The State of Digital Collaboration

2023

SWOOP Analytics®' M365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking Report

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Executive Summary

SWOOP Analytics' first-ever combined Microsoft 365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking analysis challenges the commonly held belief that remote and hybrid work has caused employees to be overwhelmed with too many digital meetings, resulting in burnout and lower performance. Our study found most employees have few digital meetings and collaborate infrequently, leading to a "silent majority" of employees that can be difficult to manage. The challenge in the hybrid-working world is for middle management to bring this "silent majority" into more active collaboration, at times an overwhelming responsibility. By using workplace analytics to better understand employee behavior across the M365 suite of tools, we can identify areas where collaboration and engagement can be improved.

In our 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams report we analyzed the digital behaviors of more than 266,000 M365 users across 19 organizations and 67,727 teams on Microsoft Teams across 17 organizations. All organizations were operating in some form of hybrid working arrangement.

SWOOP Analytics benchmarking studies are unique in that we use workplace analytics[1] and not surveys to benchmark and derive our insights i.e. we do not selectively survey, we analyze how all employees are interacting. While we are not anti-survey, we believe workplace analytics as a complementary "listening tool" provides insights that are unavailable to survey-based methods. This study is a case in point. The enduring narrative is that employees are overwhelmed by too many meetings; suffering burnout because of meeting overload and becoming disengaged. Our M365 benchmarking studies can find no quantitative evidence that this is the case.

We found up to 83% of employees have less than two meetings a day, and less than 1% have five or more meetings a day. We do not begrudge the support needed by this 1% of employees, but with a 20-30% digitally silent majority occupying the other end of the scale; perhaps they might deserve more attention. While one might argue that many meetings may now be face-to-face, we found that digital activity had actually increased since 2022.

How can we rationalize such a disparity of insights? Beyond meetings, we identified a large proportion of employees are solo working i.e. little evidence of collaborative activity. We found 76% of employees had not posted in a Microsoft Teams channel over the three-month study period; 71% had not posted in a Viva Engage (Yammer) community; 26% had not participated in a meeting and 23% had not participated in a Microsoft Teams chat. We characterize these employees as the "silent majority" that leave little, if any, collaboration digital footprint, and likely do not respond to surveys.

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1   Workplace Analytics is a type of software that uses advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) techniques to analyze and interpret various types of data related to employee behavior, work patterns, and productivity. This tool can collect data from various sources such as email, calendar, and messaging applications, as well as other sources of workplace data such as human resources, IT, and financial systems.

Our hypothesis is that the survey-identified overloaded employees are likely hybrid middle management, tasked with bringing the "silent majority" into more active collaboration; be it in the office or remotely. We have anecdotal, more so than comprehensive, evidence of this. Research has identified it was these employees, responsible for connecting staff across their organizations, that were most negatively impacted by the pandemic. Outside of the office the "silent majority" had become invisible to their managers. This is not to say they were idle. In fact, they could have been very busy executing their solo tasks. In truth, we just don't know. And if you are the middle manager responsible for their performance, and many others as well, then one could understand a feeling of overload.

We believe starting on a premise that work overload is endemic, overlooks the "silent majority" of non-collaborating employees. Supporting the overloaded employees does little to address this cohort, that are likely the cause of overload for their managers. This is akin to addressing the work overload of medical staff during the pandemic; without working on a vaccine.

Our finding that up to 76% of employees are not active Microsoft Teams channel users is particularly disturbing. Teams channels, and the digital teams they support, are fundamental to effective remote and hybrid working.

In developing what might constitute "best collaboration practice" in M365 and Microsoft Teams channels, we have gone to those benchmarked leading groups and teams to solicit their stories for you. Without exception, their stories are inspiring.

The existence of a silent majority of non-collaborating employees highlights the training and education challenge faced by most organizations. M365 is a complex platform, becoming more complex by the day, as new features are continually added. Our analysis of the variations in practice within groups or teams, negatively impacting on collaborative performance, was identified in 2022 and reinforced this year. In our view, **it is critical for groups and teams to agree on their practices for collaborating**. It is not possible or practical for all team members to be educated in the full use of the M365 suite. It is possible, however, for team members to agree on a workable subset, and then learn together from there.

To hone in on some of the fundamental practices for hybrid and remote working, we went back to our roots; looking at relationship analytics across each of the five collaboration modes provided by M365. We identified the relationship networks for each of the different modes of collaboration i.e. Outlook, Microsoft Teams chat, Microsoft Teams meetings, Viva Engage and Microsoft Teams channels. We then compared each of the networks, looking for redundancy. We found little, if any. In fact, each collaboration mode plays a distinctive value adding role. We found Microsoft Teams chat did most for "bonding" groups into a cohesive whole. Outlook provided the most diverse networks to exploit, given the larger presence of external participants. Meetings also provided an opportunity to engage with external stakeholders. In summary, each M365 collaboration mode has a distinctive role to play, that should not be ignored.

With the comfort of knowing the future of work is now hybrid, we can focus our resources and benchmarking insights onto how to maximize productivity and experience both in the office and online.

Key Insights

In SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking Report we analyzed the M365 interactions of more than 266,000 employees across 19 organizations, along with more than 67,000 teams in Teams across 17 organizations.
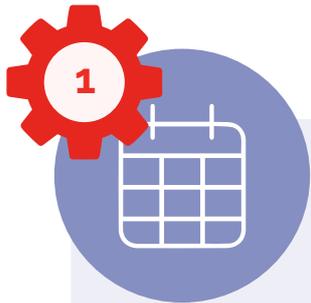
1

The commonly held belief that remote and hybrid work has caused employees to be **overwhelmed with too many Microsoft Teams meetings**, resulting in burnout and lower performance, **is a myth**.

- **Only 1% of employees have "meeting overload"**, with five or more Microsoft Teams meetings each day.

- **Less than 17% of people using M365 have more than two meetings a day** on Microsoft Teams.

- **Less than an hour a day is spent in Microsoft Teams meetings**, on average, across the active users analyzed. (Active users are those who have interacted on M365 in the benchmarked period. For example, have posted, reacted or replied.)

2

We have lots of new tools available in M365 to collaborate, but **our habits haven't changed**. Email, with all its inefficiencies, still dominates. **Most employees spend the equivalent of a full working day a week in email.** Balancing email with asynchronous work in Microsoft Teams channels will provide the largest return on investment.

- Employees spend 80 minutes a day reading email, the most time-consuming activity on M365. Another 25 minutes a day is spent sending emails. That's **1 hour and 45 minutes every day in email**.

- **76% of people using Microsoft Teams don't use Teams channels** to collaborate.

- **71% of staff have not posted in a Viva Engage** (Yammer) community.

- Almost **25% of all employees using Microsoft Teams have not sent or received chat messages**.

- Our ROI calculations found that **if employees improve their digital collaboration habits on M365 it would equate to an increase in the workforce of 4.5%**.

3
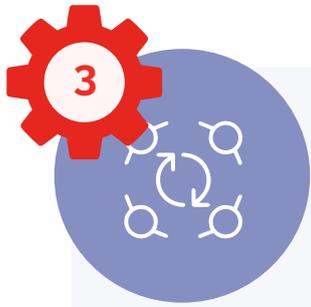
Collaboration is something you do together, but **there are substantial variations in how people use the M365 tools within groups or teams**. This negatively impacts collaborative performance. Groups and teams must agree on how to use the M365 tools to improve collaboration and save time.

- Only **5% of teams/groups/departments analyzed have strong and consistent collaboration habits**.

- The remaining **95% of teams/group/teams had members who used the M365 collaboration tools in very different ways**, making it very hard to work effectively together in a consistent way.

- Those teams/groups/departments who do use Microsoft Teams have developed a "chat first" habit. In the three-month study period, **241 million Microsoft Teams chat messages were sent versus less than one million Microsoft Teams channel messages**. There is a real risk that important enterprise knowledge will be lost in Teams chat.

- To start working more consistently, and transparently, we recommend each functional group should **create a team on Microsoft Teams, using channels** rather than chat. This way there will always be a place to capture important content for future prosperity.

- The high proportion of largely inactive teams on Microsoft Teams, together with the large variation found in activity levels within Microsoft Teams channels, suggests **there is significant confusion as to how best to use Microsoft Teams channels**. This presents the largest learning opportunity by far amongst all M365 functions.

4

We've seen significant improvements in collaboration across some M365 tools in the past 12 months, despite the return to the office, with **more people using Microsoft Teams channels, more guests joining Teams and greater file sharing**.

- **Activity levels for both M365 and Microsoft Teams channels were 20-30% up** from the levels of 2022, despite the supposed return to the office during 2023.

- **30 minutes a day, on average, is spent collaborating on SharePoint files.**

- There was a **17% growth in the use of Microsoft Teams guest accounts from 2022**. This reflects an increase in external stakeholder engagement.

- **71% of the highest performing teams on Microsoft Teams are working as "Self-directed" teams**. A further 23% are classified as communities.

Terminology Note:

Before we start, it is important to be clear about the terminology we are using in this report.

Teams: a shortened version of Microsoft Teams, the software. Note the capital "T" for the proper noun. A "team" (lowercase) is the place a real-world team works on Microsoft Teams. A real-world team forms a team on Teams (the product). Inside the team, the team decides to create channels for work.

1   Introduction

1.1   Who is our main audience for this report?

In this report we are focused on the "collaboration" theme. For the first time we have combined two SWOOP Analytics products (and therefore data sources) for analysis into a single theme. The M365 data source allows us to characterize the broad digital work habits that encompass the breadth of the M365 suite. The Microsoft Teams data sources allow us to do a deep dive into the working patterns of digital teams.

We see the main audience for this report as employees responsible for an organization's digital workplace. Typically, these employees may be located inside the IT function and reporting to the CIO but with largely a business, more so than technical, focus.

We see the main beneficiaries from the insights identified in the report as the key "customers" for the digital workplace employees. They are the middle management "people managers" who were the most disenfranchised when their departments/groups moved to remote working in 2020; and who now must deal with the complexities of an emerging hybrid workforce.

Pre-pandemic these managers had the luxury of having their teams co-located around them. Today these same teams are communicating digitally; working flexibly with some in the office and some not, often at different times; and only limited visibility of how work is getting done, or not. The new "hybrid working manager" is having to invent new ways of being effective. Not only do they have to be seen as leading users of the digital platforms and leaders in face-to-face events, but also leaders in how to make both work together seamlessly. We do not believe this is possible without access to effective workplace analytics i.e., making the invisible visible.

1.2   How is this report structured?

We start by identifying the scope of what we are benchmarking in section 2. It is through the source data that we can make work "visible" for groups, teams and their leaders. We briefly position Collaboration Benchmarking withing the full scope of SWOOP's benchmarking activities, before leading into our case studies in section 3.

We have contacted some of our benchmarking participants to identify their stories around benchmarked high performers. These stories showcase what best practice looks like in real-life work environments, with the goal to inspire you to replicate the same in your workplace.

In sections 4.1.1 and 5.3 we describe our maturity models for M365 collaboration habits and Microsoft Teams work patterns. SWOOP has identified Seven Collaboration Habits

we believe contribute to working most effectively as a highly engaged and collaborative knowledge worker. The SWOOP Analytics for M365 product benchmarks these digital habits against a global performance benchmark (this report), but also inside the organization itself, as an internal benchmark.

Benchmarking requires measurement. Sections 4 (M365) and section 5 (Microsoft Teams) describe our measurement methodologies. SWOOP's benchmarks go well beyond the simple activity measures contained within the standard M365 administration reports. For example, some of our M365 collaboration habits use ratios and percentiles to create them. Our Microsoft Teams benchmarks use network interaction patterns within teams to create the Team personas. Of course, basic activity measures are also included.

For digital teams using Microsoft Teams, SWOOP has developed a maturity model based on the "Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing" framework. SWOOP identifies a team type using the interaction data contained with the Microsoft Teams channels and uses these personas to locate a team within the team maturity continuum.

Many of our SWOOP clients are looking for digital working goals and targets for both individuals and groups to aim for. For most SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams measures, these targets exist directly in the platform, updated annually with the latest study results.
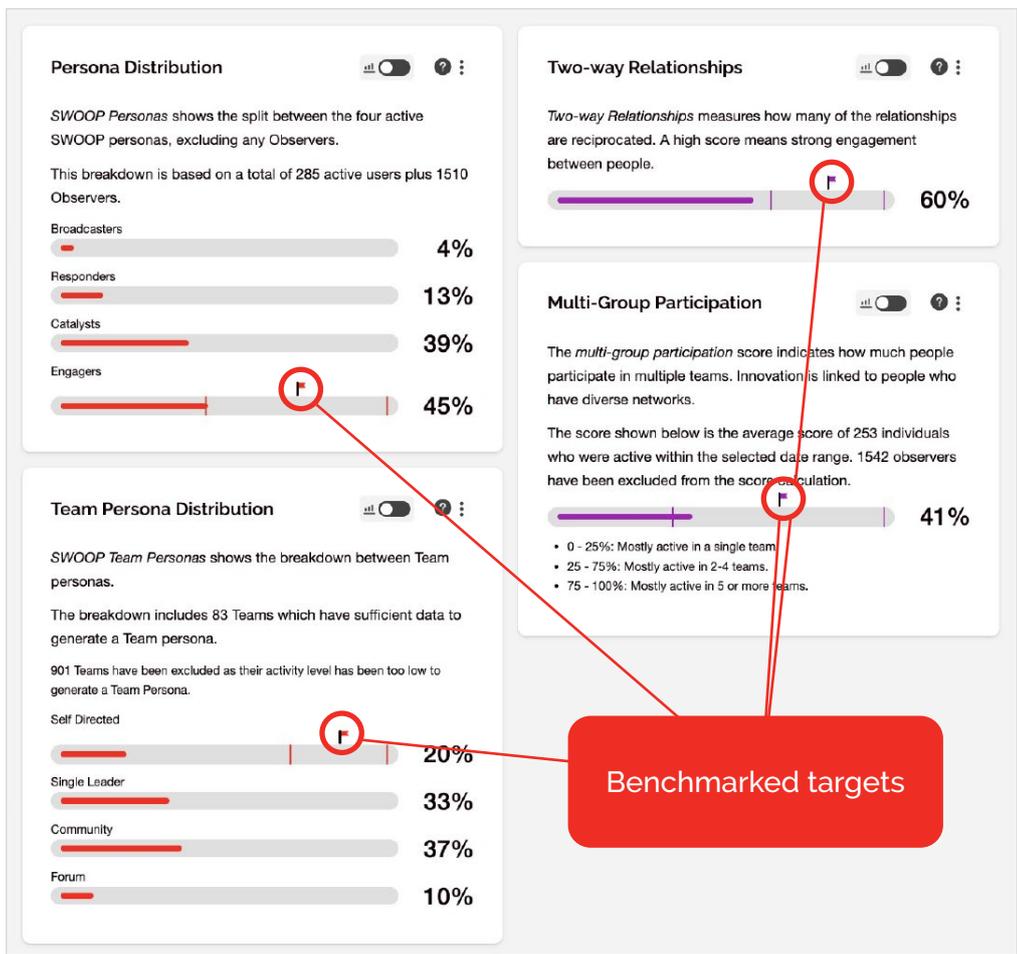

Figure 1 – In-platform targets.

The "what tool when" question has never been more prescient. We aim to answer this question in section 6. Even when constrained to the M365 suite, there is a dizzying range of choice. In our initial M365 benchmarking in 2022, we found most employees had yet to explore beyond email and Teams meetings, leaving many of the other M365 functions unused. In this year's study we still see elevated levels of confusion around issues like when to use Microsoft Teams chat and when to use a Microsoft Teams channel. The use of Teams channels or Viva Engage continues to be a source of confusion, despite more support being provided for this decision. When to use a Teams channel seems to be an enduring question, with most being formed and left unused.

We look to address the question by stepping back to identify the fundamental knowledge worker role-based needs. We provide a process where organizations identify their work context based on these "should-be" knowledge-based roles, as a baseline. By comparing current M365 work practices with roles, we can then identify productivity harming gaps, created by inappropriate technology use choices.

Our prior benchmarking studies for both M365 and Microsoft Teams have identified a large "skills gap" for a majority of employees, with respect to just how to use and exploit the richness of the M365 tool suite. There are many training videos available online from Microsoft and its partners. Our benchmarking reports are also rich with "best practice" case studies. At SWOOP Analytics we want to bring practical learning right into the "flow of work". Today we see end-users looking to SWOOP's analytics to help assess their current work practices, and where appropriate, to receive some gentle customized "nudges" on how they can improve. We address the "learning challenge" in section 7.

Section 8 contains our Futures section. This year we are going back to our base; networked relationships. We respond to research identifying the damage remote work had on certain job roles requiring connections across the enterprise. Your organizational network consists of colleagues you recognize as "connections." Today, many of these connections may be digital. Early passive organizational networks used email to create these digital networked connections. In fact, Viva Insights was founded on analyzing email networks and has now been expanded to time spent in Microsoft Teams chat and calls/meetings. At SWOOP, we measure interactions within Viva Engage (Yammer) and Microsoft Teams channels.

We explore the multiple connection networks contained within the different technical modes – Outlook, Microsoft Teams channels, Viva Engage communities, Microsoft Teams chat, Microsoft Teams meetings etc. How do the different options potentially interfere with effective networks forming? Building on our section "What Tool When", what job roles are most aligned with what toolsets? What does a high performing employee, bridging connections across the enterprise, look like from a digital networking perspective? How should you partition your networks based on "which tool when to network?"

