



Chicago United Building A Culture of Collaboration: The Manager's Role

April 10, 2026

Today's Objectives


- Understand characteristics of collaborative cultures
- Identify behaviors and systems that foster (and undermine) collaboration
- Apply concepts to your own teams
- Commit to 1–2 immediate actions

Why does collaboration matter?

Research from McKinsey & Company and Gallup shows that teams that collaborate effectively are significantly more productive, innovative, and engaged.

“World's Largest Ongoing Study of the Employee Experience” (Gallup, February, 2026);
“Go, teams: When teams get healthier, the whole organization benefits” (McKinsey & Company, October, 2024)

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As a manager, fostering collaboration is not just about culture...it's about performance.

Think about your best team experience.
What made it great?

Characteristics of Collaborative Cultures

Trust and Psychological Safety

People feel safe to speak up; Mistakes are treated as learning; Input is welcomed and valued

Clarity and Transparency

Aligned goals; Defined roles; Clarity about decision-making

Inclusive Team Practices

Diverse perspectives invited; All voices are heard; Actively counter dominance and bias

Strong Relationships

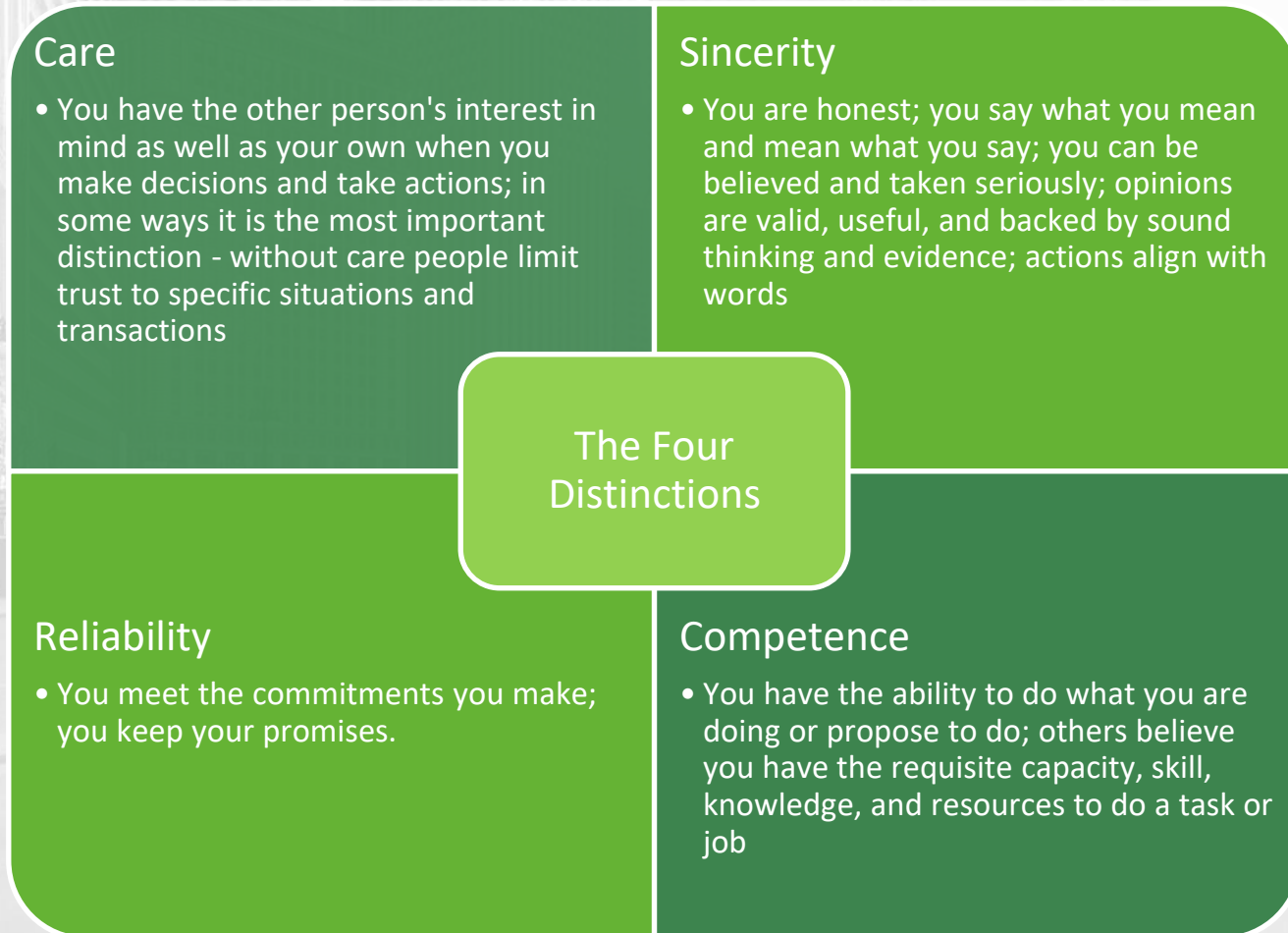
Collaboration is relational, not just operational; Trust and connection increase openness, speed, and resilience

Enabling Systems

Streamlined communication; Reduced silos; Tools used intentionally

Quick Resource: The Four Distinctions of Trust

Freeing ourselves from the limiting belief that trust is all or nothing!



