Transform Microsoft Teams into a Path-to-Value for Your Remote Workforce

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most organizations rushed to bolster the remote work capabilities of their office workers by onboarding them with tools like Microsoft Teams. While some enterprises provided significant enablement efforts to get their employees productive with the new tools, many more have not done much beyond making Teams available for use.

According to Gartner, users at many organizations are struggling to reach proficiency with Teams.[1] Gartner states that while SaaS-based personal and team productivity applications like Microsoft Teams were clearly essential to effectively working from home, "many employees were not sufficiently adept at using the applications."

While the recent surge to remote work is fading in the rear-view mirror, the time has come for organizations to better enable their employees to use Microsoft Teams and incorporate it seamlessly into their core work processes. The intent of this white paper is to provide insights to organizations that aim to transform Teams into a path-to-value for your remote workforce.

THE OBSTACLES TO USER ADOPTION OF MICROSOFT TEAMS

Microsoft Teams, with its ability to keep employees connected, communicating and collaborating, has become a critical component for supporting remote work, but there are some characteristics of the Teams application that can hinder user adoption and prevent organizations from fully realizing the value it can provide. Simply pointing users to the Help menu in Teams will not result in the majority of them becoming proficient and productive.

Understanding the Challenges Users Face to Becoming Proficient in Teams

First off, Teams is more than just chat and voice meetings. Teams requires users to change how they work together. Users need to change their behaviors to make the best use of Teams.

Secondly, Teams can also be seen as more complex than the applications users have used prior for collaboration as it brings together the capabilities of multiple Office 365 applications into a single app.

And to top it off, the Office 365 platform is constantly evolving with the addition of new capabilities, which can make it difficult for users to keep up and know which new capabilities to add to their workday processes, when they should add them, and how.

The Requirements for Enabling Users to Become Productive with Teams

Gartner states that "digital workplace learning is most effective when tied to adoption and engagement that takes into account the specific working context of the organization and of each individual employee."[2]

This approach requires the following three elements:

- An understanding of the roles and processes of your users.

- Visibility into how your users are currently using Microsoft Teams and related applications.

- Effective on-demand learning resources.

When you combine your understanding of the unique roles and processes of your users with visibility into how they are using the productivity and collaboration applications at their disposal, then you can properly guide them to learn the skills they need to elevate their proficiency and productivity with Microsoft Teams.

While the topic of understanding the roles and processes of your users is outside the scope of this white paper, the remainder of this document will examine some best practices for identifying the proficiency gaps of your users of Office 365 and Teams, and how you can help them boost their productivity with effective online learning resources.

IDENTIFYING THE PROFICIENCY GAPS OF TEAMS USERS

To bolster Teams proficiency and productivity, we first must define what successful adoption looks like and then identify the areas that need improvement. What follows is a 3-step approach to identifying the proficiency and productivity gaps of your Microsoft Teams users.

STEP ONE:

Understanding What Successful Adoption Looks Like

Based on the Forrester study commissioned by Microsoft on The Total Economic Impact of Microsoft Teams, the vast majority of the value produced by Teams comes from helping users improve in three areas: in collaborating and sharing information; in having more effective and efficient meetings; and in reducing the amount of time they spend switching between multiple applications.[3]

Below are some examples of the ways success with Microsoft Teams should look based on insights found in the Forrester study and in research notes from Gartner.

Enhancing collaboration and the sharing of information

- Users will start shifting their crucial conversations from internal emails to postings in team channels.

- Important team messages will no longer be buried in the clutter of user mailboxes.

- Teams is being used as a group drive that is organized around the same channels as team conversations and where users edit documents in Office applications.

- Departmental use of network file shares has declined considerably as users are now storing group documents in Teams.

Enhancing meetings

- The number of meetings are reduced as users work more in channel discussion threads that encourage more participation and viewpoints and a persistent history of the discussion topics.

