 17% | 39% | 44% |
| At home in a domestic setting | 8% | 24% | 41% | 27% |
| At a traditional company office or other facility | 55% | 16% | 11% | 18% |

# The modern digital workplace: fact or fiction?

*IT and non-IT roles have different perceptions when it comes to the current state of IT.*

In keeping with observations from other studies, respondents grouped by IT and non-IT roles have different perceptions when it comes to the current state of IT (Figure 4). This is undoubtedly linked with IT consumerisation and the fact that employees are often comparing business IT facilities with the latest consumer offerings.

*Figure 4*

**How would you sum up the IT and communication facilities provided by your company?**



IT Professionals / Business Professionals

| | IT Professionals | | | Business Professionals | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desktop and laptop computer equipment | 62% | 27% | 9% | 41% | 37% | 16% | |
| Document and file sharing/collaboration | 60% | 28% | 7% | 44% | 35% | 11% 6% | |
| Document printing, copying and scanning | 52% | 32% | 8% | 43% | 36% | 13% 4% | |
| Mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) | 55% | 25% | 8% 7% | 38% | 28% | 13% | 15% |
| Office tools (word processing, presentation, spreadsheet, etc) | 74% | 18% 3% | | 55% | 33% | 5% | |
| Remote and mobile working facilities | 59% | 26% | 8% | 31% | 32% | 16% | 12% |
| Telephony and audio conferencing | 43% | 31% | 13% 7% | 28% | 36% | 18% | 7% |
| Video calling and conferencing | 44% | 28% | 13% 12% | 25% | 31% | 19% | 15% |
| Web conferencing and collaboration | 44% | 29% | 13% 11% | 23% | 31% | 17% | 17% |

■ Good  ■ Mixed/mediocre  ■ Not very good  ■ Nothing provided  ■ Don't know
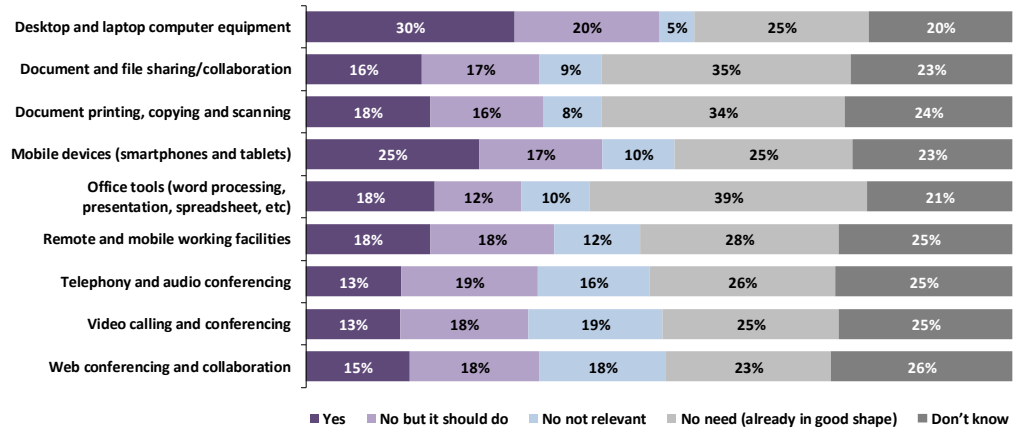
*The end-user computing environment is far from homogenous.*

The end-user computing environment is far from homogenous, with various constraints shaping the digital workplace. Budgets (time and money), industry regulation and compatibility with legacy systems are the more obvious reasons, but the accelerating rate of change and IT skills shortage is also leaving some firms behind.

There's encouraging news for hardware manufacturers in the survey data, with around a quarter of respondents anticipating investment plans for desktops, laptops and mobile devices over the coming year (Figure 5). If real business value can be demonstrated, then there's an additional opportunity for equipment suppliers in those areas where spend is not expected, but a need has been identified.

*Figure 5*

Do you anticipate your organisation investing in any of the following over the coming 12 months?



| | Yes | No but it should do | No not relevant | No need (already in good shape) | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desktop and laptop computer equipment | 30% | 20% | 5% | 25% | 20% |
| Document and file sharing/collaboration | 16% | 17% | 9% | 35% | 23% |
| Document printing, copying and scanning | 18% | 16% | 8% | 34% | 24% |
| Mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) | 25% | 17% | 10% | 25% | 23% |
| Office tools (word processing, presentation, spreadsheet, etc) | 18% | 12% | 10% | 39% | 21% |
| Remote and mobile working facilities | 18% | 18% | 12% | 28% | 25% |
| Telephony and audio conferencing | 13% | 19% | 16% | 26% | 25% |
| Video calling and conferencing | 13% | 18% | 19% | 25% | 25% |
| Web conferencing and collaboration | 15% | 18% | 18% | 23% | 26% |

# The bottom line

Products, services, and rewarding customer experiences are designed, delivered and managed by employees, so business leaders should do all they can to spark creativity and drive productivity by investing in the skills, tools, and environment of the workforce. As humans, it's hard for us to escape the familiarity and comfort of the status quo, but this we must when it comes to the future of work.

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Workforce productivity, collaboration and innovation are important drivers of business growth, so the design goal of the 'digital workplace' should be that of providing an easy-to-use, secure computing experience that can deliver the apps and data that the employee is likely to need, on any device that the employee is likely to use, from any location that the employee needs to be.

The notion of what constitutes the digital workplace will, of course, continue to shift and change as new technologies and business models emerge, and this will present a constant range of opportunities and challenges for those on the buy-side, and those on the supply-side, of digital transformation strategies. The means and approach by which these are met are likely to shape future business outcomes and possibilities.

