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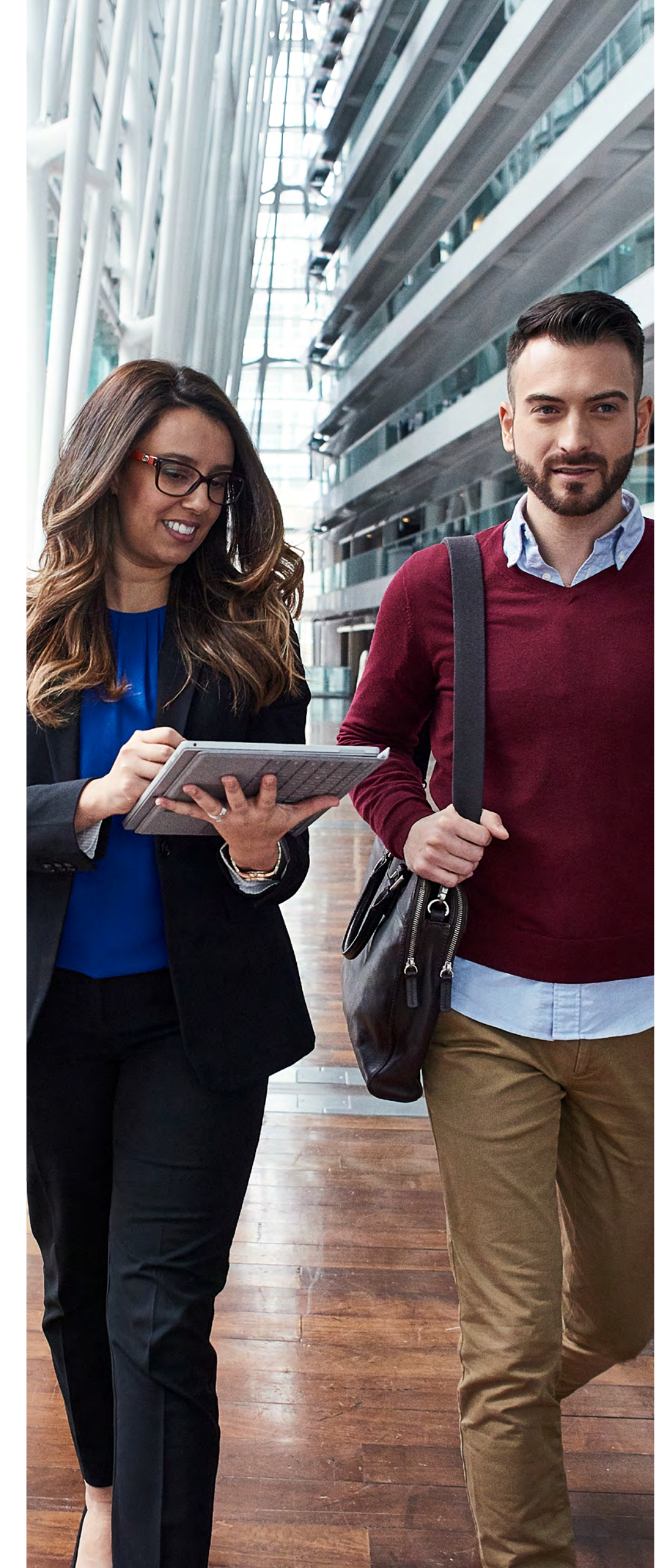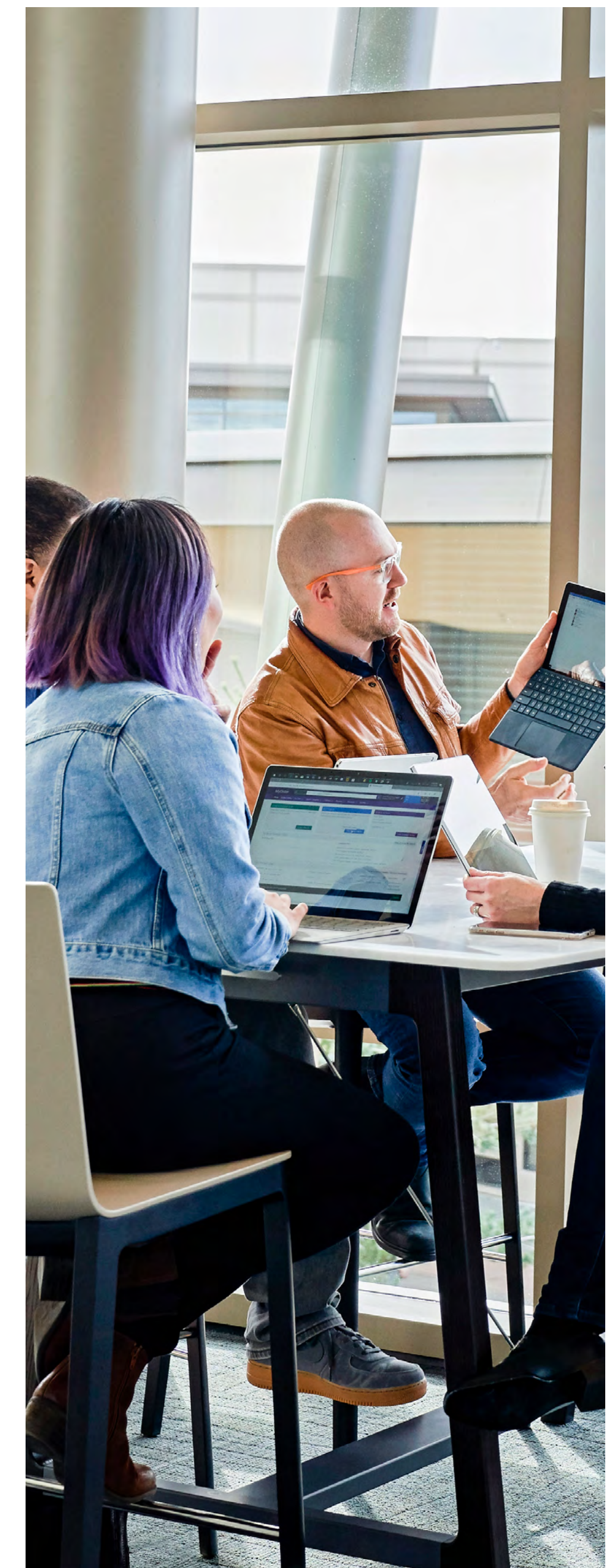
Best practices for creating a collaborative work culture

