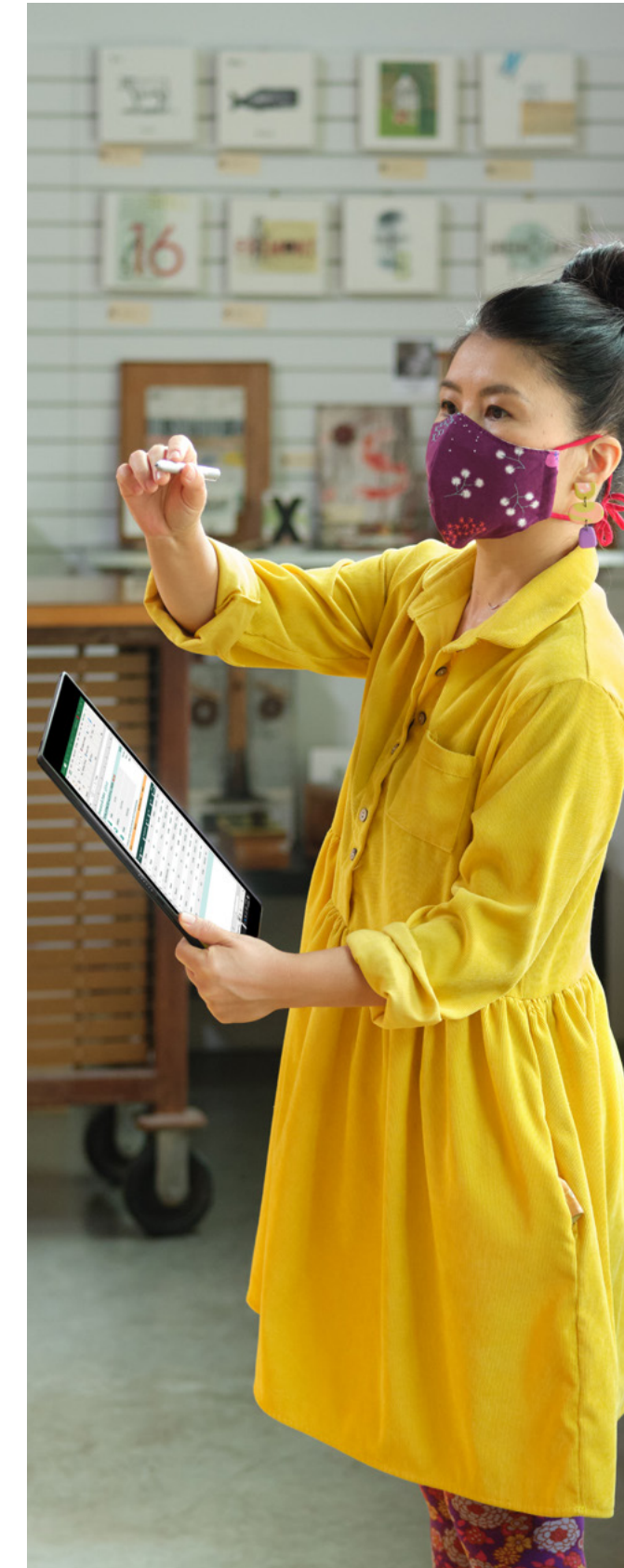
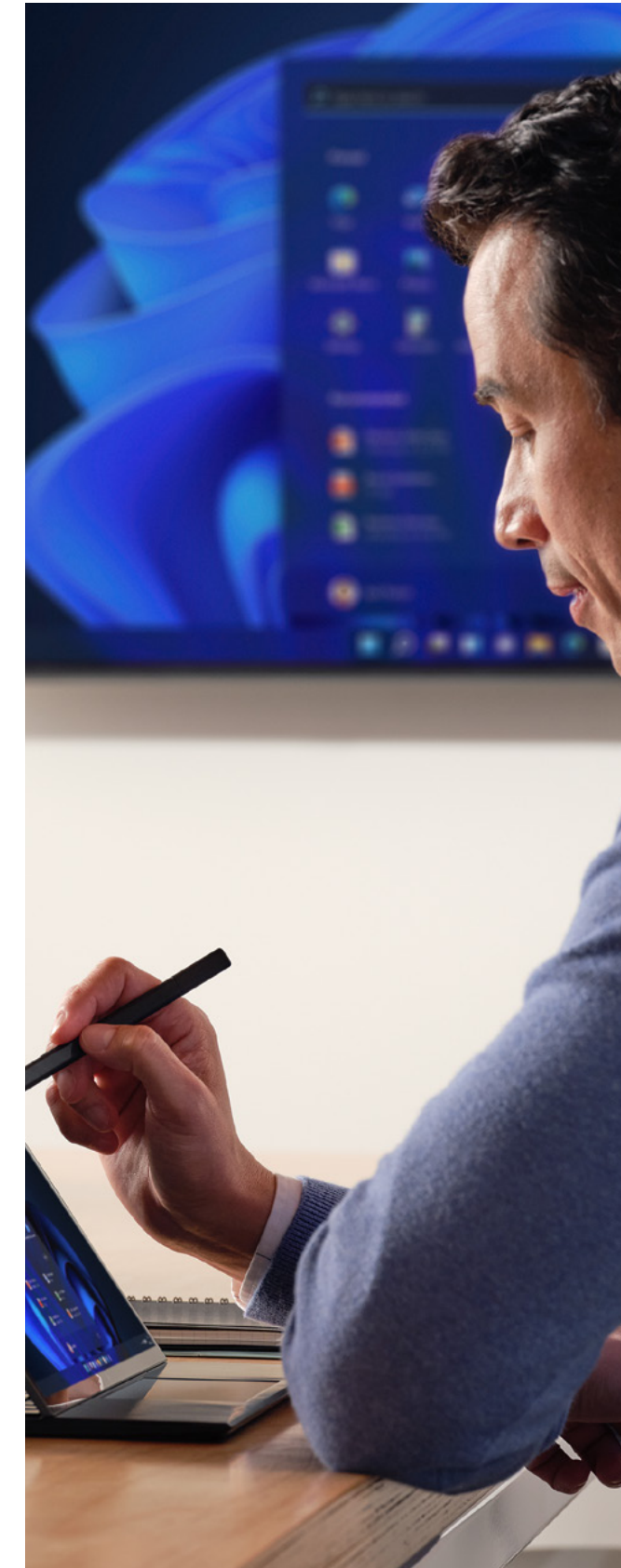