- Meeting durations are also reduced as Teams' enhanced audio/video integration enables meeting organizers to spend less time setting up calls while also reducing the amount of call-quality issues.

Reducing time spent switching applications

- Users open Office documents from the Teams app and can edit documents together at the same time in Word, Excel or PowerPoint.

- Users now avoid wading through multiple email threads and attempting to find documents in a cluster of Windows File Explorer folders as team channels now act as the hubs of their communications, collaboration and file sharing.

[1] Gartner, "Workforce Resilience in the Eye of the Pandemic: Overcoming the Current Remote Work Situation While Planning for the Future", Matt Cain, Gavin Tay, Ron Hanscome, Chris Silva, Stephen Emmott, 16 April 2020.

[2] Gartner, "Go Beyond Conventional Training to Drive Digital Workplace Adoption", Jeffrey Mann, 23 March 2020.

[3] Forrester, "The Total Economic Impact™ Of Microsoft Teams", April 2019.

Quest

- Now that we have a better understanding of what success with Teams looks like, now we can move on the next step of analyzing and classifying your Teams by their level of engagement.

STEP TWO:

Analyze Your Teams Users by their Level of Engagement

This part of the 3-step approach is mainly a focus on WHO is using Teams. Look not only at individual users, but study your users by the groups, departments, business units and regions they operate in.

Identify users, groups, departments, business units and regions by their level of usage

The first thing to do here is to assess the level of Teams usage by users, groups, departments, business units and regions, and then to further categorize them by their level of engagement with Teams.

- Power users and groups can provide use case examples and also help rally others into better use of Teams with guidance and encouragement. Power users also often possess specialized expertise and skills that others seek out and that should be shared in channels that others can easily access, not in private chats.

- New users are typically at the other end of the spectrum with little or no use of Teams. Help these users to learn how to use the basic functionality of Teams.

- Average users are in between the two groups above. Build upon their basic understanding of Teams and show them how to take their productivity in Teams to the next level.

Identify who might benefit from extending Teams access to external groups

Extending guest access to external enterprises you collaborate with could make it easier for the two organizations to innovate.

- Formal business partners, organizations your company has formal business agreements with already, should be evaluated as to whether or not they have guest access. And if not, consider reaching out to the relevant internal stakeholders to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of extending the partner organization with guest access.

- Informal business partners, organizations your own users collaborate with but where no formal business agreement exists, should be identified by studying your email volume by internet mail domain. From this you should be able to identify groups in other domains, tenants or organizations that your internal users and stakeholders frequently collaborate with.

STEP THREE:

Identify Proficiency and Productivity Gaps that You Can Influence

The last step is primarily about studying HOW your users are using Teams. Study how your users and groups are holding online meetings and calls as well as how they are collaborating via channel discussions, co-authoring and file sharing.

Calls and Meetings

- Compare the Use of Teams vs Other Technologies for Chat, Calls and Meetings
  Here, you'll want to analyze the usage of Teams against other technologies your organization has used for chat and for teleconferencing and videoconferencing. Compare the use of Teams against the use of Skype for Business and other services like GoToMeeting, Webex, and Zoom. Hopefully, you will find the use of Teams growing and the use of the other services declining.

- Evaluate Your Trendline for the Number and Length of Meetings and Calls
  You also should assess the usage trends of Microsoft Teams. Track the volume of calls and meetings over time as well as the number of minutes used. Comparing this trendline with the usage of similar technologies used prior may uncover time efficiencies gained from switching to Teams. In addition, comparing this trendline to the volume of channel discussions and private chats will let you see if your Teams users may have become more productive by shifting to collaboration methods that automatically document the flow of the conversation and allow colleagues to contribute when it best fits their schedule.

Quest

Team Collaboration via Discussions, File Sharing and Co-Authoring

- Evaluate the Usage of Channel Discussions and Private Chat in Teams
  Assess whether your users are transitioning their usage of email for internal correspondence to channel discussions and chats. While Teams won't completely replace email for internal messaging, over time it should diminish as users leverage messaging in team channels and chats. Similarly, compare the usage of private chats to messaging in channels to look for signs that users are using the right method for their conversations.