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Let's work together

Strong collaboration is a common goal in organizations, but it's not something every company knows how to do well. There was a time when true team collaboration was limited to in-person working sessions and a wall covered in sticky notes. But the workplace has changed. Employees are increasingly mobile, working from home, or on the other side of the world. Relying on face-to-face and sticky notes won't work anymore. In the last five years an explosion of collaboration technology has empowered collaboration across continents with video, screen-sharing, chat, and more.

Collaboration technology is important, but it's not enough to just provide chat and video conferencing tools to your employees. As your organization addresses changes in how people get work done most efficiently, it's a good idea to take some time to examine what is required for a truly collaborative culture to take root. True collaboration goes deeper than tools.

In this e-book, we'll examine some important considerations for creating a culture of collaboration in the workplace.

1

Is everyone collaborating except us?

Not yet. While our devices and offices may be flooded with collaboration tools, it seems most organizations haven't taken the time to build the foundation that enables strong teamwork.

A Nielsen study found that despite collaboration's benefits, many organizations are failing to reap its rewards. The study identified several barriers that can prevent teams from maximizing collaboration, including the perception that collaboration takes too much time, increases workload, and leads to personal conflict.

74% of workers believe their company is not collaborating effectively at all[1]

76% of respondents feel their organization doesn't provide them with the tools to do collaboration well[2]

65% of leaders agree that moving from hierarchical to team-based working is critical for their success, but only 7% say they are ready[3]

The benefits of collaboration are clear

When it's done well, collaboration improves both individual and company performance. Involving more collaborators leads to a larger pool of ideas, which creates more opportunities to identify a single idea that can be successful.

58% improvement in performance with 6+ collaborators[1]

36% improvement in performance with 3-5 collaborators[1]

A Stanford University study found that even the mere perception of working collectively on a task can supercharge performance. People who participated in the research and were primed to act collaboratively showed 64 percent longer time at a task than solitary peers, while reporting higher engagement levels, lower fatigue levels, and a higher success rate.[4]

5X Companies that promoted collaborative working were five times as likely to be high performing.[4]

2

Why is collaboration hard?

Effective and meaningful collaboration between two or more people requires that every person involved be willing to step out of the default comfort zone of working in a silo. We often expect collaboration to come together easily, simply because it's what's expected in the workplace. We're surprised when it's uncomfortable.

Here are the top reasons collaboration is challenging:

✔ **Collaboration requires letting go of control.** Or accepting a different version of control than we'd planned. Current research shows that people are nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to take a job that gives them more autonomy than to take a job that gives them more influence. Making decisions on your own is empowering and satisfying. Having others help decide your course of action is a big adjustment.