How to Improve Employee Engagement in a World of Hybrid Work



Introduction

Engaged employees enable your business to grow and achieve more. Improving that engagement requires the right culture and the right tools. Together, they empower people to do their best work, wherever they are.

Increasing employee engagement is not always easy. In fact, only 36 percent of US workers today consider themselves engaged.¹ Disengaged employees are more than twice as likely to look for new employment.¹ With employee quit rates reaching record highs in the past year, engagement is more important than ever to maintaining a stable, effective workforce.¹

The good news is that employee engagement held steady during the COVID-19 health crisis, even though hybrid work grew dramatically. Accelerated investment in hybrid-work tools

helped many companies stay productive during pandemic-related disruption. Now, engagement strategies must take hybrid work environments into account, where employees work remotely and in the office to varying degrees.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity. With the right solutions and the mandate to make the most of employee capabilities, you can go beyond productivity to drive engagement and excitement about the future.

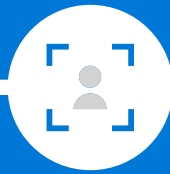
In this e-book, we discuss five ways you can use technology effectively to drive engagement in a world of hybrid work.

- 1 **Foster intentional collaboration**
- 2 **Take work-life balance seriously—and back up your commitment**
- 3 **Make engagement easy for employees**
- 4 **Embrace mobility**
- 5 **Build trust with always-on security**

¹ "U.S. Employee Engagement Holds Steady in First Half of 2021", Gallup, 2021.

1 Foster intentional collaboration

According to a 2021 Gartner report, “71 percent of HR leaders are more concerned about employee collaboration this year than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.”² When employees are in different locations, spontaneous teamwork is more challenging. That means you need to create collaboration opportunities intentionally. Thankfully, technology can provide employees with more options for collaboration. The results are striking. The Gartner report cited above notes that, “teams of knowledge workers who collaborate intentionally are nearly three times more likely to achieve high team innovation than teams that do not use an intentional approach.”