Looking forward, we can see that digital transformation is just as likely to transform the working practices of the service worker and manual worker as it is the knowledge worker. New device types, new application styles, and new technologies will continue to reshape and redefine the world of work, disrupting the workplace for some and transforming it for others. So, if your digital workplace strategy isn't in some way moving forward, then your organisation is more likely to be falling behind.

# Appendix A: Research sample

The research upon which this Inside Track is based was designed and executed by Freeform Dynamics in collaboration with ESI Media. Data was collected from 734 UK respondents via an online survey. The study was completed in the Summer of 2017.
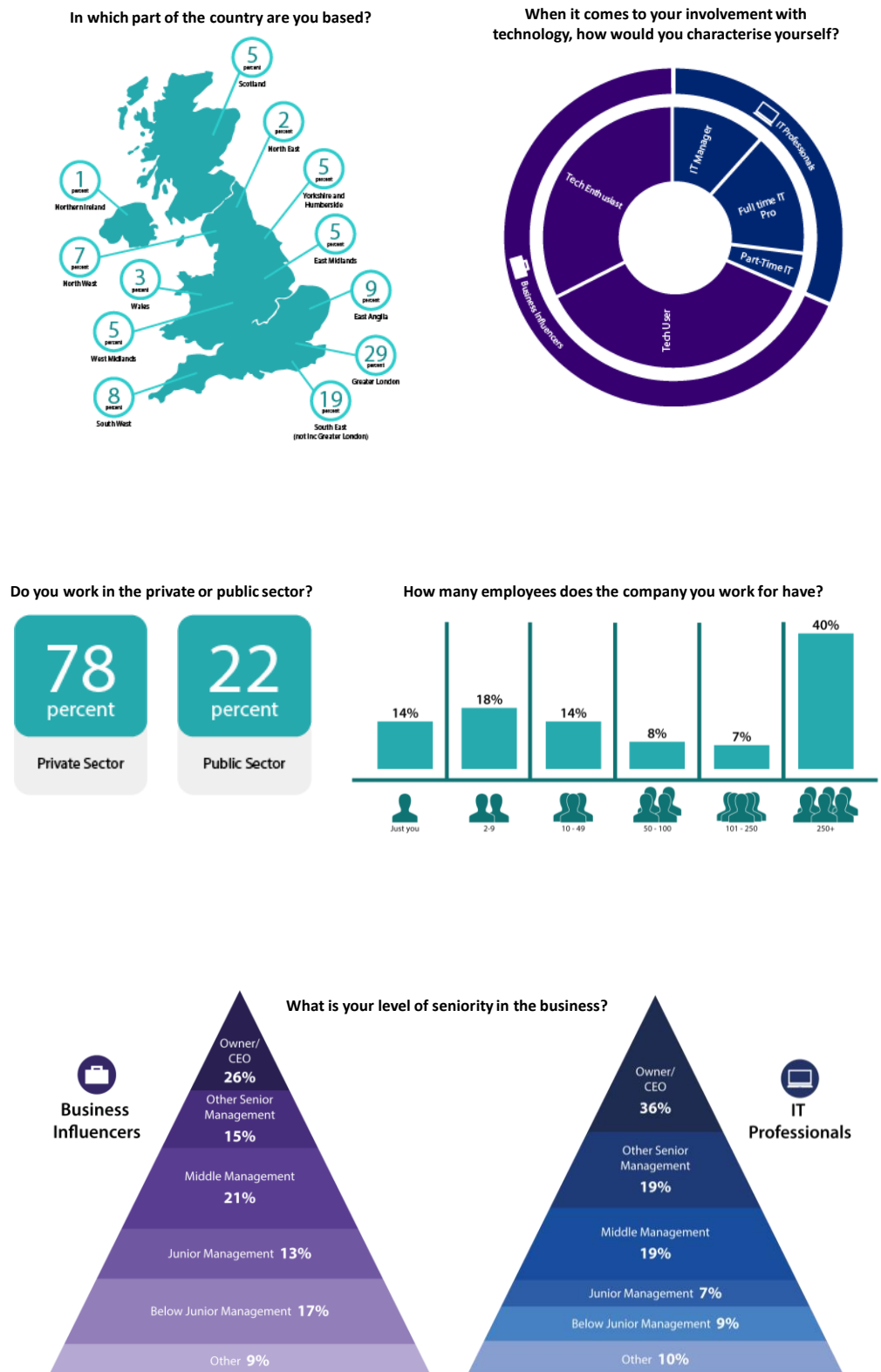


**In which part of the country are you based?**

- 5 percent — Scotland
- 2 percent — North East
- 1 percent — Northern Ireland
- 5 percent — Yorkshire and Humberside
- 7 percent — North West
- 5 percent — East Midlands
- 3 percent — Wales
- 9 percent — East Anglia
- 5 percent — West Midlands
- 29 percent — Greater London
- 8 percent — South West
- 19 percent — South East (not inc Greater London)

**When it comes to your involvement with technology, how would you characterise yourself?**

Business Influencers: Tech Enthusiast, Tech User
IT Professionals: IT Manager, Full time IT Pro, Part-Time IT

*Figure 6*

**Research sample**

**Do you work in the private or public sector?**

78 percent — Private Sector
22 percent — Public Sector

**How many employees does the company you work for have?**

- 14% — Just you
- 18% — 2-9
- 14% — 10 - 49
- 8% — 50 - 100
- 7% — 101 - 250
- 40% — 250+

**What is your level of seniority in the business?**

**Business Influencers**
- Owner/CEO 26%
- Other Senior Management 15%
- Middle Management 21%
- Junior Management 13%
- Below Junior Management 17%
- Other 9%

**IT Professionals**
- Owner/CEO 36%
- Other Senior Management 19%
- Middle Management 19%
- Junior Management 7%
- Below Junior Management 9%
- Other 10%

# About Freeform Dynamics

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