We close with some closing thoughts in section 9, as the world moves out of the pandemic, but into an economic recessionary period, where workplace collaboration continues to be challenged.

2 Scope of benchmarking

SWOOP publishes two benchmarking reports each year. We have been benchmarking Viva Engage (Yammer) usage since 2015, Microsoft Teams from 2020 and M365 from 2022. In 2023 we are combining our benchmarking studies along the themes of *Communications* (Viva Engage and SharePoint intranet) and *Collaboration* (M365 and Microsoft Teams). While the delineation is not crisp, the organizational "ownership" of each theme and their respective product support is becoming clearer.

The Communications theme falls centrally to the internal communication function. The Collaboration theme is being increasingly owned by an emerging digital working function, often located organizationally within IT; but looking to service the mainstream operations groups for their collaboration needs.

	Email	Teams Channels	Teams Chat	Teams Meetings	OneDrive Files	SharePoint Files	SharePoint Pages	Viva Engage
SWOOP for M365	· Send · Receive	· Messages	· Messages	· Meetings · Recurring · Scheduled · Ad hoc · Audio · Screen Share	· Files	· Files	· Pages	· Posts · Replies · Reads · Likes
		Relationships · Posts · Replies · Likes · Mentions · Team size · Active team size · Interactions / Team Member · Channels / team · Private teams · %Response rate · Multi-team participation · %Curiosity · %Reciprocity · %Key Player Dependency · %Core · %Gallery · %Private Channels · Team Personas					**Quality** · Active Users · Visitors (Unique Viewers) · Page Visits · Top Pages · Top News · Stale pages · %perfect spelling · %No broken links · Views/ device · Activity Time · Typical visit times · Page engagement	**Relationships** · %Mentions · Influencer Risk · %Participation · %Observers · Activity/ User · %Catalysts · %Responders · %Engagers · %Broadcasters · %Response Rate · Replies/Post · %Reciprocity · %Curiosity · %Diversity · Threads/ User
		SWOOP for Teams					**SWOOP for SharePoint**	**SWOOP for Viva Engage**

Scheduled for November 2023

Figure 2 - SWOOP 2023 benchmarking studies.

This report focuses on the Collaboration theme, drawing data from SWOOP Analytics for M365 and SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams. Later in the year a second benchmarking study on the Communications theme will be conducted with data sourced from SWOOP Analytics for SharePoint intranet and SWOOP Analytics for Viva Engage. (Shaded Red).

SWOOP Analytics for M365 draws its data from the M365 administration reports and contains usage/activity counts for each of the M365 collaboration tools. SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams, SWOOP Analytics for Viva Engage and SWOOP Analytics for SharePoint intranet provide a deeper dive into the data. For Microsoft Teams channels and Viva Engage (Yammer), we look for more human-centered measures that contribute to relationship building. SWOOP Analytics for SharePoint intranet is looking at the health of SharePoint intranet use.

3 Collaboration case studies

At SWOOP Analytics we have the data to identify high performing teams and groups across M365 and Microsoft Teams but what does that best practice look like in real life? When we rank the top performing groups in M365[2] and top teams in Microsoft Teams[3], we can see the names of which organizations come out on top but we have only ID numbers to recognize them. That's when we reach out to the organizations and share the ID numbers with them. They then identify the groups and teams. In almost every instance over our years of benchmarking, the top performers come as a surprise to our contacts. Remember, our contacts are often situated in IT or internal comms departments and would otherwise have no interaction with these quiet achievers who are dispersed across their organization. We then arrange to interview members of these top performing groups and teams so we can share their real-life best practices with you in the hope you can learn from, and be inspired by, them.

In our M365 benchmarking data set the top six organizations were all what we call "digital specialist firms" – they make their living helping clients to work more effectively with digital toolsets. These six organizations were closely followed by real estate management consulting and managed services firm RealFoundations and federal government department New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), both of whom shared incredible stories with us of a digital collaboration culture across their organizations.

In SWOOP's 2023 Microsoft Teams benchmarking, RealFoundations was the standout performer again, with an incredible four teams ranked in the top 10. Perhaps what makes this even more impressive is all four teams are client-based teams, either for projects or ongoing client relations. Close behind RealFoundations was workplace consultancy and Microsoft Partner of the Year Engage Squared, with two teams in the top 10. NZTE and Virgin Media O2 also boasted teams in the top 10, along with three other organizations who chose to remain anonymous.

We hope you can learn from these top achievers and perhaps implement some of their best practices into your workplace.

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2 Based on scoring Seven Collaboration Habit scores (see section 4.1)
3 Based on SWOOP Analytics' bespoke Teams ranking index (see section 5.3)

Virgin Media O2 - M365 case study

A vehicle for employees' voices

When a Manchester-based engineer for UK telecommunications giant Virgin Media O2 needs to conduct a site survey in Birmingham, they will typically hire a car to get there. In fact, if you need to drive more than 120 miles, it's been company policy for years to hire a car rather than use your own vehicle.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and lockdowns around the world resulted in the car rental market collapsing. Suddenly it became incredibly difficult to hire a car anywhere in the UK as rental companies sold off their cars in response to the mayhem.

At the same time, people in the UK became more and more reliant on telecommunications to work from home, and connect with family online, so there was huge demand for Virgin Media O2 to build and sustain even better telecommunications services.

Virgin Media O2 workers had to get to sites and were, at times, unable to hire a car, or they would be left waiting until the last minute to learn if a rental car was available. Remember, if you need to drive more than 120 miles, company policy is to hire a car and not to use your own vehicle.

You've probably already worked out an easy solution, right? Increase the mileage allowance to travel to sites in personal vehicles and reimburse employees. It sounds easy but in a company with more than 18,000 employees, it isn't a simple process to make company-wide changes. The first step is to identify the problem and alert those who have the authority to make the change.

Virgin Media O2 values its employees' voices and has a formal structure to allow employees' voices to be heard at the highest level, which can result in company-wide changes – like the increase in miles on a personal vehicle. Virgin Media O2 has a program called Voice which allows employee voices to be heard through Voice forums.

There must be a vehicle for these employee voices to be heard and this is where Virgin Media O2's digital workplace and use of the Microsoft 365 suite of tools, combined with Workplace from Meta as the company's enterprise social network, comes into its own.

When an employee at Virgin Media O2 has an issue to raise, they contact their Local Voice Forum representative. Once a month, the Divisional Voice Forums (each representing the different business divisions at Virgin Media O2) meet on Microsoft Teams with the representatives from the local forums to discuss the issues raised by their constituents. Prior to the meeting, representatives add to an agenda which is a shared document in their team on Microsoft Teams.

Catherine Callan, Senior Manager – Partner Engagement & Performance, Virgin Media O2.

Representatives from the Divisional Voice Forum, who are spread across the entire UK, use Microsoft Teams channels to discuss issues in the lead-up to the monthly meetings, and afterwards they share all their documents in these channels. All communications, conversations, meeting minutes and documents are contained in one place – in the Teams channel.

"We share everything in the team," said CTO Divisional Voice Forum Representative Catherine Callan.

"If we have a meeting, we will put our minutes in there and then everyone will comment on it and you're not filling everyone's inbox. We make sure we tag the whole team. After a meeting we do all our comms on Teams and get feedback.

"We always ensure that cameras are on so that you can you feel as though you're sitting in the same room together. I think that's really important when you're collaborating."

One representative from each Divisional Voice Forum sits on the National Voice Forum, which also includes Virgin Media O2's CEO and other C suite executives. It's at these meetings that big changes can happen. Again, all members of the National Voice Forum collaborate and communicate in a Microsoft Teams team, sharing documents in the channel and an agenda prior to the quarterly meeting.

In the case of the rental car difficulties, the issue was raised at multiple Divisional Voice Forums and taken to the National Voice Forum, where Virgin Media O2's leadership was made aware of the problem and made the company-wide change to increase the mileage on private vehicles to 400 miles, if employees preferred this option to hiring a car.

To put it in perspective, the distance from Edinburgh in Scotland to Cardiff in Wales is less than 400 miles. It seemed the issue was solved. But there was one more step in the process – getting the message back to employees, especially those on the frontline who need to travel to sites.

Again, Microsoft Teams and the M365 suite comes into play. At the National Voice Forum, meeting minutes and all documents are shared in a Teams channel. The draft of a Voice newsletter is also shared in the team on Teams and each National Voice Forum representative then shares the newsletter with their Divisional Voice Forum representatives in their own team. Each Voice Forum member can work on the document and ask questions to clarify for their own constituents.

Once the newsletter is finalized, it is shared with all employees across Virgin Media O2, with each newsletter coming from the relevant division, often with a personalized note for that division of the company.

"We make sure that we all agree, and that everything has been correctly captured and we work on it together and that way you know no one will come back and say; 'Well that's not really what was said'," Catherine said.

The newsletter is shared across all communication channels – in teams on Microsoft Teams, on Workplace by Meta (which Virgin Media O2 uses instead of Viva Engage), in Outlook and on the company intranet.

"We all like to consume things in a different way, so therefore really to get the most out of everything, you should communicate in different ways and not be restricted to just one," said Virgin Media O2's User Experience Manager, Adam Jukes.

"That's the way I feel and the data backs me up with that."

The example of increasing mileage on personal vehicles to address a nation-wide issue of hire car shortages is an example of how collaboration and communication is occurring across Virgin Media O2 using the M365 suite of tools. It starts with a frontline worker raising an issue, goes up through the channels using the employee Voice Forums, a change is made at the executive level, and the message is then clearly communicated back down through the channels to reach the frontline worker with a solution to the issue.

"We did make that change as Voice," Catherine said.

"We championed that and then we allowed people to use their own car up to 400 miles. It saved the business money and it took away the need to try and get hire cars.

"And that's just with people across the entire organization coming to these forums saying; 'I've got this issue'."

Many of the Divisional Voice Forums at Virgin Media O2 were identified by SWOOP Analytics as top performing teams in SWOOP's 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking analysis, with the CTO Employee Voice forum among the top 2% of the more than 67,000 teams analyzed.

When SWOOP met with the CTO Employee Voice representatives to learn about their digital habits, Catherine thought we must have the wrong team because she didn't think they did anything special in the way they worked.

Adam Jukes,
User Experience Manager -
Digital Workplace,
Virgin Media O2.

"This is what we do everyday in our day job," Catherine said.

"So in my day job, not my Voice day job, we do everything that way. We've got our documents up there and everything is on Teams so we can all work on it.

"Our team is dispersed so we work this way on Teams every day."

While this way of working is now natural to Catherine and her team, data from SWOOP's 2023 benchmarking shows only 24% of employees work collaboratively in Teams channels.

Migration emphasized the trouble with Teams chat

In mid-2021, Virgin Media merged with O2 to form one of the largest entertainment and telecommunications operators in the UK, with more than 47 million connections. It also meant merging the two businesses into one.

Virgin Media O2's User Experience Manager, Adam Jukes, said the migration emphasized the trouble with Microsoft Teams chat, and the copious amounts of knowledge and documents shared in chat that should have been posted in Teams channels to capture it permanently.

It became a massive exercise to find ways to migrate the information in chat. That's why Adam is adamant people use the M365 tools correctly and post in Teams channels, to avoid any similar problems in the future, and to make knowledge accessible to all who need it.

"Nothing was really contained within channels and then that gave us a real big headache when it comes to looking at the migration because the tooling out there isn't scoped for mass migration of chat messages," Adam said.

"Whereas if the business files had been shared within channels within Teams, all of that stuff actually would have migrated far easier."

Adam said this is why analytics from SWOOP are so important to show people their personal digital habits and to direct them to work collaboratively across the M365 tools.

"SWOOP gives us the facts and figures, for both personal and enterprise, to show us where potentially we're going wrong and where we need to improve," Adam said.

"SWOOP does paint that picture and without it you don't really have a clue. You can only look at consumption, it doesn't really paint the story.

"We see SWOOP as something that will bring a lot of value to the business because we'll be collaborating better, potentially we'll be having less meetings because of it, which is a cost saving."

Changing behaviors with SWOOP Analytics

Adam said without data from SWOOP, there is no way individuals can know if their digital behaviors are good, or need improving.

"You need to know where you are, and you need to know what you can change and then also you need to be able to see that," he said.

"We don't have anything that can tell you as a person where you are, what you could do better. That's where SWOOP fits in. SWOOP helps to change the behaviors."

Adam said Virgin Media O2 could write guidelines to tell people how to improve their digital workplace habits, but without SWOOP giving employees the ability to go and see their own personal behaviors, it will never have the same impact.

Once digital workplace behaviors do improve, it will also bring ROI back to the business.

"As part of the SWOOP analytics you can look at things like time spent in meetings," Adam said.

"We know meetings cost money and there's stuff you can do in Teams that can result in less meeting time. All of this is cost saving."

RealFoundations - M365 case study

Microsoft Teams v Viva Engage: why you need both

Are you thinking of ditching Viva Engage? Do you question why Viva Engage is needed when you could just have a large team on Microsoft Teams and eliminate the need to switch between the two platforms?

These are questions asked by many and RealFoundations CEO Chris Shaida believes he has a rock-solid answer. Chris' answer is based on years of experience, which is backed by almost a decade of data from SWOOP Analytics identifying RealFoundations, a real estate management consulting and managed services firm, as a world-leader in the digital workplace. RealFoundations was the star performer in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams benchmarking study, with four teams ranked in the top 10 of the more than 67,000 teams analysed. RealFoundations teams ranked No.4, No.5 and No.8, along with more in the top 100.

Think of Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage as two separate places. Not just different tools, but different **places**, each with its own rationale.

Chris likens it to two different buildings on a unified campus, each with distinct but highly inter-related purposes, like the library and the student union.

People can read, study, research, write and discuss in both places. Neither is strictly focused on, or conducive to, a single activity. You choose to be in one or the other based on the time, mood, need for specific kinds of stimulus, as well as the expected mix of activities you expect to perform.

Chris emphasizes that this is quite different from the tool metaphor. You pick up a tool – a hammer, stapler, ruler - to do a specific thing. Then you put it down. People don't "hang out" in a tool but we do hang out and spend time in a place; and in a place we might pick up and use a variety of tools.

For RealFoundations, Viva Engage is the place to learn or share information about topics of broad interest to individuals, the company and the industry. Microsoft Teams is the place to go to work with a specific group of people toward a specific goal.

"We have found that the consistent use of the place metaphor has helped clarify the rationales for each, much more than the tool metaphor does," Chris said.

Chris Shaida,
CEO, RealFoundations.

"We are all used to doing some of the same activities in different places. And we are all used to choosing a specific place for the complex mix of activities that we expect we're likely to do in that place."

Different activities, different moods on Teams v Viva Engage

While Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage are both discussion-based, Chris believes they are tuned to different moods, or activities.

- **Viva Engage** is the digital water cooler, or break room, where people can interact with a broader and less defined set of colleagues on broader and longer-term topics.
- **Microsoft Teams** is the digital project room that one goes "into" expecting to do focused work with a specific set of colleagues, with a specific plan, towards a specific goal.
- **Viva Engage** is more discovery oriented.
- **Microsoft Teams** is more delivery/outcome oriented.

In Chris' experience, once the place-based understanding is established it becomes a part of the workplace culture and no one is particularly confused about it.

"Virtually everyone in our enterprise spends material time in both every day," Chris said.

"People spend a lot more time in Teams but almost everyone seems to find the time they do spend in (Viva) Engage to be, uh, engaging. Just like in the olden times - remember when we all went to something called an 'office' everyday - people spent time both in their assigned workgroup area and milling around the water cooler."

Chris lists three subtle, but important, differences between Viva Engage and Microsoft Teams.

1. Storylines
   - there is nowhere in Teams where people can just post things of interest to them and, as a consequence, where others can follow that person as an individual, rather than as a team member.
2. Audience default
   - **Microsoft Teams** sits on the narrow-cast side of the audience line. Chris says for each work event the first thing he does is say; "What team am I working in?" then everything flows from there. He will almost always know the individuals in a given team, after all, they are teammates. He will almost never discover an unknown person in Teams.
   - **Viva Engage** defaults to the broadcast, within the enterprise. Chris says the first thing he does in Viva Engage is to ask himself; "What topic do I want to learn or contribute to?" Discovering someone new is a fairly common occurrence in Viva Engage.
3. Channels
   - Microsoft Teams has channels and Viva Engage does not.
   - A team working on a plan/schedule towards defined goals will have more inherent structure, and channels provides for that.
   - With the more free-form discovery nature of Viva Engage, a hierarchical structure like Microsoft Teams channels would likely get in the way of

discovery. Viva Engage can be a place to learn and knowledge share.

Where does email fit in?

It doesn't! It may continue to be used for external communication but there is no place for email within an enterprise.

"Five years from now, the only enterprises relying on email as their primary communication and interaction tool will be dying enterprises," Chris said.

"The workplace will continue to be digitized whatever the leadership of a particular enterprise does or doesn't do."

Chris uses the example of mobile phones. Mobile phones changed business communication with almost no guidance from the enterprise. It will be the same for email and the digital workplace in general. The question for leaders is whether to embrace and guide this new way of working, or just let it happen.