Engagement tip

Encourage people to schedule regular one-to-one catch-up chats with teammates, reports, or people on other teams, and set the example by doing the same thing yourself.³

² [“Collaboration in Hybrid Work Environments Takes Intentional Effort”](#), Gartner, 2021.

³ [“Seven Steps to Building A Healthier Meeting Culture”](#), Microsoft, 2021.



Action plan



Assess your current technology

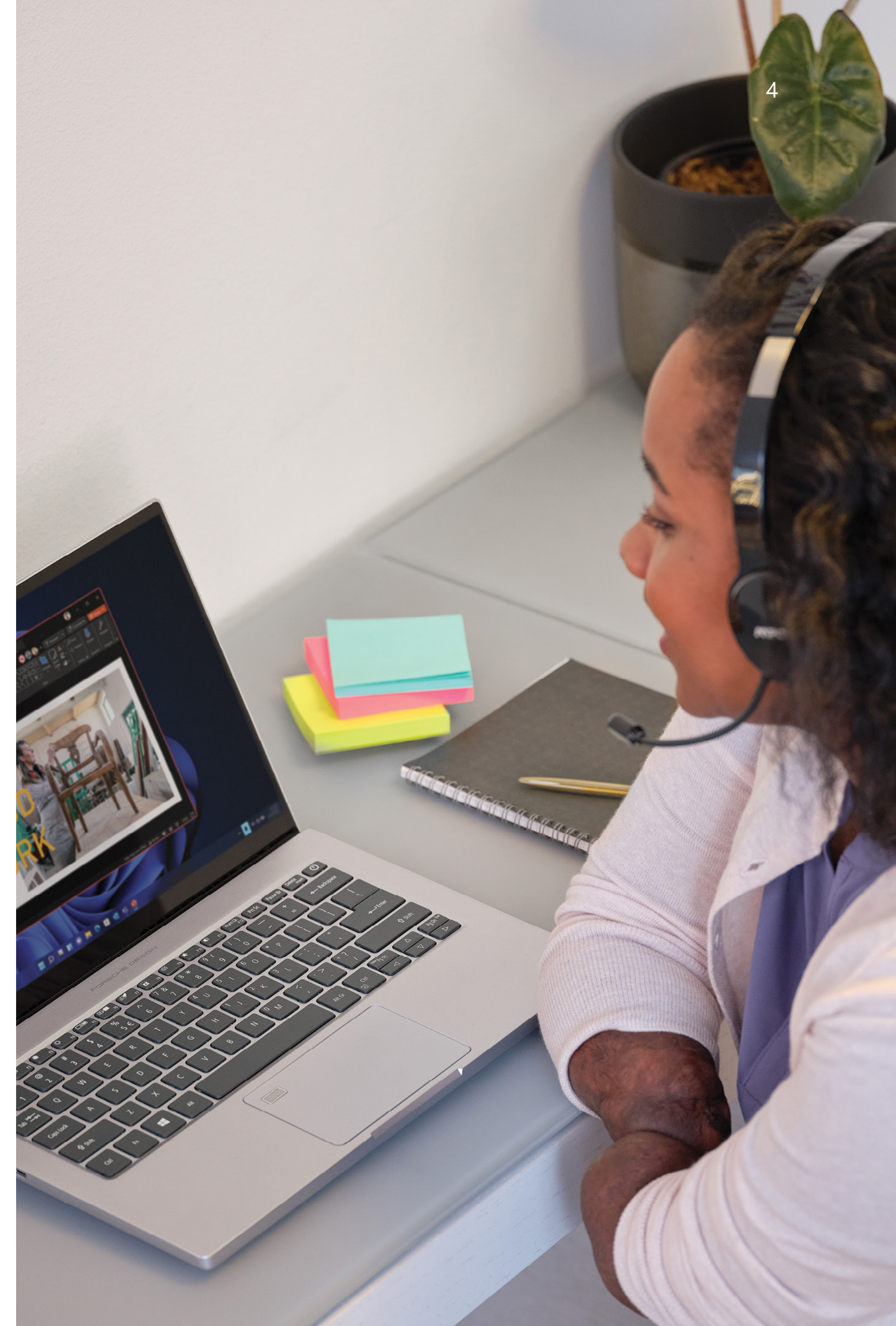
Do employees have access to the tools and environments they need to thrive when collaborating both remotely and in person? Can they effectively engage in mixed-mode collaboration where some people meet in person and others are remote? Ask employees what they need and be prepared to invest where there are gaps.