- Evaluate the Usage of File Sharing in Teams
  Here you will want to evaluate the use of file sharing in Teams versus other storage options like network file shares, public folders, and even SharePoint and OneDrive folders that are not stored within the Teams file structure. Over time, you should see a shift to storing files within Teams, so users don't have to switch applications to access the files they need.

- Evaluate the Usage of Co-Authoring in Teams
  If feasible and time allows, consider assessing the usage of co-authoring in Teams as this capability has the potential to not only save time for the team authoring and editing content, but can also eliminate over-writing someone's edits because a different team member uploaded a file they edited on their laptop rather than online.

Now that you've got a better idea of how to identify the proficiency gaps of your users with Office 365 and Teams, it's time to look at the requirements for boosting their proficiency and productivity with online training.

ONLINE TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR OFFICE 365 USERS

This section presents six key requirements for online training solutions that can boost the proficiency of your Office 365 and Microsoft Teams users. While this is not meant to be an exhaustive list, it does describe many of the core features and functions that organizations should seek when considering an online training solution for their Office 365 users.

1. Ease of Use

While ease of use is always a solution aspect we should demand, it is especially crucial for training users to learn new applications and new ways of performing their work. The solution should be easy for IT to set up and maintain, and from the user perspective, the training resources need to be easy to access, easy to find the courses and lessons they need, and easy to keep the user on-track long-term as they continually enhance their skills.

Easy to Set Up and Maintain

For IT, it starts with being easy to set up and prepare the solution for use. It should be a simple and straight-forward process to add all of your users in bulk for the initial launch and also be easy to maintain going forward to onboard new hires and offboard departing staff.

Easy to Access

As for user access, the training resources should be in a centralized, online location that users can easily access on-demand via a URL, a Microsoft app, or lives in an existing corporate Learning Management System (LMS). And preferably, it will use their existing user credentials to automatically log them in.

Easy to Find the Right Content

Users should be able to easily find the content they need. The solution should have a simple navigation structure of courses and lessons and the ability to search when users need to quickly learn how to perform a task unfamiliar to them.

Easy to Keep Users On-Track

Lastly on the ease of use topic, the solution should help to keep users on track with their training. The solution should make it easy for users to see which lessons and courses they have completed, those that are still in process, and those which are yet to do. Users should also receive alerts when new training resources are made available and managers should be able to create reminders that alert their direct reports of expected due dates for completing specific courses.

2. Great Educational Content

While great content is as obvious as ease of use, it still needs to be said that the content must be compelling, it needs to accurately convey the subject matter now and as the technologies evolve, and it should cover all of the core topics a Microsoft 365 user would need to learn new applications and skills.

Quest

Expertly Developed Content

The development of the content should be directed by those with an intimate knowledge of the Microsoft 365 applications, like Microsoft MVPs, alongside those skilled in constructing coursework and lessons.

Covers the Topics a Microsoft 365 User Needs

The learning content needs to cover all of the capabilities of Microsoft 365 and be periodically refreshed to reflect the new capabilities that Microsoft continues to roll out in their cloud. The content should also cover some of the basics of computing, security and compliance, and other key professional skills.

3. Supports In-Depth and Task-Based Learning

The content should be structured to support the users whether they need to learn a new application or simply need to know how to perform a specific task. Ideally, the course content for each application would be broken down into brief 'bite-size' chunks that enable users to use the same content for either in-depth or task-based learning.

In-Depth Courses

Courses that provide in-depth content are needed to assist users in learning applications that are new to them. These courses should cover all of the basic functionality of an application, but they should be provided in small segments that make it easier for users to use and retain the knowledge being imparted. This partitioning of content also helps users to track where they left off if they need to tackle the course over time as fits their schedule.