"We are poised to get out of the house and to other places where we can work, interact and collaborate," Chris said.

"But we are most certainly bringing both some new habits – we know how to turn our videos on, we now know that it is possible to interact and collaborate with others even if, post pandemic, they won't be in the same workplace as us – and different expectations about how our work is structured, measured and managed.

"The only real decision for enterprise leaders is whether to embrace, shape and guide this new and better way of working or just let it happen."

Chris says the "let it happen" path involves less near-term thinking, energy and effort but it will inexorably lead to departments using different tools and processes and eventually the connected digital ecosystem will slip away through these disconnected silos.

For leaders to lead the way in the digital workplace they need to explicitly recognize the digital workplace is:

1. an enterprise —not a workgroup, department or division.
2. an ecosystem – not a best-of-breed collection of apps.

Then decision must be made to:

1. Choose for the enterprise the "embrace and shape" or "wait and see" path
2. Build a plan based on that path.

CityFibre - M365 case study

Microsoft Teams Chat – a slippery slope?

At SWOOP Analytics we love to share case studies showcasing best practice so you can learn from the best. Let's face it, best practice starts with *better* practice and it's arguably just as important to show how *better* practice is the first step to achieving best practice.

A perfect example of better practice came shining through when speaking recently with CityFibre – the UK's largest builder of independent full fibre infrastructure. An increasing number of teams within CityFibre have already had eyes opened to a more effective way of working, but the journey to get everyone collaborating transparently in the Microsoft 365 suite of tools is far from over.

One team at CityFibre just starting the journey towards successful digital collaboration is the Sales team. The *better practice* in this case has been championed by Martin Pedler, who leads the Key Accounts Sales team. Under his steer, an entire team has purposely moved away from Microsoft Teams chat to a common Microsoft Teams channel structure that is now serving 80 account management teams.

"Our starting ambition was that individuals across CityFibre who have a question about what is going on for a particular customer account should be able to go to that account team, learn what they need to know and then contribute", explained Martin.

This seemingly simple shift has been a game changer. Suddenly knowledge isn't lost in chat, never to be seen again, but captured in a Microsoft Teams channel for everyone to reap the benefit.

Martin and his team had become increasingly frustrated by fragmented email chains, never knowing which document was current and having to constantly seek out up-to-date information on the status of certain account activities.

"I was one of many people drowning in email and spending too much time searching Outlook for the right emails and files," Martin said.

"Teams channels, for me, were the logical place for topical conversations to be taking place and we needed to get everyone onto the same page."

Martin Pedler,
Carrier & National Sales
Manager, CityFibre.

The Sales team set up a handful of dedicated channels in their team in Microsoft Teams and agreed on some simple usage protocols. Once a brief training session on how to use Teams and SharePoint effectively had been conducted, a far more streamlined flow of information and communication began to benefit the group.

"Making these changes has had a huge impact on the quality of our digital-platform-based conversations," said Martin.

"It has shifted us away from email threads to topical engagement and file management, with everything now easily searchable in a shared space. And most importantly it's helping us to manage and support our customers more efficiently.

"This is definitely a journey and there is plenty more benefit yet to extract, but we started with the right behaviors and we're now using this as a foundation for onward improvement."

Once Martin's colleagues saw the benefit of moving away from email and private chat to working in Microsoft Teams channels, the wider Sales team wanted to extend the improvements across all account teams, ensuring that appropriate individuals within CityFibre could find out what's happening on any customer account, at any time, with just a few clicks.

The new approach was rolled out in January 2023. Since then, data from SWOOP Analytics has shown a continual boost in Microsoft Teams channel messages, a drop in Teams chat activity, and a welcome decline in internal email usage.

"There is still a long way to go before our community of Sales teams can claim full digital collaboration success though," Martin said.

"Chat obviously has its place, but using it is a slippery slope and even when you've made a concerted effort to shift away from it, it's easy to fall back into bad habits and end up drowning in hundreds of unstructured, undifferentiated chats. Sharing documents within those chats also exacerbates the issue."

Another frustration for CityFibre is when participants of Microsoft Teams meetings create their own chat, rather than capturing the conversation in the relevant Teams channel.

"The fact that this is even possible tempts people back into these private silos," Martin said. "Now I actively encourage our team not to use chat or email as the default at all, as so much rich content gets buried this way. Our goal from the start was to bring that content into the right Teams channel so it can be accessed by all who need it – including new people joining the team."

When measuring digital success on M365, or digital *improvement*, CityFibre is able to look to SWOOP's [Chat Liberated](#) and [Email Liberated](#) measures. Chat Liberated shows how good they are at collaborating in Microsoft Teams channels and Viva Engage compared with collaborating in Microsoft Teams chat. Email Liberated shows how good they are at collaborating in Teams channels and Viva Engage compared with sending emails.

The Sales team's decision to embrace Teams channels has not only reduced chat and email conversations, but files are now stored on the Teams channel via SharePoint. The result is a significant and continual improvement in digital collaboration habits.

While Martin believes there is still a lot of room for digital collaboration improvement, making the one small change of posting in Teams channels rather than chat is making a real difference every day, especially as more and more people fully embrace the new way of working.

This *better* practice of the sales community working in Teams channels is another step towards CityFibre becoming a best practice M365 workplace.

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise - Microsoft Teams case study

A team of Microsoft Teams champions

When a team of 10 people at New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) began to get lost in the sheer amount of documentation and conversation happening in a never-ending Microsoft Teams chat, they made the conscious decision to move their work to a Microsoft Teams channel.

NZTE is New Zealand's trade promotion agency, with nearly half its 800 people based overseas. To provide expert knowledge for Kiwi exporters, it has also created a network of "beachhead" advisers, who can be called on to provide specific advice. The 10 people within NZTE who run this program live around the world – New Zealand, Australia, China, Singapore, Germany, UAE, the United States and Chile. You can understand how complex this relationship must be, and to begin with, their shared digital world was based on Microsoft Teams chat and Outlook email. They soon realized this was not an efficient way to collaborate.

As a team, they all agreed to move their work to a Microsoft Teams channel in November, 2022. All conversations, files, meetings, agendas, minutes and more are shared in the Teams channel for all to access. No matter where they are located around the world, or what time zone they're working in, their Teams channel gives equity to everyone.

It may then come as no surprise this team was ranked No.13 from more than 67,000 teams benchmarked in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking analysis.

One of the key findings from SWOOP's benchmarking analysis is that for digital collaboration to work, groups and teams must agree on how to use the M365 tools to improve collaboration and save time. If there are substantial variations in how people prefer to use the M365 tools within one group or team, this causes confusion and negatively impacts collaborative performance.

NZTE's Beachhead Network Managers team is a poster child for how to work successfully as a team using M365 tools. Director of the team, Katherine Fippard, said that in October 2022 the team was still working in Microsoft Teams chat, rather than Teams channels.

"What we found is we got a bit confused because there's so much going on in chat," Katherine said.

Katherine Fippard, Director - Advisory & Networks, NZTE.

"Our knowledge would get lost in the chat and it was too difficult to tap into that knowledge."

Within the team of 10 in the Beachhead Network Managers team, three were Microsoft Teams champions, a self-selected group with a passion to learn and be upskilled in Microsoft Teams, and they suggested the chat be moved to a formal Teams channel, an idea Katherine embraced.

"Within the chat we made the decision to formalize it and make a Teams channel so we don't lose things and files don't disappear and we know this is the one source of truth," she said.

"We all agreed that was our means of how we were going to communicate".

Katherine said she has barely used email for this team since November 2022 and the time savings of working in Teams channels has been immeasurable. No longer is she searching through emails, or months of chat, to find knowledge.

"Now we've just got the channel and you can search it," Katherine said.

"You can go into your Teams channel, you can search for the conversation and 'bingo!'."

One of the best things is the ability to be able to resurface a conversation, or nudge someone, with a quick comment in the thread, rather than starting a whole new chat or email, Katherine said.

That's not to say Katherine no longer uses Microsoft Teams chat. She uses chat when she's communicating solely to one region, a deliberate move to quiet the noise in the channel. But as soon as the work pertains to the program, the information is shared in the Teams channel.

"It just makes sense to work this way because everyone is so global, we can't find times to collectively talk because someone has to get up at 3am," Katherine said.

"So because of the global nature of our team, then the Teams channel makes the most sense because no matter what, no one misses out. Whereas when we're talking and trying to have an actual meeting, someone either has to be the sacrificial lamb that gets up at 3am for the call or we end up breaking into two meeting times.

"This way we're all on the chat (within the Teams channel), we're all informed at the same time and we know what's happening."

The People Advisory Team

It's a practice used across NZTE's global workforce. NZTE boasted two more teams on Microsoft Teams in the top 20 of the 67,000 ranked teams in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 benchmarking, by far the most successful government agency in the global benchmarking.

Coming in at No.17 is NZTE's People Advisory Team which is part of the wider People and Kōrako team.

Phoebe Chandler, Director People Advisory Services who leads the People Advisory Team, has team members located across NZ, partnering with people and teams across the globe in different time zones which makes working in Microsoft Teams channels the obvious choice.

Like Katherine, Phoebe was surprised to learn her team had ranked so highly in SWOOP Analytics' benchmarking because the behaviors of posting in Teams channels, sharing files within those channels, working asynchronously, screen sharing and using cameras when in meetings, are part of the team's culture, which enables the team to effectively engage with each other.

Phoebe said email is now rarely used within the team and if an email arrives that needs to be shared with the team, it is shared into the Microsoft Teams channel with the click of a button, rather than forwarded in Outlook.

Although she feels her team is only scratching the surface when it comes to capitalizing on the capabilities within M365, Phoebe believes her team's willingness to always be learning from each other continually improves their online behaviors.

"For me, it's less about the tool and it's more about the behavior of the team," she said.

"The team wants to do a good job. The team wants to learn more. There is a belief that we've made this commitment and we want to use the tool to be more effective."

A big aspect of improving digital collaboration behaviors within the team is learning from each other. When someone encounters a problem, they will try and find the solution and then share it with the entire team. Like Katherine's Beachheads team, the People Advisory Team made the conscious decision to work in Microsoft Teams channels. The wider People & Kōrako leadership team has always led by example, posting in Teams channels.

The People Advisory team made the collective decision to do training with NZTE's Digital Engagement Specialists, which gave them the initial overview of how they could use the M365 tools.

"We made a commitment as a team to do that together, which was part of our team focus on improving our ways of working," Phoebe said.

"But we've recognized that for us it is ongoing and we need to continue to put effort into building better habits and proactively learning how we can use the tool better."

Phoebe Chandler,
Director People Advisory
Services, NZTE.

Sailing to success

The top-ranked NZTE team, coming in at No.6 from more than 67,000 teams ranked in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 benchmarking is a team established for a specific project. The project was to promote New Zealand's Active Investor Plus visa program at an international sailing competition called SailGP, which finished in San Francisco in May. The visa program encourages investors who align with New Zealand's values to migrate to Aotearoa (New Zealand). The end goal of the project was to promote the visa program at a host of hospitality events in San Francisco, bringing together potential investors, New Zealand companies, private sector specialists, NZTE and more.

Samantha Walsh,
International Investment
Activation Manager, NZTE.

The SailGP race in San Francisco. Australia won the event, followed by New Zealand, with Great Britain in third place.

NZTE's SailGP team members are also geographically dispersed, working in different time zones. Establishing a team within Microsoft Teams and working in Teams channels was the obvious - and natural - place to work, said Samantha Walsh, NZTE's International Investment Activation Manager.

Working this way in Teams breaks down hierarchies, giving every person equal say, no matter what their role or where they are geographically located.

"The Teams channel means there's no ego, we're all just there to get the project going and humming and happening," Samantha said.

"There's also various levels of comfort with technology but we all collaborate on Teams and it's a really easy place for us to all come together."

A huge advantage of using Teams over email, Samantha said, is being able to hold different conversations.

"Sometimes we would be getting in the weeds about one thing but also needing to

touch base about something else, and you could do that and tag someone and say; 'Anthony, I need your quick response on this' and put it in the right thread so you could go back to that context," she said.

Samantha taps into the features on Teams to prioritize work, using the Important or Urgent feature, highlighting or using bold text, and she continually edits documents or posts from agendas and actions from meetings, tagging relevant people into conversations. She also utilized phone notifications to be able to quickly reply to messages in the Channel or Chat, which was incredibly helpful with various working hours.

"Teams is what we used to collaborate as that cross-functional team to help us communicate across time zones, share important documents and updates, and keep each other informed as everyone had different roles to play in that activation," Samantha said.

Attendees at one of NZTE's SailGP events in San Francisco.

All three NZTE teams identified in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams benchmarking habitually turn cameras on during Teams meetings, giving them strong scores in SWOOP Analytics for M365's Camera Confident habit, they are all Email Liberated, it's second nature for them to screen share during Teams meetings and share files, and their differing time zones mean they are Asynchronous Collaborators.

When Samantha returned home to Connecticut after the SailGP event in San Francisco, her Outlook inbox was flooded with emails. Like most people after a few days away, she felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of emails.

"Even just being away for a few days, my inbox gets insane because it's so hard to find things, whereas I know if I just go to Teams I'll be able to find whatever I'm looking for pretty quickly and I can cut through the noise," Samantha said.

Now the SailGP activation is complete, the team on Teams will begin to slow down once the post event follow ups and communications are complete. Samantha will "unpin" the team on her Microsoft Teams list, but the team will remain there to resurface for the next event, or to tap into the knowledge when it is next needed.

Cricket Australia - Microsoft Teams case study

Howzat! Cricket Australia hits Microsoft Teams collaboration for six

Prior to Cricket Australia adopting Microsoft Teams as a place to work, those responsible for selling tickets to cricket matches had to make the choice of moving to live in Melbourne to be able to work with their colleagues, or remain in their home state and feel somewhat disconnected from the team.

Those that made the decision to have a greater team connection would have to relocate hundreds, or thousands, of kilometers away from their sales market to Melbourne, and then commute back to their home state to make their actual sales.

Nowadays, this geographically dispersed team works together on Microsoft Teams. Relocating to Melbourne is a thing of the past, team members live in their sales market and, regardless of location, team members feel connected to each other.

Take a moment to stop and think about the efficiencies and return on investment from working this way. There are no more relocation costs, no more monthly flights and a week of paid accommodation back to the home state, not to mention the personal upheaval of moving families interstate. What's even better for the business is the fact these people can be physically present in the market they're servicing, rather than working in Cricket Australia's HQ in Melbourne.

Cricket Australia's Tickets & Premium Experience team has the job of selling tickets to all national cricket matches – Tests, One Day Internationals, T20s and more. The team organizes to sell everything from the general entry ticket to premium hospitality suites and functions, complete with guest speakers.

This team was identified in SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams Benchmarking analysis of more than 67,000 teams on Microsoft Teams as one of the top performing teams, ranking in the top 1%.

Due to the nature of their work, team members rely on each other to get their jobs done so it's essential they all have a place to work together, hence, the need to relocate to be together before the days of Microsoft Teams.

"Part of the function of our team is sales and members need to be in those locations (where they sell tickets)," said Cricket Australia's Ticketing Growth Manager, Rhiannon Crowe.

Rhiannon Crowe,
Ticketing Growth Manager,
Cricket Australia.

"Before using Microsoft Teams we used phone calls but the team never felt connected to each other and individual team members felt quite isolated. We actually got to a point where staff would end up moving to Melbourne and then commute back to do their customer work, just because they didn't have that connection with our broader team.

"For example, they would spend three weeks in Melbourne and then go into the market for a week and do a whole heap of meetings over that week period."

Since the Tickets & Premium Experience team adopted Microsoft Teams as its place to work at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, everything has changed – for the better. Rhiannon said all documentation relating to the team is shared in the Teams channel and as soon as anything is updated or added, the whole team is notified so they can access the resources.

"Teams has been a huge gamer changer for us," Rhiannon said.

"We now have people back out in their markets, they can call any time to anybody.

"Since having Teams we've just seen such a difference in the way that everyone interacts and as a team we're really mindful that if we hop on a Teams call, everybody has their camera on so that we can interact face-to-face with one another, even though it is only through a screen."

Working in Teams channels, with external guests

All conversations relating to the team are shared in the team's Microsoft Teams channels – not in chat - along with files, documents and anything else relating to the team. Weekly team meetings are now held in Teams, rather than in-person in the Melbourne office, and side meetings can be held any time they're needed.

Importantly, the team invites guests into its Teams channels. The guests are usually state cricket body's ticketing staff, allowing these key stakeholders access to the information, conversations and documents they need. There are 17 members in the team in total, but many of these are guests.

"We would never have had this connection in the past," Rhiannon said.

"Teams is the go-to channel."

It's not all hard work and no play. The closeknit team sometimes shares aspects of their personal life in the Teams channel.

"We have some fun chats as well for different things that are happening through the day for people," Rhiannon said.

"It's also getting to know the team and understanding who they are under the surface. We always like to have a bit of fun and send some memes, that sort of stuff."

Microsoft Teams
Chat v Channels

There are times, Rhiannon said, when people will use Microsoft Teams chat instead of the team channel. But those times are reserved for speaking with only one or two people at a time.

"We always try and make sure that, depending on the audience, if it's more broad and everyone needs to be aware of it, we throw it in channels," she said.

"But if it's more specific for one, or a few, people then we'll use the chat."