✅ **Collaboration requires getting to know your colleagues.** And letting them get to know you. If we don't know our colleagues well, we don't know what strengths, expertise, and experience they bring to our shared work, and we fail to value what a teammate can contribute. For people who are more private, it can be difficult to open up to colleagues. Building relationships with co-workers takes an investment of time and energy.

✅ **Collaboration can feel like confrontation.** In a collaborative workplace, we are expected to offer ideas, debate, and hold each other accountable. None of this is easy, and being direct with people can be frightening and stressful. It's often more comfortable to stay in our agreeable silos.

But being agreeable might not be best for the project. It's important for leadership to establish that differences in opinion are welcome and are often the key to innovation.

✅ **Collaboration requires sharing recognition.** If your company culture is one in which advancement is still a result of individual recognition only, employees may be hesitant to contribute fully to team-based efforts. They may fear their contributions will be overlooked or attributed to someone else. Transforming this part of company culture is key if you want collaboration to flourish: reward for team success in addition to individual contribution.

3

The one thing you need for a collaborative culture

The challenges to establishing a true collaborative culture are significant. But there's one key thing that can address the challenges and become the foundation of the collaborative culture you want. The one thing a workplace needs is trust.

Easy to say, but we know building trust in the workplace is anything but simple. Still, there are some key principles that can make building trust easier.

✓ Trust flows from the top down.

Leaders need to set the expectation of a trust-fueled workplace by deliberately building trust with workers. Staff look to leadership to set the tone, and if this one piece isn't in place, then trust can't take root. At the company-wide level, leadership builds trust by following through on promises, being clear about developments that impact employees, and by behaving consistently.

✅ Trust is built in small moments.

If leadership communicates openly with the entire team on a daily or near-daily basis, it's harder for mistrust to grow. Listening to employees and incorporating their input invites trust. If leadership takes a turn with the worst parking spot along with everyone else, trust blooms. When leadership sponsors meet-ups so the team can get to know each other, and leadership also participates completely, people feel safe in building relationships.

✅ Trust doesn't take a day off.

When things are going well within an organization, building trust from the top down comes more easily. But when things are rough, trust-building becomes even more important. Transparency about what's happening can ease fears and help people relax into their work, trusting that leadership will be honest about decisions that impact them.

4

Key practices for building a collaborative culture

Because trust is central to building a collaborative culture, let's start there. Here are 10 things you can do today to increase trust in your organization:

1. **Keep promises and honor requests**
Especially when it's easier not to.

2. **Assign clear responsibilities and tasks**
Structure gives us a framework for collaboration.

3. **Reward creativity and initiative**
Publicly, if possible.

4. **Mix and match skillsets on teams**
Relying on each other helps build trust and commitment.

5. **Celebrate employees' personal lives**
This shows it's safe for everyone to share their experiences and interests.

6. **Include**
Invite input and make sure everyone's at the table.

7. **Try to understand where other people are coming from**
Ask questions, listen to the answers.

8. **Communicate openly every day**
To the entire team.

9. **Embrace cultural differences**
Diverse perspectives are a key to creative innovation.

10. **Give people the tools they need**
Listening and responding shows people that they are valued.

All of these actions increase trust because all of them signal respect. If your goal is to build a truly collaborative culture, this is key. When you signal respect, you plant the seeds of trust. Where trust grows, collaboration follows.

How Microsoft Teams can help you transform workplace collaboration

Establishing a winning culture of collaboration means extending the benefits to all your employees. Providing effective tools that help employees connect and work together more efficiently plants the seeds of trust that are critical to your success. Microsoft Teams is the hub for teamwork in Office 365 and is designed to support connections, communication, and robust collaboration no matter where people are working from.

Microsoft Teams is the all-in-one platform where you and your team can chat, meet, edit documents, and build business processes. It makes collaboration easy by pulling together the team whether local or remote, so you can share pertinent information, assign tasks, schedule meetings, and collaborate on documents. With accessibility built in, everyone can participate. And Microsoft Teams is part of Office 365, so it comes with the enterprise grade security, compliance, and manageability that you expect from Microsoft.

Interested in learning more about collaboration and team-building strategies?

[1]Nielsen, "How collaboration drives innovation success: A benchmark study on collaborative ideation and its impact on innovation performance," March 2015.

[2]Collaborate Foundation, "State of Collaboration: How ready are we to work together?" June 2018.

[3]Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019, "Leading the social enterprise: Reinvent with a human focus,"

[4]Forbes, "New study finds that collaboration drives workplace performance," Adi Gaskell, June 2017.

[5]Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, "To have control over or to be free from others?" March 2016.