Task-Based Lessons

Breaking down in-depth courses into brief lessons not only benefits users in using and retaining new skills, it makes it easier for them to quickly find "how to" instructions to any unfamiliar tasks they need to perform whenever the need arises.

4. An Engaging Learning Experience

An engaging learning experience is one that combines compelling, rich media content that supports multiple modes of learning with a consistent and well-structured learning experience.

Compelling, Rich Media Content

The courses and lessons should provide the users with a compelling learning experience that supports a variety of learning preferences with a rich, but consistent, use of media. Because different users learn in different ways, having the content in a mix of media types will enhance the effectiveness of the training. The primary content at the core of each lesson should be an illustrative "how to" video that visually and audibly instructs users how to perform specific tasks step-by-step. The videos should be supplemented with other content like course outlines, quick reference guides, and text-based versions of the instructions in the videos.

Consistent and Well-Structured Courses and Lessons

Each course should be composed of sections and lessons that divide and organize the learning material so that it can be tackled sequentially or used to answer ad hoc queries. And delivering the courses and lessons in a consistent structure, and with a consistent use of media, will help to build the confidence of your users to advance their learning over the long run.

Social Sharing

When a user finds a lesson valuable and believes it would be beneficial to some of their colleagues, the solution should enable them to easily create a link to that lesson that they can share with others. This is primarily for sharing with other users within your organization, but a bonus would be if the solution enabled temporary links to external users that your internal users collaborate with.

5. Tailored Learning

Since not all users need the exact same training, a learning solution should allow managers to customize the courses and lessons available to their direct reports as well as assign specific courses or lessons to tailor their path of learning.

Quest

Customize the Available Courses and Lessons

A learning solution for Microsoft 365 users will have an expansive catalog of courses and lessons but some of the application courses may not be applicable to either the entire organization, or to specific groups of users within the organization. For instance, building applications in Microsoft PowerApps is probably not applicable to a wide swath of your users, so the ability to have it only appear in the course catalog for those users that might actually use PowerApps, reduces the clutter of courses for users that have no need for it.

Create Tailored Learning Paths

Managers may want their direct reports to learn a specific new set of skills or refresh their existing skills to enhance their productivity or take better advantage of changes in the applications. The learning solution should enable managers to select, order, and assign the courses and lessons they want their staff to learn in the sequence they deem is best. Ideally, it should also allow the managers to select lessons from multiple courses for skills and business processes that require the use of multiple applications.

6. Tracking and Recognizing Learning Achievements

Last, but not least, any learning solution you select should be able to track the progress of your users and recognize them for their achievements.

Tracking Learning Progress

To track the learning progress of your users, the solution should have built-in quizzes and exams to verify that the users are learning the skills they need. Dashboards can also help users see their progress at-a-glance as well as enable their managers to quickly check their progress. Additionally, the solution should offer reporting functionality for full visibility into the state of end-user learning.

Recognition of Achievements

Recognition helps to motivate users to accelerate and expand their learning. The learning solution should recognize the level of learning your users have achieved with badges of accreditation that gamify the results of learning. This recognition should be visible on dashboards they see, their managers see, and that are visible across the organization.

CONCLUSION

The Microsoft cloud offers your organization a lot of potential value but there are obstacles in your way and requirements that must be met to unlock that potential. The path to value for your Teams users starts with understanding their roles and processes, identifying how they can improve their processes with Teams, and then providing them with the educational resources to learn how to get there.

LEARN MORE

For more information, visit us at www.quest.com/binarytree

Quest

ABOUT QUEST

Quest creates software solutions that make the benefits of new technology real in an increasingly complex IT landscape. From database and systems management, to Active Directory and Office 365 management, and cyber security resilience, Quest helps customers solve their next IT challenge now. Around the globe, more than 130,000 companies and 95% of the Fortune 500 count on Quest to deliver proactive management and monitoring for the next enterprise initiative, find the next solution for complex Microsoft challenges and stay ahead of the next threat. Quest Software. Where next meets now.