While Microsoft Teams training is now compulsory at Cricket Australia for new starters, Rhiannon's team made the conscious decision to establish a team and work in Microsoft Teams from the start of the pandemic. While they received some basic tips, Rhiannon said it has been more a case of learning on the job and learning from each other.

"Everyone gets a bit excited when they find something new and they can be the one to share it with the rest of the group," Rhiannon said.

No more exhausting face-to-face marathon meetings

Another huge benefit of working together in Microsoft Teams is no longer having to cram in whole-team collaboration sessions on the rare occasions everyone is together face-to-face. In fact, now rather than having a three-day face-to-face session bursting with meeting after meeting, and leaving people feeling exhausted, mentally drained and overwhelmed, these face-to-face sessions can be reduced to one day and instead focus on team building and getting to know each other.

Rhiannon said people now leave these face-to-face sessions feeling energized, rather than exhausted.

"Now we can mentally go; 'Alright, we'll do this meeting online but when we get everybody here we'll only do one day session and we'll have some fun activities' and it's more team building," Rhiannon said.

"So it actually has enabled us to be better about what we do when we do have those connection moments with everyone."

Perhaps the biggest benefit from this team's prolific use of Microsoft Teams comes on match day. If a key person comes down sick on match day and can't attend a game, all the necessary information can be easily accessed on Teams for any replacement. The same applies should anyone leave the team.

"For us, working this way in Teams is to future proof," Rhiannon said.

"We never know how long employees are going to stay, but also on a given match day, if someone gets sick, people need to be able to step in and do their role and having that information there in a shared environment enables everybody to work across different areas and upskill and have knowledge across different roles.

"That's essential for us."

Interestingly, looking at the CA Tickets & Premium Experience team's data on SWOOP Analytics shows a lull in the Activity By Time measure during the December and January period. This is arguably the team's busiest period, when cricket matches are held across Australia. Rhiannon says there's a simple explanation, and it's got nothing to do with team members not accessing the information on Teams.

"We find that we're working face-to-face in those instances, so staff that are looking after those particular matches will be at venue and therefore talking directly with one another, therefore no need to have that interaction on Teams," she said.

"The work that we've already done in the lead-up to the match is already there and the chat and channels probably go a bit quieter because the information is already in there so the team know where they need to navigate it, rather than have to be chatting about it."

Getting on-field opponents to work together off-field

Cricket Australia is the national governing body for the game of cricket in Australia. Australian Cricket is administered by Cricket Australia and its members, the six state and two territory associations.

Jack Stevenson, Training and Adoption Specialist at Cricket Australia, has the task of getting more adoption of technology tools, primarily M365 tools, across all the associations.

But how do you get opponents on the field to agree to share their knowledge and resources off the field? Jack admits it can be a challenge.

"They're all separate organizations that run themselves and it's their nature to compete against each other, so it can be quite competitive," he said.

"Naturally, they want to compete against each other so it can be quite difficult at times to get them all doing the same thing and often when we're rolling out something, all but one state wants to use it.

"A lot of what we do from a change perspective is trying to get all the states working together, because it makes our life a lot easier from a technology front, but it's not always as easy as it seems."

This is when SWOOP Analytics can help by identifying exactly where attention, and coaching (pardon the pun), should be focused to ensure all states and departments become better at collaborating.

Jack Stevenson,
Training and Adoption
Specialist, Cricket Australia.

VHB - Microsoft Teams case study

How to ditch email and work in Microsoft Teams channels

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit back in early 2020, the IT department at US-based engineering, planning and design firm VHB knew Microsoft Teams was going to be a powerful tool with which to work.

They wanted to be ahead of the curve and use Teams in a purposeful and transparent way that everyone in the department agreed upon.

It started with an agreement to stick with one communication channel. The IT department committed to move off email; all department communication would switch to Microsoft Teams channels.

The next step was a shift in mindset across the entire department to work out loud in Teams. This also came with its own potential problem – constant interruption from notifications. So customizing Teams notifications became a priority to allow for minimal interruptions to daily work.

For this IT department of about 45 people, transparency was important. While the IT department is split between six working teams, each with a different focus, there are times people may need access to a team they don't actively work in. VHB's solution was to make everyone a member of every IT department team on Teams so they could access all information if needed. The key though, was for each person to turn down notifications for these non-essential teams. Notifications remain essential for your day-to-day team.

After a facilitated session with the whole department, VHB's IT department's plan looked like this:

Will Scarbrough,
VHB Vice President,
Digital Transformation.

The Plan

|		
👁	Transparency	All are members of all teams
🚫	Minimal interruptions	Customize notifications
👥	Easy to find information	Centralize knowledge Set ownership
📭	Eliminate Communication Silos	No email Private chat for logistics only

"We realized the main outcome we wanted was converting to one streamlined communication channel," said Will Scarbrough, VHB Vice President, Digital Transformation.

"Splitting our lives between email and Teams is challenging. As a group, we committed to 100% internal communications in Teams, which actually makes our life easier."

If emails arrive from outside the IT department, they agreed to redirect those emails to a Teams channel.

After establishing these basic guidelines, the next step was to give clarity on how to post and reply. VHB's IT department came up with three levels of messages:

Again, the key to making this work was to have Teams notifications set accordingly. The department then shared examples and further clarity on each message level.
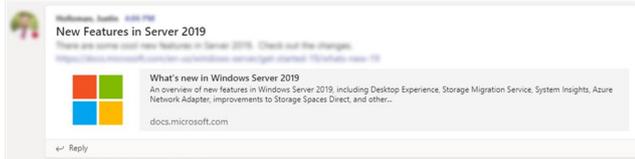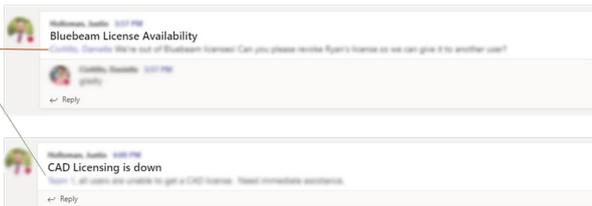
VHB IT department's examples of three levels of Teams messages.

Will said the emphasis in those early days of using Teams at the start of the pandemic was to ensure everyone controls what and how they are notified on Teams.

"Some of our best practices include setting your own notifications to allow for quiet work time where you won't be interrupted," he said.

"When messaging a teammate, we know their response might not be instant, but they will reply. So, if someone doesn't respond right away, remember we have a practice of checking our notifications periodically and allow people a grace period to get back to you.

"If there is a channel created where you need to be 100% on top of any new developments or updates, no matter how small or big, you can dial the notifications up so it will not only pop up in your banner but also any reply to that post will show up in both your banner and your feed."

There are also basic tips to ensure Teams is used consistently across the department.
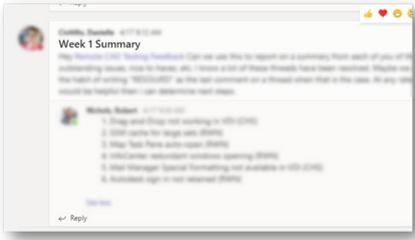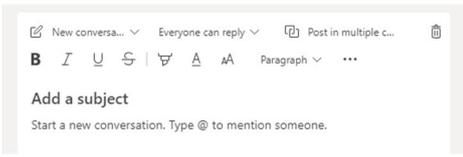

VHB IT department's tips for writing a Teams post.

VHB's IT department's usage of Teams can be summarized by the four expectations they set themselves for how to communicate within IT.

1. Work out loud (within the right size team).
2. Quickly respond or acknowledge when you are @mentioned. For channels you follow, read what arrives.
3. Set focus time to prevent the inefficiency of multi-tasking.
4. Find the right frequency to read things you don't follow. For channels you haven't hidden, ones you might be interested in but don't need to know about quickly, set a frequency such as once every other day to skim through.

Four Communication Expectations
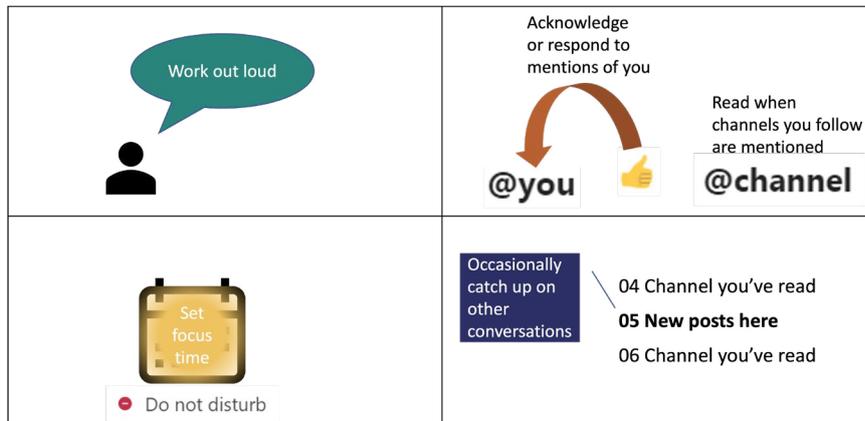
VHB IT department's Four Communication Expectations.

"You need to learn to work out loud, you need to acknowledge a response if it mentions you — even if it's just reacting to the message to confirm you've seen it. If you don't respond, it breaks down the social contract because people can't get ahold of you," Will said.

"You need to set your own focus times so Teams notifications don't overwhelm you.

"And you need to occasionally catch up on other conversations in the relevant channels you're subscribed to that are peripheral to your work."

VHB's IT department has been following these guidelines for working in Teams since 2020 and the data from SWOOP Analytics proves its success, with the IT department teams among all the top-performing teams on VHB's SWOOP Analytics dashboard. In SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams benchmarking analysis, VHB had two teams ranked in the top 1% of all active teams analyzed.

Rolling out Microsoft Teams to the rest of VHB

The next step is to try rolling out the lessons learned to the rest of the 1800 employees in the organization. Except for the IT department, Teams is primarily used for chat across VHB. But plans are underway for that to change.

Will is working with the Director of Technical Services, Matt Kennedy, the company's Learning and Development team, and others on the IT and design teams to implement these changes.

The process starts with Communities of Practice (CoP) within Teams. Although it's not something SWOOP would recommend as best practice, for numerous reasons, VHB has decided not to use Viva Engage for CoPs but to instead host CoPs on Microsoft Teams, despite a large number of people in each team.

Ken Staffier, Chief Engineer for New England Land Development at VHB, quickly learned the benefit of sharing leadership information and directives in Teams, rather than email, and before long the team on Teams had turned into a CoP for Land Development at VHB with more than 300 members.

"My messages were in the Teams platform for all to see," Ken said.

"Searching for messages is easier than ever since they remain on Teams permanently versus an email, where maybe someone deleted it or it became cumbersome to find.

"We started finding that communicating like that was pretty fantastic and began utilizing Teams more. It ended up growing into a Community of Practice almost organically because we were using it to connect with teams and receive as much information as we could."

ROI from collaborating on Teams

Ken shared an example of how communicating and collaborating in this CoP has already led to business value and ROI.

An employee was working on a residential site and wanted to build a pickleball court for the recreation area but didn't have details or a design to do so. They posted in Teams asking for help.

"In less than 10 minutes they had eight or 10 people responding. They were blown away by how quickly those answers came in," Ken said.

"Whereas if that sat in somebody's inbox, it might take them a week or two to respond and they wouldn't have that same instantaneous connection.

"That's the thing we're seeing with Teams, and we want to maintain and foster it even more."

Importantly, Ken and Senior Project Manager Karen Staffier, who both facilitate the CoP, had nothing to do with the pickleball conversation; it was an organic question and a sign of the shifting culture towards collaborating on Teams. They're also planning to use the data from SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams to identify the influential people within the CoP to help share messaging.

Another example of instant ROI using the CoP in Teams was when someone needed information on Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations. Ken shared the details and documents on Teams and within minutes others were responding with thanks because they too needed the information and were saved from searching for it elsewhere.

"If that had been an email and I had responded directly to that person, nobody else would have known about it and we would have lost the opportunity of wider info sharing," Ken said.

"We see the power of it. We want to keep people engaged and using it because it is so helpful."

Karen perhaps summed up the purpose of the CoP; "Helping each other builds community."

Moving the enterprise to Microsoft Teams

The second step towards moving the rest of the company to Microsoft Teams is moving files to the correct cloud tools for each project, which totals thousands of projects each year.

"Teams is the common denominator, providing communications and live document collaboration," Will said.

"In the future there will be a team automatically created per project, in addition to the industry cloud tools needed for that project. That space will serve as the working group for the team as well."

Will and the IT department have learned it's not a good idea to force everyone to switch to Teams because they won't know how to use it well if they're only used to email.

What will be implemented though is an agreement for each project to either communicate in email or in Teams, but not both. Either way, the files will be accessed via Teams.

"We're creating a training that if you're the project manager of the team, you need to pick. Either communicate in Teams or in email but don't do both," Will said.

"And if you're not comfortable yet in Teams, that's fine, keep to email. But you have files in Teams."

Karen Staffier,
Senior Project Manager,
VHB.

Engage Squared - Microsoft Teams case study

It's all Japanese to me

Imagine being an English-speaking software developer tasked with creating an app completely in Japanese, while living in New Zealand.

That's exactly the situation Engage Squared developer Ryan Clasby found himself in. Ryan had to create the app from scratch in a foreign language, communicate with his team in another hemisphere and time zone, work with translations along the way and design an app in a completely new format to meet the Japanese customer requirements.

Two months after the project started, Ryan and his close team boasted a custom app for the client, completely in Japanese. So successful was the app, the client who commissioned the app on behalf of a larger client, also asked for its own custom version.

Ryan Clasby,
Senior Developer,
Engage Squared.

A screenshot of the app created by Engage Squared for the Japanese client.

"It was certainly a challenge," Ryan said.

Despite being an experienced Power Platform developer, Ryan was nervous.

"When I was first told about it, I thought; 'I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this. It's going to be pretty difficult'," he said.

"It felt a bit daunting, but I really liked the idea of the challenge. It's something I've never done before, creating an app in a different language."

Ryan and his team were able to successfully complete the project by communicating and collaborating on Microsoft Teams and across the M365 suite of tools. Not only was their app successful, so was their team. In SWOOP Analytics' 2023 M365 & Microsoft Teams benchmarking analysis of more than 67,000 teams in Microsoft Teams, this team was ranked No.2 in world, based on SWOOP's comprehensive bespoke online Team Performance Index.

This quiet achieving team's high ranking came as a surprise to Engage Squared CEO Stephen Monk, who didn't even have access to the team on Teams. But a close look at the team shows best practices in working out loud and digital collaboration habits right from the start.

Let's backtrack to September 2022 when Engage Squared expanded into Japan and opened its first office in Tokyo.

CEO Stephen Monk, Michael Cashen and Justin McPhee at Engage Squared's Tokyo office launch in September 2022.

In December 2022 a consulting firm contacted Michael Cashen, Engage Squared's Japan Country Manager, about creating an employee development and wellbeing app on Microsoft Power Platform for a training firm that was working with a large pharmaceutical company, the end client.

Tokyo-based project manager Yuta Saito was the main contact point and while he had some experience building Power Platform apps, it was decided the more experienced Ryan would primarily develop the app.

Michael, Yuta and Ryan set up a team on Microsoft Teams for the project, and Ryan's manager was also invited into the team. Three channels were created – a rarely-used General channel, a channel for the app for the pharmaceutical company and a third channel for the app for the training firm that also wanted its bespoke version.

All documents, chats and communications were posted in the Teams channel and twice a week the three met online in a Teams meeting for 30-minute check-ins.

Michael Cashen,
Japan Country Manager,
Engage Squared.

Yuta Saito,
Project Manager,
Engage Squared.

They were working across two time zones in different hemispheres so transparent collaboration allowed for asynchronous working habits. Working this way meant the team excelled in SWOOP Analytics' collaboration habits of being Email Liberated, Chat Liberated, Asynchronous Collaborators, Filer Sharers, Camera Confident and Screen Sharers.

Working this way in Teams channels also allowed easy access to auto translations, which were sometimes needed. User requirements, user stories, bugs discovered – everything was documented and discussed in the Teams channel, along with deadline dates, prioritization of work and more.

"Apart from our bi-weekly check-ins, everything went back and forth on posts in the channels," Michael said.

"Ryan doesn't speak Japanese and he built the app with the UI completely in Japanese. It was quite impressive."

The final app was finished in February and deployed in March.

Some of Engage Squared's Tokyo-based team, including Yuta and Michael.

Stephen Monk, CEO, Engage Squared.

The team no longer uses the Teams channel but the entire process remains documented there for anyone to tap into the knowledge should it be required. The team has not been archived but Michael has unpinned the team, making it accessible but out of sight, now it's not required.

"Adopting great work habits has helped us in many ways," said CEO Stephen Monk.

"Because of how we work, we can have confidence to put the best person with the right skills on the job, regardless of where they are based. This leads to better outcomes for customers and quicker turnaround times and helps our team to share knowledge and continuously improve.

"It's great to see how these collaborating practices have real tangible benefits."

Practicing what it preaches when it comes to successful digital collaboration, Engage Squared boasted a second team in the top 10 from the more than 67,000 benchmarked by SWOOP in 2023. The No.9 ranked team in SWOOP's global benchmarking is a team established for an internal project to replace Engage Squared's time sheet system.