Get comfortable with asynchronous work

Real-time teamwork in meetings and presentations is important, but too much can cause burnout, especially when those meetings and presentations require screen time rather than face time. Use calls and meetings effectively and give people the flexibility to collaborate in other ways. Encourage in-person teams to start a video meeting so remote employees can easily join. Remote contributors feel more included during meetings when everyone is in the same virtual room.⁴

⁴ [“The future of work—the good, the challenging & the unknown”](#), Microsoft, 2020.



2 Take work-life balance seriously— and back up your commitment

Work-life balance is second only to compensation when people decide whether to seek new employment.⁵ McKinsey found that more than half of employees “would like their organizations to adopt more flexible hybrid virtual-working models, in which employees are sometimes on-premises and sometimes working remotely,” and that “better work-life balance” and “better flexibility for day-to-day work” are employees’ top two hopes for the future.⁶ One key to addressing work-life balance issues is to give your workers control over their schedules and tasks, allowing them to work remotely using the devices they prefer.



Engagement tip

Creating a culture where breaks and focus time are respected and encouraged is a good first step. Technology tools can help by allowing employees to quiet notifications and inform others of their status.⁷

⁵ “Pulse of the American Worker Survey: Post-Pandemic Work & Life”, Prudential, 2021.

⁶ “What employees are saying about the future of remote work”, McKinsey, 2021.

⁷ “The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?”, Microsoft, 2021.



Action plan



Set clear, consistent policies and apply them fairly

It's up to you to set policies for flex time, remote work, and other scheduling options. What matters most to employees is that they know the rules and see them being applied fairly. In the McKinsey survey, "organizations that convey more detailed, remote-relevant policies and approaches see greater increases [in well-being and productivity]. Employees who feel included in more detailed communication are nearly five times more likely to report increased productivity."⁶ Employee performance reviews should also be updated to focus on results, not where they are achieved. Set clear goals and ensure managers are aligned on how to measure and report progress.



Provide a remote-work tool set

Evaluate the effectiveness of the technology that employees currently use. Are they genuinely happy and engaged or are they just getting by? Can they find information quickly when they need it, and is that information up to date? Are they using collaboration tools effectively or defaulting to email? Is their hardware powerful enough to support the full breadth of workday tasks? The answers to these questions can help you direct investments most effectively. Microsoft Viva Insights can give managers visibility into work patterns that can lead to burnout and stress such as afterhours work, meeting overload, or too little focus time.

⁶ ["What employees are saying about the future of remote work"](#), McKinsey, 2021.



3

Make engagement easy for employees

When faced with the need to support remote work, organizations took varying approaches. Some had technology in place already. Some bought point solutions as needed. Others invested in a comprehensive platform.

While a best-of-breed approach with apps from different vendors does provide some flexibility, it comes at the expense of friction for employees. Requiring them to sign in to multiple apps several times a day can be surprisingly frustrating, and even a time drain. Everyday tasks such as sharing files, keeping documents up to date, communicating, and collaborating across multiple apps all require extra steps or complex integrations. Employees may look for workarounds, such as unapproved third-party apps, which can create security gaps and siloes. On this basic level—enabling employees to do their absolute best work—an integrated solution is likely to support engagement more effectively by reducing frustration and improving focus.



Engagement tip

Encourage employees to share secure links to files in the cloud rather than hard-copy attachments. Collaborators will always have the latest file, reducing the need to manage multiple versions.