"The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust At Work, 2nd Edition," Charles Feltman

Practices for Building a Culture of Collaboration

Build Trust First

Collaboration fails without trust; Teams must believe their colleagues will contribute positively and reliably; Transparency and relationship-building are essential starting points

Why it matters: Trust enables open communication and risk-taking, which are critical for teamwork

Create Clear Shared Goals & Roles

Align teams around a common purpose; Clarify responsibilities and decision-making authority; Ensure everyone understands how their work contributes

Why it matters: Clarity reduces confusion and increases accountability, enabling smoother collaboration

Prioritize Open & Structured Communication

Establish consistent communication channels and norms; Encourage idea-sharing across levels and functions; Make information accessible and transparent

Why it matters: Communication is the “backbone” of collaboration and prevents silos

Foster Psychological Safety

Create an environment where people can speak up without fear; Normalize feedback, disagreement, and learning from mistakes

Why it matters: Teams collaborate more effectively when people feel safe contributing ideas and challenges

Practices for Building a Culture of Collaboration

Leverage Diverse Perspectives

Actively include different backgrounds, roles, and viewpoints; Encourage constructive debate (“intellectual friction”)

Why it matters: Diverse thinking improves problem-solving and drives innovation

Invest in Relationships & Team Connection

Create time for team members to get to know each other; Build rapport beyond task-focused interactions

Why it matters: Strong relationships increase openness, trust, and willingness to collaborate

Promote “We” vs “Me” Mindset

Shift from individual performance to collective success; Highlight how strengths complement each other

Why it matters: Collaboration thrives when people see success as shared, not competitive

Enable Collaboration Through Systems & Design

Use tools intentionally (don’t overload with tech or frameworks); Create environments (physical or virtual) that support interaction; Reduce friction in workflows

Why it matters: Collaboration improves when systems make it easy—not harder—to work together

Practices for Building a Culture of Collaboration

Recognize & Reinforce Collaborative Behavior

Celebrate teamwork, not just individual achievement; Reward knowledge-sharing and partnership

Why it matters: What gets recognized gets repeated

Model Collaboration

Demonstrate inclusive behaviors (listening, inviting input); Be explicit about what collaboration looks like in practice

Why it matters: Leaders set the tone—culture follows behavior, not intention

*Which of these do you do well?
Where do you struggle?*

Resources:

“Building A Psychologically Safe Workplace” (TedX, Amy Edmondson, May, 2014)

” (Gallup, February, 2026)

“Go, teams: When teams get healthier, the whole organization benefits” (McKinsey & Company, October, 2024)

“The Benefits of Employee Engagement” (Gallup, February, 2026)

“Gen Zs and millennials at work: Pursuing a balance of money, meaning, and well-being”
(Deloitte Insights, June, 2025)

Collaboration Breakdowns

Even with good intentions, collaboration often breaks down in predictable ways.

Breakdowns

- Silos → teams optimize locally, not collectively
- Dominant voices → fewer ideas surface
- Lack of clarity → duplication or inaction
- Unspoken norms → exclusion without intent

Manager Challenges

- Competing priorities and siloed structures
- Lack of time or intentionality
- Over-reliance on informal networks (which excludes those outside of the networks)
- Manager habits that unintentionally limit participation


“Collaborative Overload” (Harvard Business Review, January-February 2016)

“Collaboration breaks down when roles and decisions are unclear.”

“Teams collaborate more effectively when people feel safe speaking up.”

“Research shows collaboration suffers when input is concentrated or uneven.”

“*Building A Psychologically Safe Workplace*” (TedX, Amy Edmondson, May, 2014)
” (Gallup, February, 2026); “*Go, teams: When teams get healthier, the whole organization benefits*” (McKinsey & Company, October, 2024)
“*Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*” (Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji)

A faded, grayscale image of a city street, likely in New York City, featuring tall buildings and a street lamp. The image is used as a background for the text.

What gets in the way of building a culture of collaboration?

The Manager's Role

- Model inclusive meeting practices
- Distribute opportunities equitably
- Encourage input and healthy debate
- Clarify goals and decision processes

Manager moves: Use structured tools, Build small habits, Practice consistently

A Few Tips...

Inclusive Meeting Habits

- Rotate who speaks first
- Use round-robin input
- Pause and invite quieter voices
- Share agendas in advance
- Clarify decisions and next steps

Sentence Stems

- “Let’s hear from someone we haven’t heard from.”
- “I want to pause and invite other perspectives.”
- “Can you build on that idea?”

Scenario Discussions

The quiet contributor: A junior employee rarely speaks in meetings but has strong ideas.

- Collaboration issue: Underutilized talent

*In your own words, what's happening in this scenario? Why?
Have you ever experienced this scenario as a manager?
What's a manager move to respond to this scenario?*

Scenario Discussions

The “Go-To” Bias: Same people get stretch assignments.

- Collaboration issue: Over-reliance on a few people

*In your own words, what’s happening in this scenario? Why?
Have you ever experienced this scenario as a manager?
What’s a manager move to respond to this scenario?*

Scenario Discussions

Generational Disconnect: Younger employees want feedback; manager assumes silence = independence.

- Collaboration issue: Misaligned expectations

*In your own words, what's happening in this scenario? Why?
Have you ever experienced this scenario as a manager?
What's a manager move to respond to this scenario?*

Mini Consultancies

Think about your own team.

- Where is collaboration breaking down on your team (identify one area)?
- Share your challenge and your assessment of the root cause.
- Share one practice that might address the challenge area.

Group Responses

- Ask clarifying questions
- Provide feedback/recommendations



Check-out: What's one action you can commit to (or experiment you can run) in the next 2-weeks?