4 Microsoft 365 Benchmarking

The M365 benchmarking conducted by SWOOP develops insights from data drawn from the Microsoft M365 Administration Reports. Our benchmarking covers an extended period of 180 days, measured daily. Collaboration happens to different degrees across all multiple functions provided by M365. The intent of benchmarking is to discover which patterns of usage of the different functions lead to optimal collaboration performance.

4.1 Assessment Methodology

4.1.1 Collaboration Habits

Assessment of our Collaboration Champions is centered on what we consider are best practice digital collaboration habits. While M365 activity levels play a role in setting minimum activity thresholds, collaboration performance is assessed by how individuals behave, according to SWOOP's nominated Seven Collaboration Habits:

Figure 3 - SWOOP Analytics' Seven Collaboration Habits.

For privacy reasons, we are not benchmarking individuals or any business segments with less than five members; which is consistent with the default [minimum group size for analytics used by Microsoft](#) within Viva Insights.

At SWOOP we have conducted digital working benchmarking studies with Microsoft Teams, Viva Engage (Yammer) and Workplace from Meta. These studies have drawn out numerous case studies from participants and commentary from our subject matter expert consulting partners. We believe we are as well informed as anyone to comment astutely on what makes a good digital collaboration habit. We accept, however, that in the world of digital working, there are conflicting opinions. We address many of these in our article on [Digital behavioural change – are you motivated enough?](#)

The table below presents the selected Seven Collaboration Habits, the rationale for their selection and how the raw ratios are calculated:

Table 1- Seven Collaboration Habits measurement.

Collaboration habit	Rationale	Calculation
Email Liberated	Email has been the primary business communication tool for decades, but also the cause of much frustration. It is easy to overlook an important message in overflowing mailboxes. A person who is Email Liberated has learned to reduce the volume of email by transitioning their internal communications to Microsoft Teams channels and Viva Engage conversations. Work colleagues get the urgent attention they deserve, reserving email for external interactions.	(Viva Engage posts & replies + Microsoft Teams channel messages) / Sent email
Asynchronous Collaborator	Changes in work styles and hybrid work means many rely heavily on Microsoft Teams calls, meetings and chat to stay connected. Such demands on our time can lead to feelings of overload and burnout. Asynchronous Collaborators have learned to balance these synchronous interactions with more time respectful asynchronous interactions in Teams channels and Viva Engage discussions where people can respond when it suits their flow of work. More flexible work patterns are therefore greatly enhanced.	(Viva Engage posts & replies + Teams channel messages) / Teams meetings (minutes)

Chat Liberated	Chat Liberated people aim to use a mix of communication channels to maximize their collaboration potential. Today, one-on-one private chat dominates our interactions. Extending your interactions to Teams channels and Viva Engage communities can help you become more Chat Liberated as others can more easily follow your work.	(Viva Engage posts & replies + Teams channel messages) / Teams chat messages
Community Contributor	Remote working has resulted in us working more intensely with our close colleagues. Research from Microsoft has shown our broader networks (and consequently innovation levels) have suffered during the COVID-19 period. Community Contributors make a point of taking time out from day-to-day work in Teams to be active in communities platform Viva Engage to connect with others. It's not only a virtual water-cooler, but also an investment in your broader reputation as a skilled practitioner.	(Viva Engage posts & replies + Viva Engage likes) / (Microsoft Teams channel messages + Teams chat messages + Teams calls)
File Sharer	Our common habit is to work on files in our private spaces, before releasing them to shared spaces when ready. With the growth in co-authored content versioning, this can become a nightmare. File Sharers have learned to work in the shared space. They and their co-authors make use of the excellent co-authoring toolsets now available, to maximize their shared content production.	SharePoint viewed or edited count / (OneDrive active files count + SharePoint viewed or edited count)
Camera Confident	While sometimes controversial, the weight of expert opinion is that your camera should be on in video meetings. Human connection is always stronger when you can see who you are conversing with. People who are Camera Confident are biased towards having the camera on, but may also have times when they will turn it off e.g., bandwidth issues, some webinars, but will aim to inform their colleagues as to why.	Video time (minutes) / audio time (minutes)

Screen Sharer	Participating in screen sharing is an effective way of communicating with a virtual audience, minimizing the potential for miscommunication. Screen Sharers are quick to share their screens or encourage their colleagues to do so when communications get bogged down in complexities. It's also a good break from just talking heads.	Screenshare (minutes) / audio time (minutes)

You should note that all Seven Collaboration Habits are calculated as ratios or proportions. Like financial ratios, they reflect a "balance" between competing measures. For example, a debt/equity ratio reflects how a firm chooses to finance itself; the asynchronous collaboration ratio reflects a choice between asynchronous and synchronous collaboration. Our proposition is that the scores for each collaboration habit should be maximized to an appropriate level (set by our benchmarking).
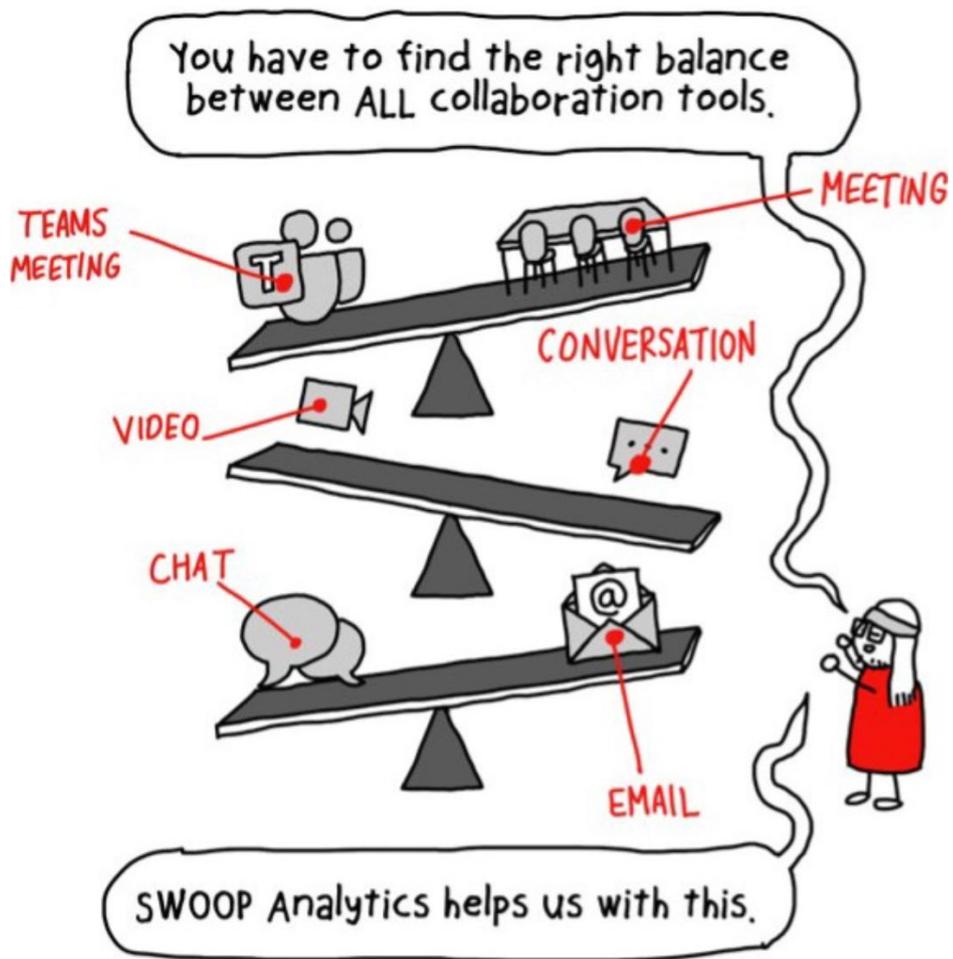
4.1.2   Benchmarking process

In our product [SWOOP Analytics for M365](), we provide benchmark goals drawn from our latest benchmarking studies, directly on our dashboard reports. In 2023, we are using a reference set from 19 organizations and more than 266,000 people to create a score for each collaboration habit. We calculated raw collaboration habit ratios first, and then converted these to [percentile rankings]() from 0 to 100 for each collaboration habit. Note that individual people are anonymized by the allocation of a unique ID code. The following diagram summarizes the overall benchmarking process:
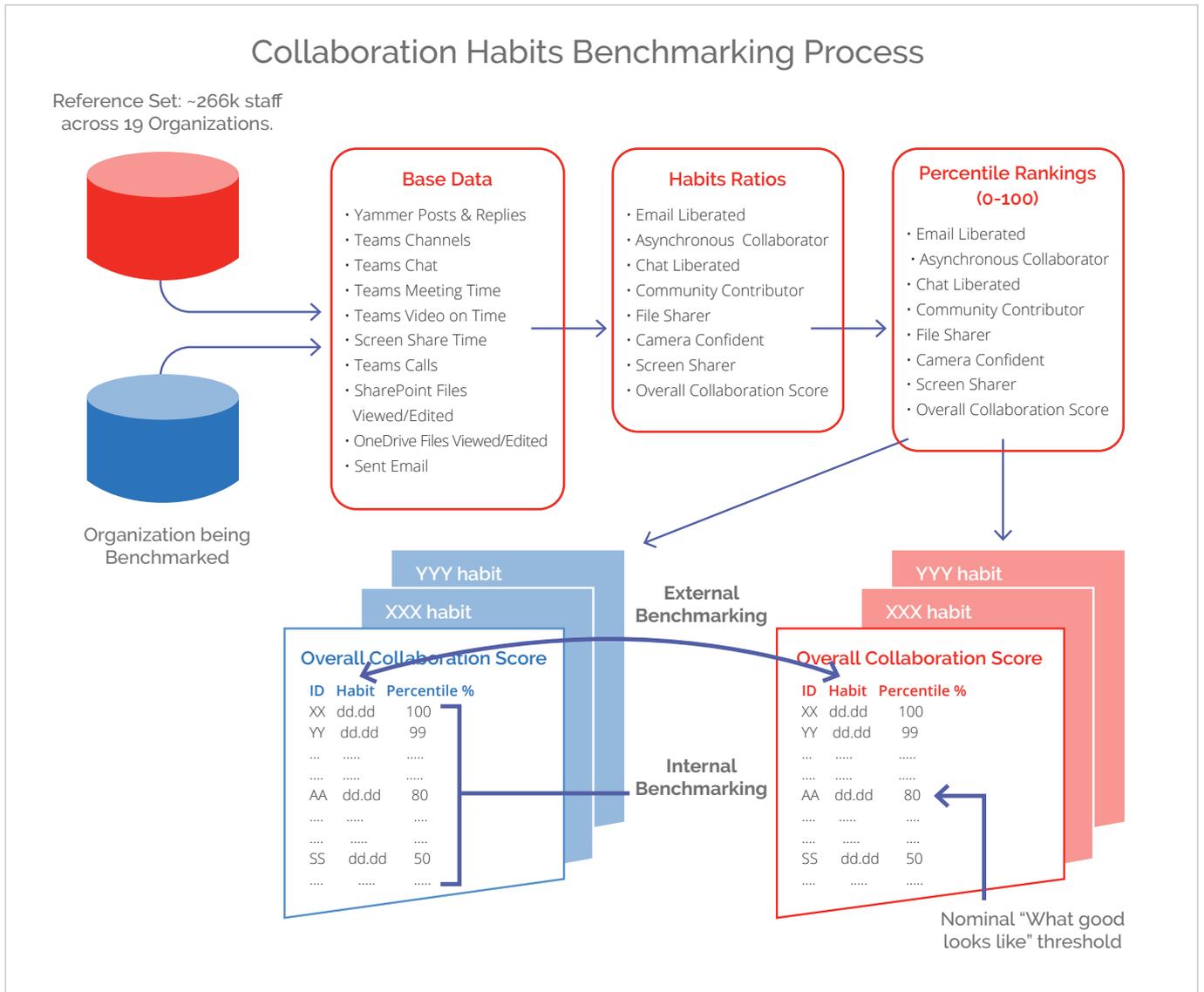

Figure 4 - Collaboration habits benchmarking process.

External benchmarking is achieved by matching the raw habit scores with a similar score from the reference set. The percentile score from the reference set is then assigned as the external benchmark score. For example, Susan in Organization A has a score of 67 for [Camera Confidence](), which equates to a percentile rank of 60%. Susan is therefore ranked in the top 40% for Camera Confidence in Organization A. When we match Susan's score of

67 against the full reference set, an internal score of 67 might drop to only 53% because of the larger comparison set.

On the SWOOP Analytics for M365 dashboard, an individual's, group's, or enterprise-level habits are compared with an external and internal reference set.
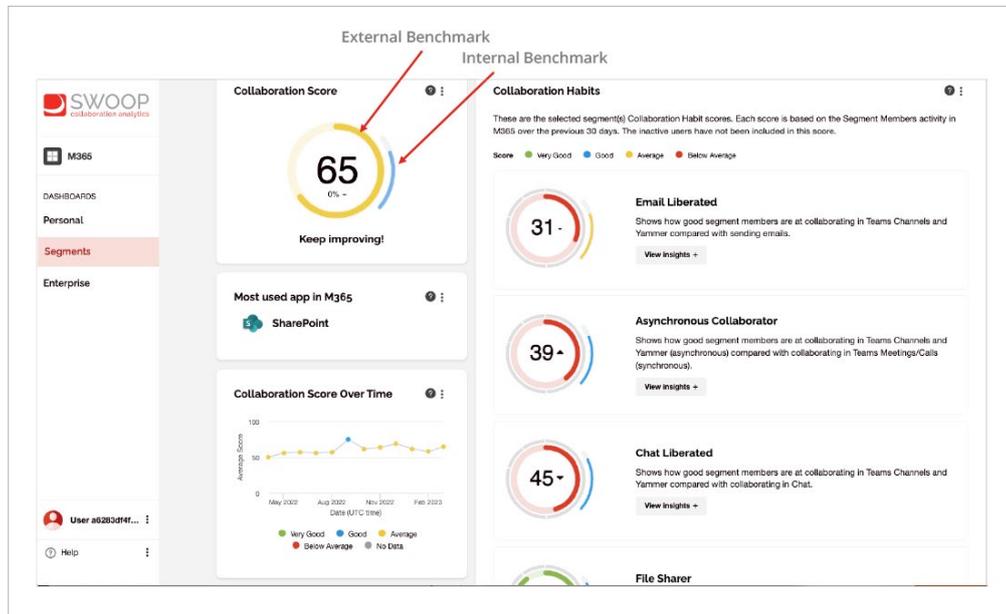

Figure 5 - Overall collaboration score.

The overall collaboration score is the average percentile score across the Seven Collaboration Habits. To calculate the collaboration score for an organization or a business segment of an organization, the individual member scores are aggregated. The screen shot in Figure 5 is a group-level dashboard compared with the reference sets.

Note the colors represent the ratings when compared with our reference set. We have set the "Very Good" level at the 90th percentile; "Good" level at the 80th percentile and "Average" level at the 50th percentile.

The same process shown is conducted for each organization participating in the benchmarking. The percentile scores calculated for each anonymized individual provides a means for conducting internal comparisons for individuals. The individual scores can then be aggregated up to any group identified within the employee's profiles, to provide group level comparisons.

For the purpose of identifying our true collaboration champions, we have chosen to benchmark at the business segment/group level. A business segment is a profile attribute in Azure Active Directory. Typically, it's a department or geographic area. We identified 5,000+ business segments with more than five active members from which to choose our collaboration champions, and to solicit our case studies. For collaboration performance, group size does matter. It's easier to score higher as a group if your group is smaller. We therefore chose examples of high collaboration scores within different group size categories, to ensure we achieved a good cross section of high performing groups.

4.2 Benchmarking results

4.2.1 Demographics

For 2023 we have 19 organizations; a similar number of organizations to 2022, but this year's cohort includes three organizations with well over 25,000 employees and 40,000 M365 accounts (including guests). We had only a single organization with over 25,000 employees in 2022. The different composition of this year's cohort is significant, given our prior insights suggesting larger enterprises struggled most with achieving a good balance of M365 tool usage.
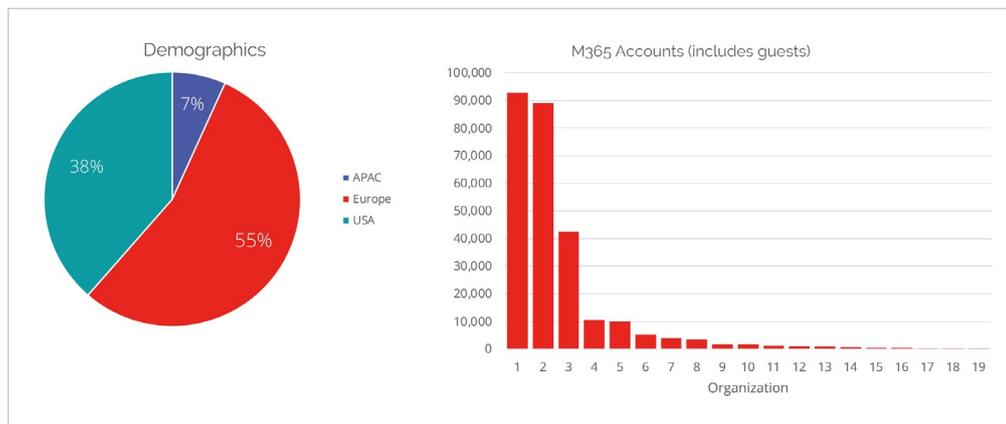

Figure 6 - Sample demographics – M365 accounts.