Action plan



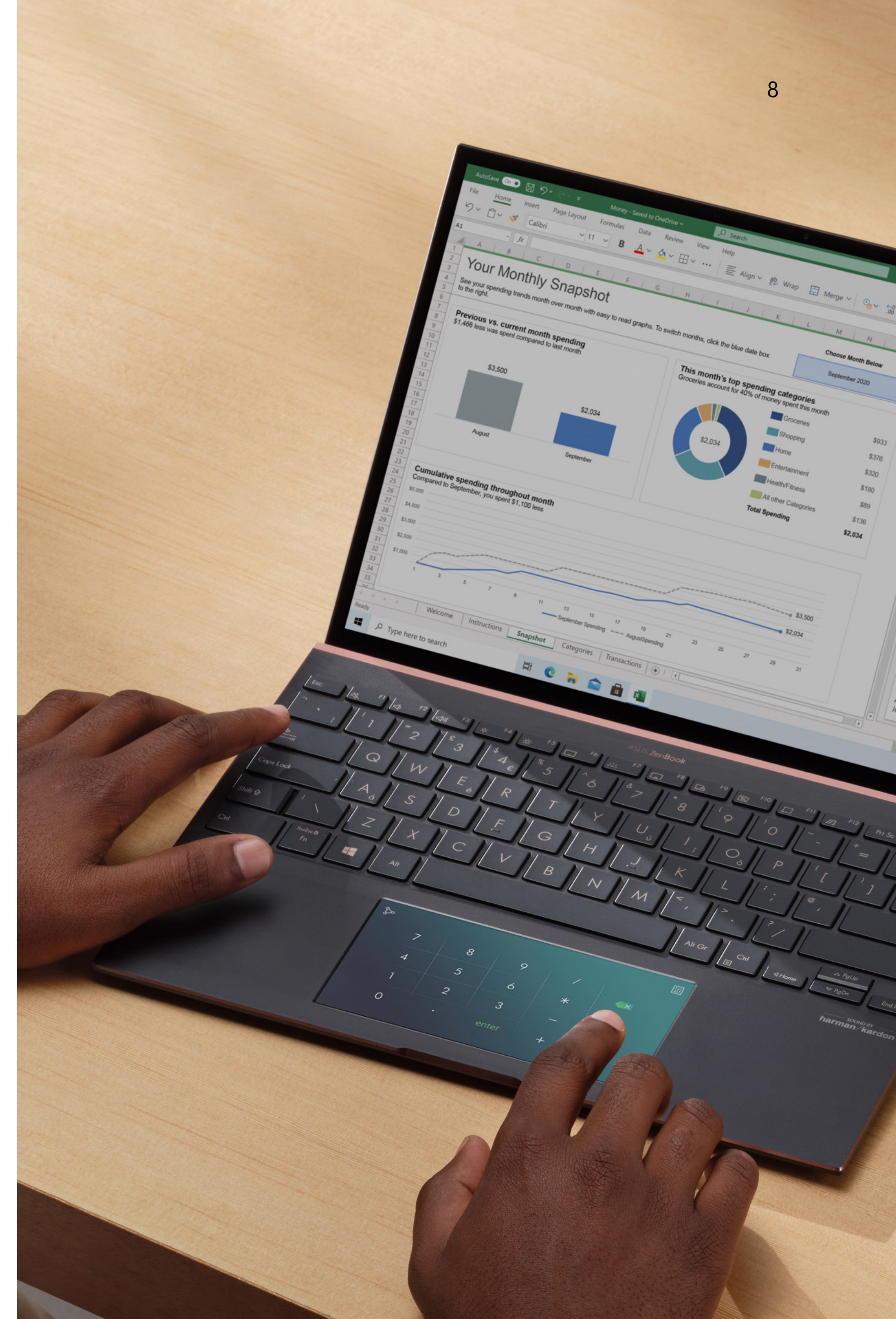
Focus on capabilities, not apps

Instead of looking at the technology first, consider the workday. What's inefficient? What's working well? What's causing employees to disengage? Where would you get the highest ROI out of greater engagement? Once you have your employees' feedback, make a list of the capabilities that you need rather than the specific applications.



Seek out integrated, cloud-based solutions that minimize friction

Integrated, cloud-based solutions enable your team to share data and resources in one place, so employees can enjoy a seamless experience without signing in and out of multiple apps or hunting down information in disconnected systems. They also benefit time- and budget-constrained IT teams by streamlining management and costs. Finally, before adopting any new point solution, it is important to make sure you're not overlooking capabilities that already exist within the solutions your employees already use.



4 Embrace mobility

Growth in hybrid work has accelerated the trend away from the traditional desktop. A Gartner survey⁸ found that digital workers increased their reliance on portable devices during 2020. Workers reported an 11 percent increase in the proportion of their work time spent on laptops, smartphones, or tablets. The proportion of their time spent on desktops declined by 8 percent.⁸ Desktops are still in the mix, too, making up 37 percent of the total.