The geographic breakup reflects where the head office is located. For the majority of organizations studied, their employees are globally located. Due to the different composition of this year's cohort, year-to-year comparisons are only made between a subgroup of organizations that have participated in both the 2022 and 2023 benchmarks.

4.2.2 Overview of activity data sources used

SWOOP Analytics for M365 draws its data exclusively from the M365 Administration Activity Reports. The following fields are used:

- Microsoft Teams chat messages
- Microsoft Teams channel messages
- Microsoft Teams audio time (minutes)
- Microsoft Teams video time (minutes)
- Microsoft Teams calls
- Microsoft Teams screen sharing time (minutes)
- Microsoft Teams recurring meetings
- Microsoft Teams scheduled meetings
- Microsoft Teams ad hoc meetings
- OneDrive active file count
- SharePoint active file count
- SharePoint pages viewed or edited
- Viva Engage posts & replies

- Viva Engage reads
- Viva Engage reactions
- Outlook email sent
- Outlook email read

The user activity reports are available for seven days, 30 days, 90 days or 180 days. To maximize the available coverage, we drew from the 180 days reports for the 19 benchmarking partner organizations. The period for benchmarking was the 180 days to the end of March 2023.

4.2.3   Are we really in meeting overload?

This is the question those tasked with "people management" are concerned about. In our 2022 M365 Benchmarking Report we challenged the enduring narrative that the pandemic had led to employees being stressed and overloaded with virtual meetings. Our data showed that a much larger proportion were more digitally "disengaged" and therefore, if anything, "underloaded".
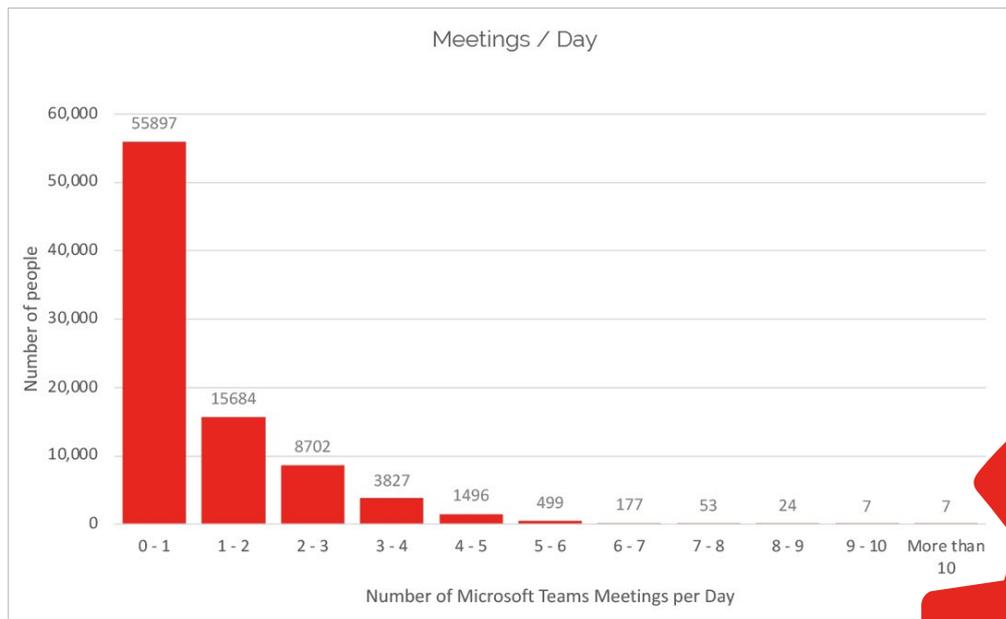

Figure 7 – Microsoft Teams meetings/day.

To ensure we were not biasing the data, all Microsoft Teams meetings i.e., scheduled, recurring and ad-hoc were included. No check was made as to whether a scheduled or recurring meeting was attended, so the number likely overstates the actual. Also, to guard against including M365 accounts that are inactive or non-people accounts, we only included accounts that had evidence of at least one meeting. Note that the meeting count will include scheduled and recurring face-to-face meetings.
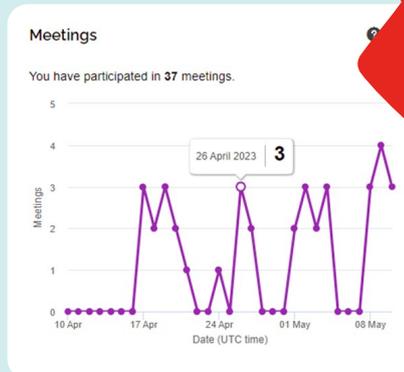
Within **SWOOP Analytics for M365** you can find the breakdown of meetings you took part in under the Activity tab of the Personal dashboard. Hover over the day to see how many meetings you had.

Finding your meeting numbers in SWOOP

Consistent with last year's findings, we can find no evidence that online meeting overload is affecting anyone other than an extremely small proportion of employees. We accept that some employees may feel meeting stress that is then reflected in the employee's survey results. But the data does not support meeting stress being caused by too many meetings.

What about "spending too much time in meetings?".

The M365 meeting data records the time employees spent in online meetings. We accept that "in office face-to-face" meetings will have increased since 2022, so virtual meeting time may understate the actual.
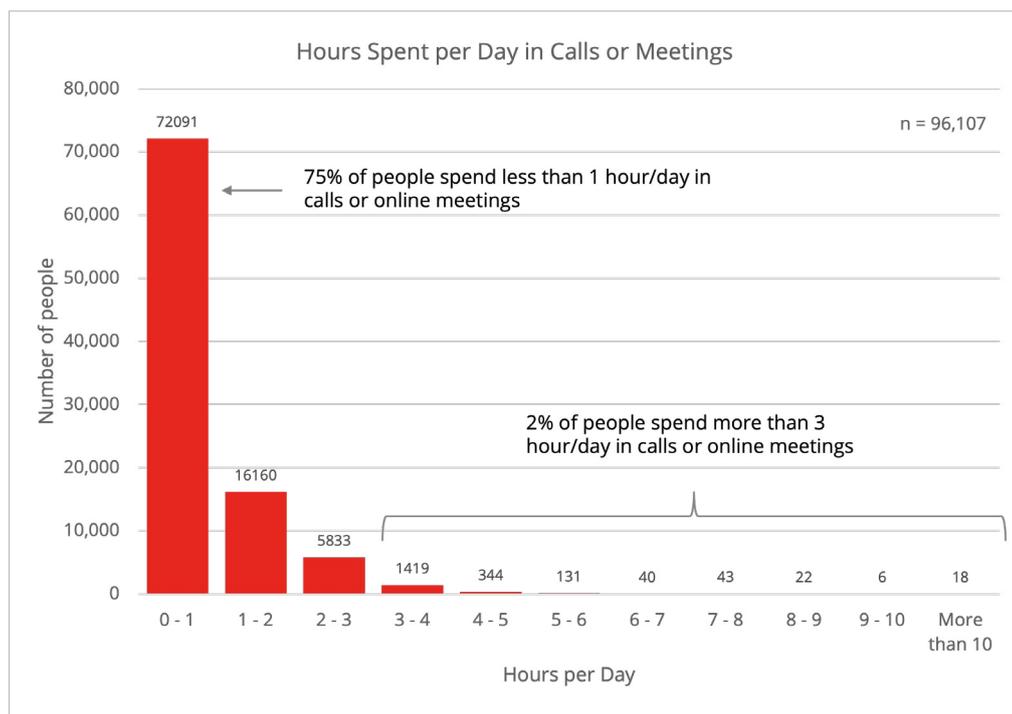

Figure 8 - Time spent in calls or meetings.

While more face-to-face in-office meetings were likely to be had in 2023, the data clearly shows that only a handful of employees are spending their days in back-to-back online meetings.

Within **SWOOP Analytics for M365** you can find the amount of time you spent in Teams meetings under the Activity tab of the Personal dashboard. Hover over the day to see the total time you spent in meetings.
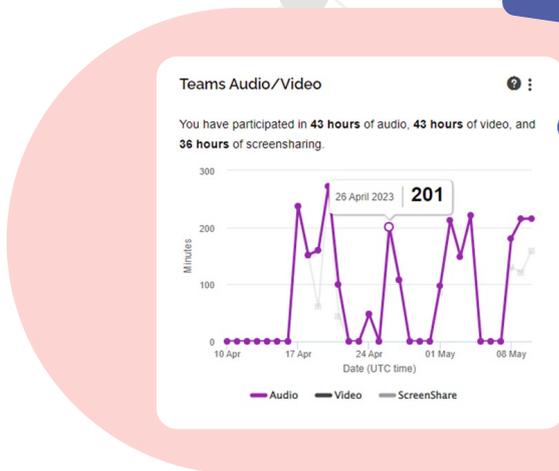
Finding the time spent in Microsot Teams meetings in SWOOP

The graphic below provides the estimated time spent on M365 activities. For asynchronous activities, a conversion factor has been used to convert an activity count to time spent. For most of these factors, we have taken the conversion factors used by Microsoft's Viva Insights.
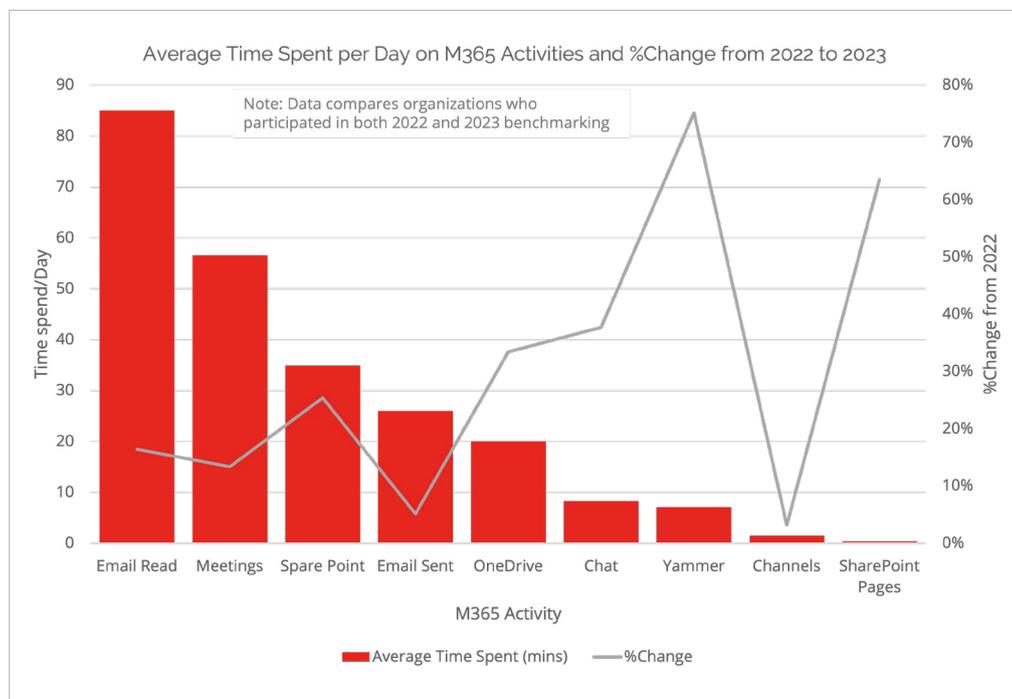

Figure 9 - Time spent in M365 compared with 2022.

Using the nine organizations (62,000 employees) to compare M365 usage year-on-year, we can see that reading email and online meetings consume most of employees' time in M365. At the other end of the scale we have Viva Engage, Microsoft Teams channels and SharePoint pages that are little used. Notably, Viva Engage has seen a 70% increase in activity year-on-year. Can this be the rebranding from Yammer to Viva Engage effect? SharePoint Online has shown a 60% growth from a low base. But this does indicate that SharePoint Online as an intranet is taking hold.

The low usage and growth in the use of Microsoft Teams channels is cause for concern. In essence, the use of Teams channels reflects the use of using teams within Microsoft Teams, a core component for growth in team-centered agile organizations. We drill more deeply into this topic in the Microsoft Teams benchmarking section of this report (Section 5).

Finding your M365 activity breakdown in SWOOP
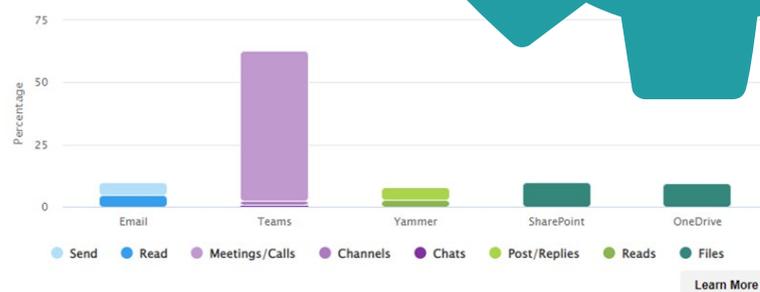
Within **SWOOP Analytics for M365** you can find the split between M365 activities in the Activity tab of the Personal dashboard. You can also find the split for the whole organization in the Enterprise dashboard under the Activity tab.

4.2.4   Digital working specialists

Six of the 19 organizations included in this year's benchmarking are considered "digital working" specialists i.e., they are consultants that make their living helping their clients to work more effectively with digital toolsets. Most are acknowledged Microsoft partners and therefore we would expect represent "what good looks like" when it comes to using M365 internally. Most are small organizations with less than 600 employees.

Table 2 - Digital specialists M365 activity comparison.

Activity	Daily Average/Person - Specialists	Daily Average/Person – Non-Specialists	%Difference
Viva Engage post & replies	0.14	0.01	2131%
Viva Engage likes	0.36	0.02	1400%
Microsoft Teams channel messages	0.58	0.06	891%
Adhoc meetings	0.57	0.09	553%
Viva Engage reads	5.82	1.51	286%
SharePoint active files	4.56	1.66	175%
Recurring Teams meetings	0.60	0.27	127%
Scheduled Teams meetings	0.61	0.33	87%
Microsoft Teams chat messages	25.98	14.77	76%
SharePoint pages	0.43	0.28	54%
OneDrive active files	2.87	2.15	34%
Outlook emails read	34.57	28.67	21%
Outlook email sent	4.07	5.84	-30%

We can see from this activity list that, as expected, the digital specialists are more active in all digital activities, with the **exception of sending emails**. The areas where the digital specialists are more active are Viva Engage, Microsoft Teams channels and ad-hoc Teams meetings. We could infer that it is these dimensions that most separate agile, team-centered organizations from the rest.

Table 3 - Digital specialist time spent on M365 comparison.

Activity	Daily Average Time (Hrs) Digital Specialists	Daily Average Time (Hrs) Non-Specialists	%Difference
Microsoft Teams channels	0.02	0.002	891%
Viva Engage	0.10	0.03	311%
Microsoft Teams audio calls	0.71	0.23	212%
Screen Sharing	0.76	0.27	182%
SharePoint active files	5.82	1.51	286%
Microsoft Teams video calls	0.65	0.28	130%
Microsoft Teams chat	0.22	0.12	76%
SharePoint pages	0.01	0.005	54%
OneDrive active files	0.48	0.36	34%
Outlook email read	1.73	1.43	21%
Outlook email sent	0.34	0.49	-30%

Note: SharePoint active files refers to a file that has been viewed or edited.

The above table uses the activity-to-time conversion to estimate where time is being spent on M365. The digital specialists are shown to spend four hours/day online compared with 3.25 hours/day for the non-specialists. The standout difference is in time spent in Microsoft Teams channels, Viva Engage and Teams audio calls. Interestingly, even for the digital specialists, the time spent in Teams channels is significantly less than in Teams chat.

Despite its perceived importance, Microsoft Teams channel use is not time consuming, on average, less than a couple of minutes a day. Only 24% of employees used Microsoft Teams channels during the three-month study period. We do note, however, that the digital specialists know that online discussions need to be persistent, and are created, or sometimes copied from chat, into channels; so that threads can be followed asynchronously.

As well as low Teams channel usage, only 29% of employees had interacted on Viva Engage (Yammer) and only 41% on either Viva Engage or Teams channels.

In contrast, 77% had participated in a Teams meeting; 79% in Teams chat; 74% in screen sharing, 92% had sent an email and 94% accessed a SharePoint file.

4.2.5   Collaboration habits performance

The collaboration habits were designed with input from digital specialist organizations and therefore we would expect these organizations to score well with respect to their Seven Collaboration Habits performance; and this is the case:

Table 4 – Seven Collaboration Habits performance.

	Members	%Employees as Digital Elites (Score > 90)	Average Score
Digital Specialists	1,125 (6 orgs)	28%	82%
Remaining Cohort	124,078 (13 orgs)	1.5%	48%

It is worth noting that the size of the organization does matter. In our 2022 M365 report we noted the "long tail" effect of digital work i.e., a small percentage of high performers and a long "tail" for increasingly inferior performance. This is particularly pronounced in larger organizations, where sharing good practice can be more challenging. The long tails in the larger non digital specialist organizations are numerically large; and therefore, have the effect of dragging the average performance scores down when compared with the smaller digital specialist firms.

To provide an analysis which is less impacted by organization size, we have looked at collaboration performance at the "group" level i.e., as defined in an organization's Active Directory.

4.2.6   Collaboration Habits performance for groups

Active Directory-defined groups typically mimic the formal organization structure, but not always. Research on teams size will typically argue that peak collaborative performance happens when teams have less than 10 members, and ideally between four and eight members. Our prior research on digital teams indicates that digital teams tend to be much larger than this.

We identified 5,129 groups in this year's cohort.

Table 5 - Group collaboration performance by size.

Group Size (members)	Number of Groups	Average Collaboration Score
< 10	2,599	0.48
10 – 30	1,890	0.45
> 30	640	0.37

As anticipated, size does impact collaboration performance. But perhaps **even more important than group size is the variation in collaboration performance across the group members**. As we reported in our 2022 M365 report, even a group with a high average collaboration performance score can be negatively impacted by just one or two members who collaborate poorly. Ideally, a high-performance collaborating team would have normalized their collaboration habits i.e., low variation in habits; and even better, all using best practice habits. That said, we would anticipate that a group agreeing to collaborate only by email would perform better than a group where members attempt to collaborate using the full gamut of available tools, without agreement.

In 2022 we identified the "boomerang" learning journey, which is virtually replicated using 2023 data:
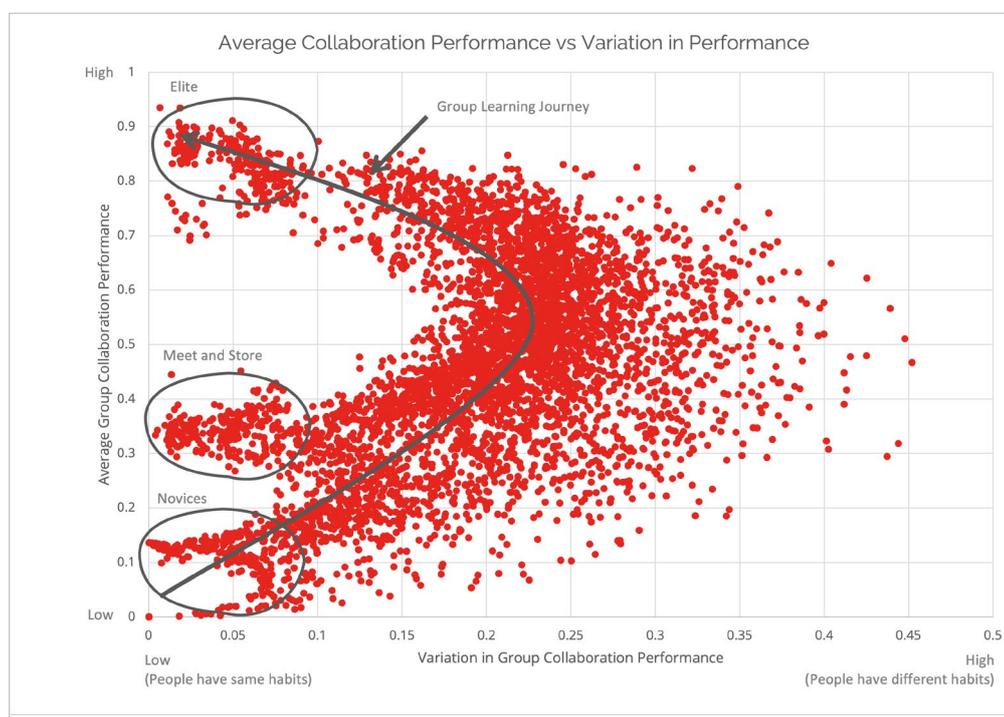

Figure 10 - 2023 boomerang learning journey.

The above chart plots the average group collaboration performance score against the variation in performance between the members of the group. Only 5% of the 5,129 groups can be found in the upper left corner of the chart. This 'elite' set of groups of people all have very strong collaboration habits.

The boomerang pattern infers that groups improve their collaboration performance virally. Starting with a few members, perhaps even only one, improving their individual collaboration habits, and then influencing their group colleagues into better habits. A good example of this in real life is the case study in section 3 from CityFibre. The "critical mass" happens after the apex of the boomerang, where the majority of the cohort groups are now.

At the novice level, the group average performance is around the 10% mark, with little variance among the members. Curiously, there is another set of groups labelled "Meet and Store", who score well on the online meeting factors (Camera Confidence and Screen Sharing) as well the use of SharePoint as the preferred file store, but they score zero on all other habits i.e., relying on email and Teams chat exclusively. This sub-group of groups emerged at the start of the pandemic, as newly remote working employees prioritized video meetings and file sharing.

4.2.7   Governance

One area of work easily measurable from M365 data speaks to IT Governance. The number of external guests invited onto the enterprise's M365 tenant potentially presents a security risk for IT security employees. At the same time, it identifies increased levels of external stakeholder engagement for the business. The second area of governance is the percentage of inactive M365 accounts. While there may be instances where inactive accounts are justified, they represent a cost-saving opportunity.
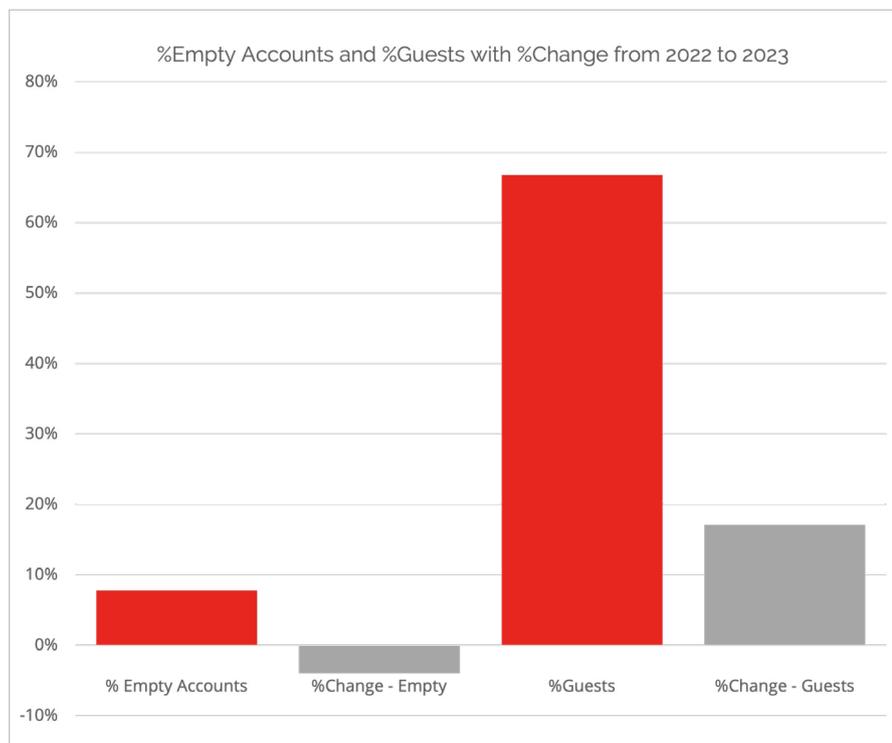

Figure 11 - Governance measures.

We can see from the chart above that the percentage of inactive accounts (over a six-month period) sits at around 8%; a 4% drop from 2022. The average %guests has grown by 17% to around 67% of all active accounts. This is set to grow in coming years as Microsoft works to reduce the friction for including external stakeholders in collaborative activities. Again, the smaller consulting firms lead the way here, using Microsoft Teams channels, selectively shared with external stakeholders.

4.3   Return On Investment from M365 best practice usage

Having identified the size of the potential gap between "best practice" collaboration performance (top 20%) and the average collaboration performance, it is now possible to estimate a quantitative return on investment available to firms if they are indeed able to close this gap.

We quantify the return in dollar terms, as this is the language of "the bottom line." However, the potential value is in time savings, just like those commuting hours saved by remote workers. They may not always directly translate to dollars e.g., contribute to more flexible working patterns and increased health and wellbeing. But they are there for those who make the effort to change their digital working habits.

SWOOP's Seven Collaboration Habits encompass the balance between different collaboration tool choices. In calculating a Return On Investment (ROI) from sustaining excellent digital collaboration habits, we make use of the Seven Collaboration Habits calculated for more than 125,000+ M365 individual account holders. By benchmarking everyone's collaboration habits, we can look to the top 10-20% to provide an achievable benefits level.

Where we can, we have looked to quantify that benefit in terms of time (and money) saved. In other areas, that do not lend themselves to easy quantification, there are qualitative benefits. For example, by swapping email for Microsoft Teams chat for one-one-one communication, there is a clear time saving. Contributing to a Viva Engage community will take more time but likely create opportunities that may surpass the investment in time.

The chart below makes the following conservative assumptions, drawn from the research literature:

- 20% of email can be replaced by more efficient Microsoft Teams channels or Viva Engage discussions, especially for internal emails.
- 50% of meeting time can be replaced by more time efficient asynchronous communication.
- 75% of inactive accounts over a six-month period could be removed and therefore saving the licensing costs.
- Hourly employees cost $US38.
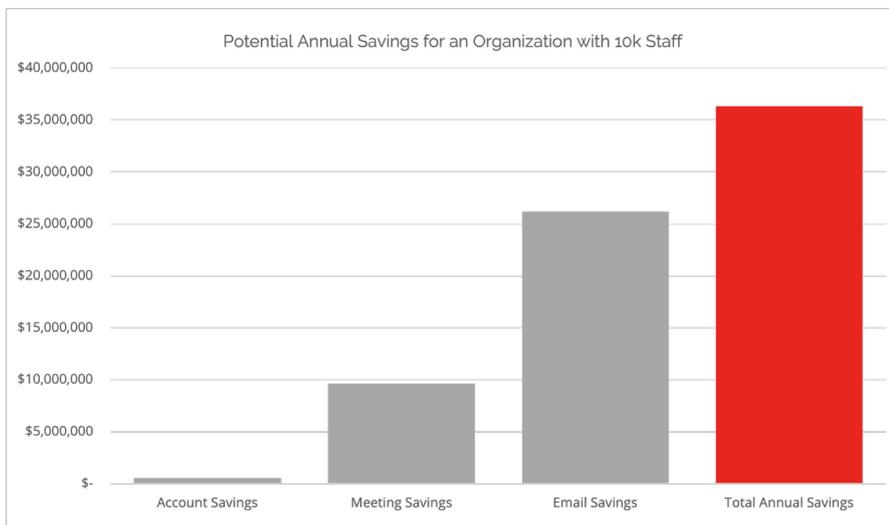
Figure 12 - Potential tangible savings from better M365 usage.

The above chart identifies that moving away from email, especially by using more efficient internal communications modes, will provide the largest returns, followed by replacing synchronous meetings with asynchronous messaging. This is especially so for those meetings principally used for status updates, that can easily be communicated asynchronously.

To put these potential benefits into perspective, **for an organization of 10,000 employees these annual savings are equivalent to having their headcount increased by 450 extra employees (4.5% increase)**, without considering the significant intangible benefits available.

4.4 M365 benchmarking insights and targets

A large part of what SWOOP benchmarking is about is to provide pragmatic targets for enterprises, group leaders and individuals to strive for; based on what their peer organizations are currently achieving. We calculate the various levels of collaborative performance for display directly on SWOOP dashboards within each SWOOP product, as a means for visualizing performance gaps that might need closing. The targets are updated, based on our most recent benchmarking analysis.

For M365, the targets are based on our collaboration habits. Four of these habits are expressed as ratios (Email Liberation, Chat Liberation, Asynchronous Collaborator and Community Contributor); which makes it difficult to express as an articulated target, compared with, say, the time cameras are on or screens are shared in virtual meetings.

The movement to hybrid working, together with the rapid changes in the M365 suite, has created a situation where many organizations are not operating in anything like a "steady state". Many organizations are experimenting in the absence of clear directions. And this is shown in the data, with some rapid changes in year-on-year trends, even within the same organizations.

Within **SWOOP Analytics for M365** you can find personal, a segment or enterprise level habits in the Habits tab of the relevant dashboard. You can view details such as how many emails you send for every Microsoft Teams channel or Viva Engage post.

Finding the collaboration habits in SWOOP

Collaboration Habits

These are your Collaboration Habit scores. Each score is based on your activity in M365 over the previous 30

Score ● Very Good   ● Good   ● Average   ● Below Average

Email Liberated

Shows how good you are at collaborating in Teams Channels and Yammer compared with sending emails

Insight
You have sent 0.52 email for every 1 Teams Channel / Yammer message.

What is good?
People who are *Email Liberated* send less than 30 emails every 1 Teams Channel / Yammer message.

How to improve
To send less email first try to reduce the amount of emails you send internally, and move this communication into Teams Channels or Yammer.

99 -

More details

Hide details −

4.4.1   Benchmarking insights

The lack of clarity in the data is not confined to passive workplace data. We have heard similar reports from HR engagement survey results (Why Microsoft Measures Employee Thriving, Not Engagement and What's Wrong with People Data?)
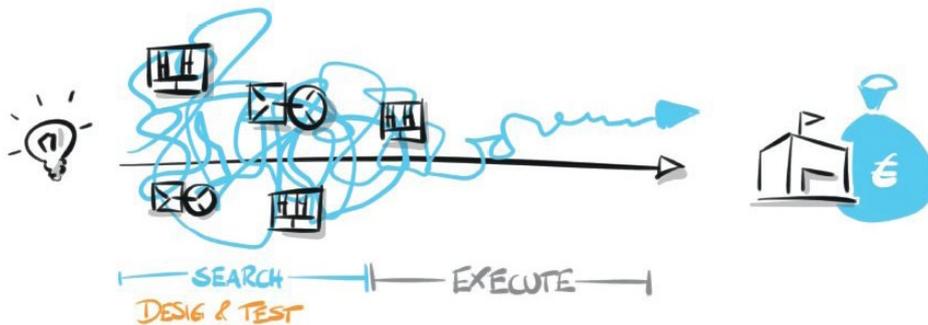
*Figure 13 - Post pandemic learning journey (Image Source: Strategizer).*

Complexity theory suggests that when the environment is sufficiently complex, and no obvious direction can be seen, then "fail safe" experimentation is appropriate, until patterns emerge that can indicate an appropriate direction (amplify the good, dampen the bad).

In this second M365 study by SWOOP Analytics we are starting to see at least some patterns emerging; especially when we analyze at the group level, where enterprise size has less of an impact. The levels of variances within groups provides us with a view of those groups that are converging on a post pandemic "execute" phase. We tentatively provide these emerging patterns as:

- The digital specialist firms are converging on common best practice habits (see Table 4); and therefore, can be confidently used as best practice exemplars;
- Employees are learning better digital working habits from their group peers. Digital workplace training and development functions should therefore aim to accelerate peer-to-peer learning;
- Even though the digital specialist firms are leading the way, every organization that we benchmarked had some groups with collaboration scores over 70 (see top of the boomerang in Figure 10). Again, digital workplace functions should seek out these groups to highlight as in-house exemplars. For SWOOP Analytics for M365 users, these groups are identified and reported on;
- During the pandemic and beyond, the most rapidly developed collaboration skill related to online meeting practices i.e., Camera Confidence, Screen Sharing and an increased use of shared SharePoint files;
- The "bad" habits that endured were the over-use of email for collaboration and the lower than needed usage of the online discussion features within Microsoft Teams channels and Viva Engage (except for the digital specialists).

4.4.2 M365 benchmarking targets

For SWOOP Analytics for M365 users, appropriate targets are built into the platform to guide you. For readers of this report without access to SWOOP for M365, we are providing the following proposed targets gleaned from the practices of our exemplar digital specialist firms, as to where they spend their time on M365:
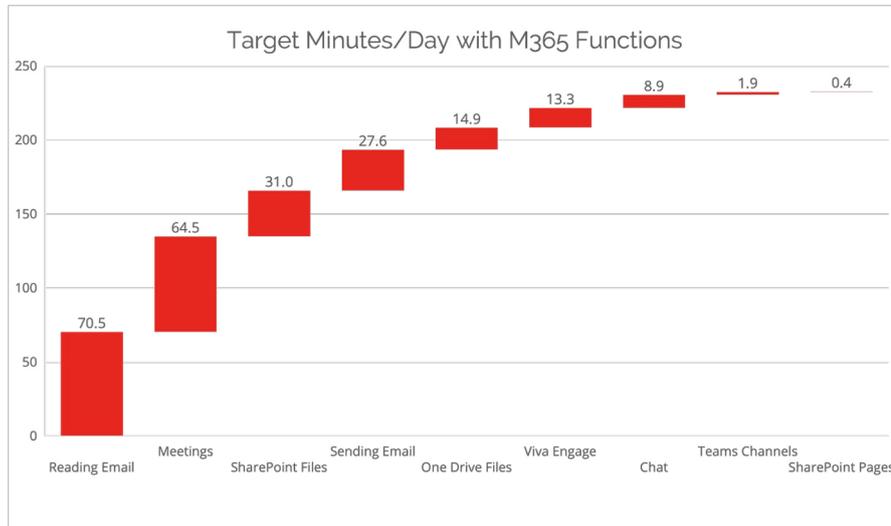

Figure 14 - Time spent on M365 functions by digital specialist firms.