It's never been more critical to provide a seamless experience across devices. Consider these questions to help evaluate your employee experience. Can they switch from laptop to tablet to smartphone while working on the same document, and have confidence they're still seeing the latest version of their work? Can they be sure everyone on their team will receive a critical document ahead of a key deadline? Can they work offline and know their emails, calendar, and documents will sync properly when they reconnect? Do they have access to devices that are designed well for the productivity tools on your shortlist?

⁸ "Gartner Survey Finds 1-in-5 Workers Consider Themselves Digital Technology Experts Since COVID-19", Gartner, 2021.



Engagement tip

Look for solutions that allow you to work both online and offline using any device, so employees are not slowed down by poor connectivity.



Action plan



Prioritize mobility

Assess every business application in simple terms. Can its mobile experience match its desktop capabilities? Does that experience extend to every mobile device that matters to you and your employees? Then, seek mobile devices that maximize the capabilities of those business applications.



Offline matters just as much as online

An application should be just as functional offline as it is online. Can employees still view emails, contacts, and calendars? Can they access and edit documents? When a device goes back online, does everything sync and update seamlessly?



5

Build trust with always-on security

The traditional corporate walled-garden approach to data management doesn't work when corporate data is on employee phones and laptops. Data breaches and other security incidents can affect employee engagement and performance, taking time away from productive tasks and undermining employee confidence in your business if they lose important data or files. That's especially true when dealing with lost and stolen mobile devices—a common problem that can be either a momentary inconvenience or a major setback, depending on your business's mobile device location and remote-wipe options.



Engagement tip

Many organizations still give remote workers access to corporate resources through a Virtual Private Network. Microsoft has shifted to using cloud-based apps and services, which reduces access to internal networks and provides a better experience for employees.⁹



⁹ "Boosting productivity and security at Microsoft with a move to Microsoft Azure", Microsoft, 2021.

Action plan



Rethink security considering your hybrid work approach

Trying to apply an on-premises security mindset to a hybrid world hinders employees and leaves you vulnerable. How do employees currently share access to files and data? Can you delete business information from employees' devices without affecting their personal data? Do you have appropriate control over cloud and mobile apps? If you uncover gaps, look for technology platforms built to address these issues without a lot of extra work from you.



Invest in modern devices

Whether you purchase employee devices directly or reimburse or subsidize them, consider how the selection will affect security and manageability. Your ability to update devices against new security threats and comply with industry regulations may not be as strong as you thought. As you shop for new devices, look for those that are designed with best-in-class security in mind and will work well with the productivity tools you select.



How an integrated, cloud-based work platform supports engagement



Flexibility

With an integrated cloud solution, you can add or remove services as employee and business needs change. Your people don't have to wait for months until a new solution is deployed. Choosing a platform that provides robust integration with the tools your business already uses gives you a head start.



Easier management

Having everything they need in one place means employees can focus on their jobs. It also frees up your time to focus on building a culture of engagement and work-life balance.



Comprehensive security

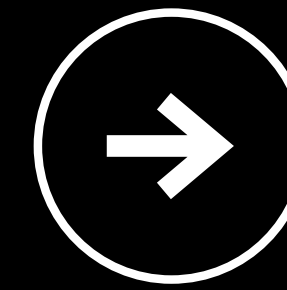
Routine management tasks, such as security patches, updates, tying into data sources, and answering user questions, can quickly eat up time and resources. With just one company providing your productivity apps, you'll have just one admin panel for managing security. With a cloud-based solution, security updates can be rolled out immediately without concern for testing patches and new software versions.

Make it easier for your people to enjoy their work

Focusing technology choices on employee engagement solves a variety of challenges related to collaborating effectively, supporting a mobile workforce, and protecting your business data. Consider Microsoft Teams, the hub for team collaboration in Microsoft 365. It integrates the people, content, and tools your team needs to be more engaged and effective.

Unlock creativity and collaboration

Customers with the deepest and broadest adoption of the platform are 33% more likely than others to say that Microsoft investments have unlocked employee creativity and 51% more likely to report that their users can collaborate in real time.¹⁰



[Discover how Microsoft 365 can help you drive employee engagement >](#)

¹⁰ "Building a Resilient Organization through Integrated Cloud-based IT", Enterprise Strategy Group, 2020.