These targets represent the average scores from the digital specialist firms. We can see that even the digital specialist firms still spend a considerable time using email. What is different though to non-specialist firms is that digital specialist firms do not use email to communicate internally. Email is reserved for external stakeholder communication, where Microsoft Teams guest access is not practical. Email links between employees are only created in concert with an external email i.e., when internal colleagues are copied in on an external email. We explore email networks in more detail in section 8.

We can see that a little over 70 minutes a day is spent in online meetings for the digital specialist employees. About twice as much time is spent on editing or viewing files in SharePoint compared with OneDrive. Less than 15 minutes a day is spent on Viva Engage, reading and connecting with employees beyond their immediate team. Less than a minute a day, on average, is spent on keeping up to date on reading pages on SharePoint Online (which is equivalent to the intranet for many people). For your immediate team, Microsoft Teams chat and ad-hoc calls are common, but Teams channels are used for discussions that may need to be referred to in the future. On average, digital specialist employees spend just under four hours per day working on M365.

The above chart identifies averages, so the objective is to look to see how your own M365 usage profile mimics the above. Are there some functions that you do not use at all? Are you over-using some functions, preferring not to learn a better way? How much are you influenced, or not, by your group peers?

As an experiment, try and keep track of how you are using M365 functions for a day or two. Check with your regular working group. How do you, as a group, compare?
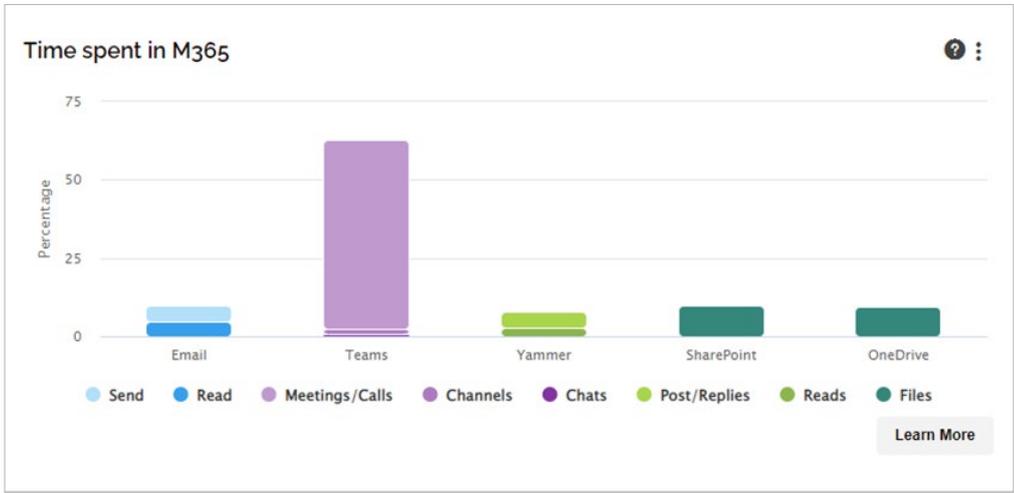

Figure 15 - SWOOP for M365 can show how time is spent across the M365 collaboration tools.
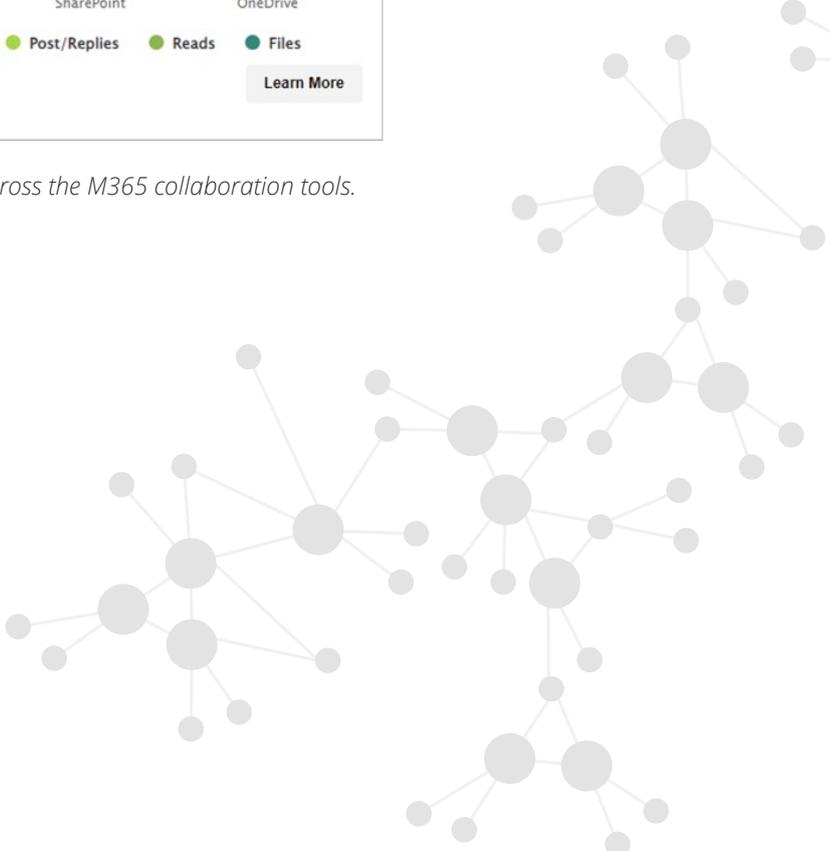
5   Microsoft Teams channels benchmarking

Our Microsoft Teams benchmarking specifically addresses digital teams' use of Microsoft Teams channels (even if only the single General channel). Digital teams are purposefully established for digital work. They may, at times, map directly to organizational segments/ groups and therefore persist. They may also be activity-based teams, e.g., project teams, that only exist for the duration of a given initiative. These are the sorts of teams that are the foundation of agile team centered organizational designs.

For our 2023 Microsoft Teams channels benchmarking we have a cohort of 17 organizations with a total of 67,727 teams (of which 6,165 active teams) and 57,951 employees using Teams channels; analyzing their Teams channel activity for a period of 90 days (about three months) to the end of March 2023.

5.1   Basic analytics

While we found 6,165 teams that were active with Microsoft Teams channels, the digital "long tail" effect is also present with Teams channel usage:
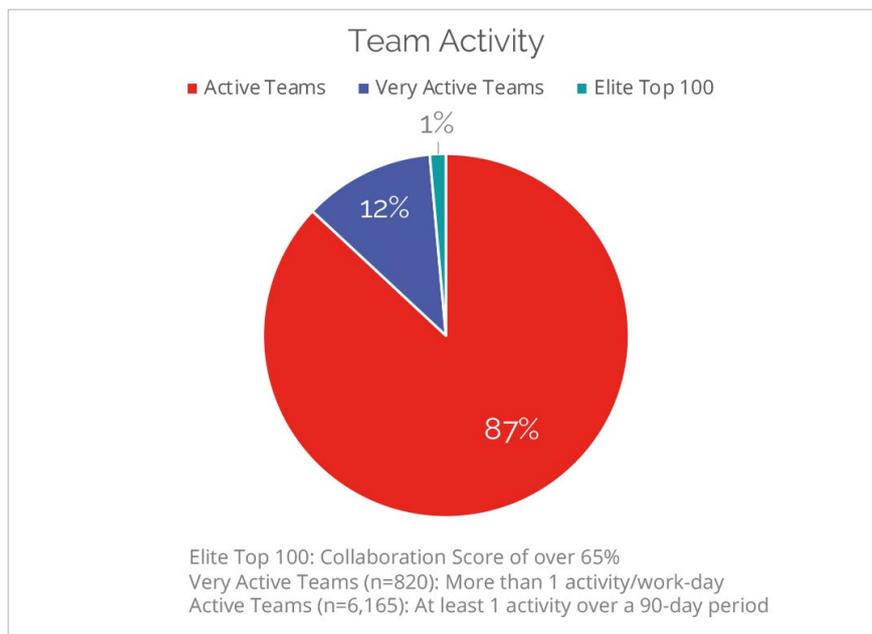

Figure 16 – Microsoft Teams channel activity.

We can see that only about 13% (820) teams were active at a level that could provide meaningful analysis. These teams had average activity levels at or above one activity/ working day. This is not to say that teams less active than this are not legitimate digital teams. We know that some teams may have been established for, say, an annual event e.g., financial reporting time. Their low activity levels, however, would bias Teams' statistics unreasonably.

Table 6 - Basic team activity in Microsoft Teams channels.

Metric	Average/Workday	Maximum/Workday
Posts	21	1,448
Replies	48	2,474
Likes	35	1,181
Mentions	4.1	130

We can see that from those active on Teams, every workday is quite conversational i.e., over two replies/post on average. Likes and mentions are less than we would see in a Viva Engage community. The maximum activity levels are shown to contrast with teams at the peak of activity levels i.e. more than 10 activities every minute! Overall, the activity levels continue the trend of substantial year-on-year increases from our 2020 and 2021 levels.

Metric	Value	Comments
Average team size	64.7 (max.2,327)	The average team size has increased by 30% since 2021
Average active team size	32.1 (max. 812)	The average active team size has increased by 33% since 2021
Average interactions / active team member	3.4 per workday (max. 33)	This is an increase of 42% from 2021
Average number of team interactions	109 per workday (max. 1460)	Interaction levels have increased 100% since 2021
Average number of channels per team	4 (max. 85)	This is down from 7.4 in 2021

What has become evident is that people set up a team on Microsoft Teams for groups that are often larger than an effective collaboration day-to-day team (ideally 4-8 members). At an average of 64 members, these "teams" look more like larger groups. 26.4% of "private" Microsoft Teams channels reinforces this inference.

The average activity levels per person and per team have increased significantly from 2021 levels. This reflects the experience curve, as team members become more familiar with the use of Teams channel discussions.

Finding Microsoft Teams user activity in SWOOP

Within **SWOOP Analytics for M365** you can find the average activity levels by selecting the Team within the Teams dashboard and then looking at the User Activity report in the Activity Tab.
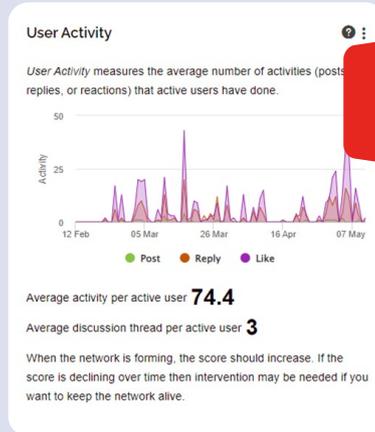
5.2 Advanced analytics

The advanced analytics are represented by SWOOP's relationship-centered metrics.

Table 7 - Advanced relationship analytics.

Metric	Value	Comments
%Response Rate	78 (Max. 100)	Measures the percentage of posts that get a reply. Slightly higher than 2021.
Multi-Group Participation index	42 (Max.85)	Measures how much members participate in multiple teams and are exposed to diverse experiences. This is a 50% increase from 2021.
%Curiosity	16 (Max.97)	Measures the percentage of messages that include a question mark. High levels of curiosity are seen as a trait of high-performing teams. A 12% increase from 2021.
%Two-way Relationships (Reciprocity)	61.2 (Max. 100)	Measures the percentage of interactions between pairs of people that are two-way. This is a core measure of team cohesion – how members interact. Score is a 6% drop from 2021, caused by the larger team sizes.

%Key Player Dependency	18 (Max. 94)	Measures the dependence of a team on a single leader. This is a 29% increase from 2021.
%Core	79 (Max. 100)	Measures the percentage of team members connected by the most connected member, e.g., if Person A is the most connected member in a team of 10 people, Person A is connected to 9 of them. The score is a 10% reduction from 2021.
%Gallery	34.8 (Max. 97.8)	Measures the percentage of passive or inactive members. High-performing teams should have no passive members. This is 36% higher than in 2021; again, likely due to the larger team sizes.
%Private Teams channels	26.4%	Measures the percentage of private versus public Teams channels. Private channels within teams can flag a lack of trust within a team. Sometimes private channels host full private teams or limit guest access. The default for Teams channels is open to all members. This significant percentage suggests that teams are formed for larger groups, rather than only working teams. Score is a 150% increase from 2021.
%Mentions	26.8 (Max. 100)	Measures the percentage of posts where one or more people have been @mentioned. Considered a good practice. Score is a 40% increase from 2021.

Compared with 2021, team sizes have grown by 30+%. This has influenced the team relationship scores of Reciprocity, %Gallery, %Core and Key Player Dependency.

5.3   Microsoft Teams benchmarking methodology

Our Microsoft Teams benchmarking methodology draws from decades of research on "what good looks like" for teams. For those interested in the specific research used, this is available in our SWOOP for Microsoft Teams e-book. We have carefully identified the key attributes of high performing teams and designed real-time, online measures, aligned to these attributes:
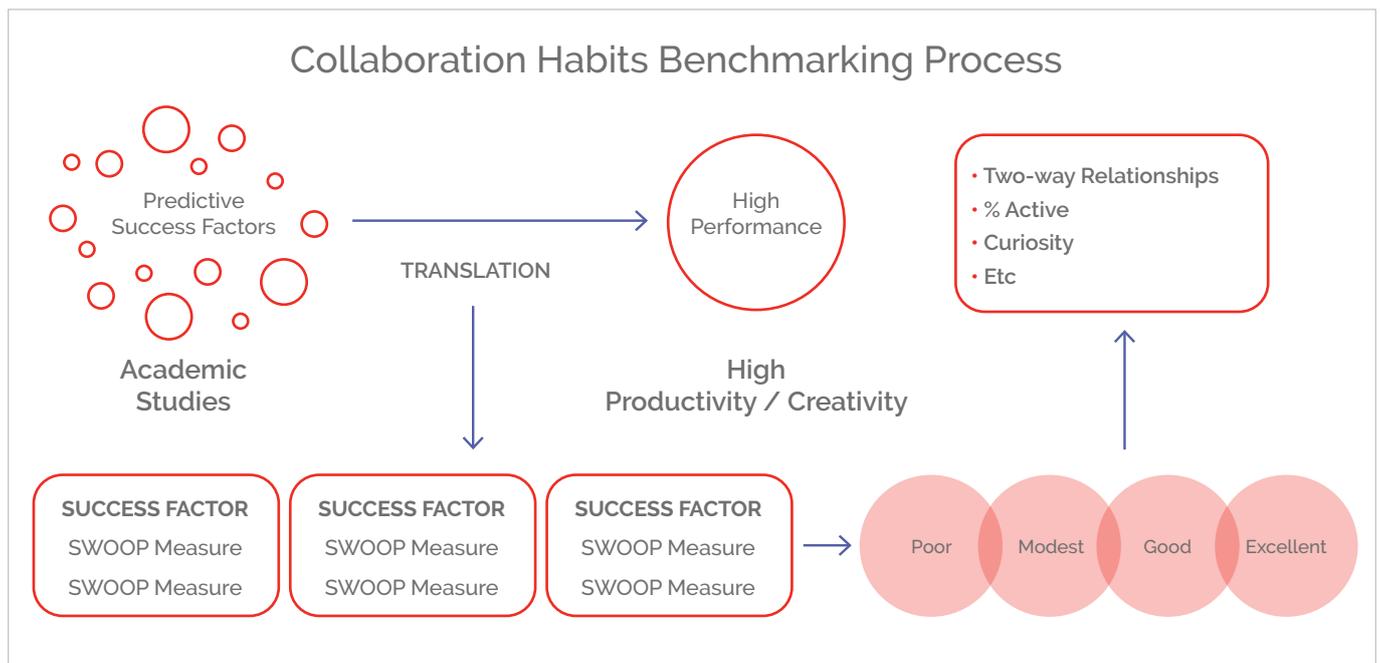

Figure 17 - Predictive team performance measurement.

5.3.1   Team performance index

Team performance is typically measured by outcomes. SWOOP benchmarking is conducted anonymously using metadata only, so the SWOOP Team Performance Index is a Predictive Team Performance Index i.e., teams are assessed against KPIs identified with actual high-performing teams from the research literature.

The process used for assessing teams is as follows:

1. A machine learning method was applied to identify those SWOOP indicators that most discriminated team classifications (see Team Type Classifications).
2. Identified measures are grouped according to the team KPIs identified from the research literature.
3. Calculated these measures for each team selected for benchmarking.
4. Created ranking percentile scores for each measure.
5. Created a relative weighting for each KPI.
6. Calculated the (predictive) Team Performance Index for each team.
7. Teams ranked according to the Team Performance Index score.

The following table identifies the Key Team Performance Indicators along with the specific SWOOP aligned measures:

Table 8 - Predictive team performance index.

Team Key Performance Indicator	SWOOP Measures	Interpretation
Team Participation	Active team size*	Number of active team members.
	Gallery (%Passive Members)*	%Team members not active during 3-month benchmarking period.
Self-Direction	Key Player Dependency (KPD)*	The degree to which a single member's interactions dominates.
	% Connected Core	The %members connected to the most connected member (creating a connected core).
	%Two-way (Reciprocity)	The % of two-way interactions (reciprocated).
	%Response Rate	The % posts that receive a reply.
	%Mention Index	The % of interactions that are mentions (tagging members).
Psychological Safety	Curiosity Index	%Posts or replies framed as questions.
	%Two-way (Reciprocity)	The % of two-way interactions (reciprocated).
	%Private Channels*	%Team channels that are private within the team.
Exploration	Diversity (of experience)	The degree to which team members are active in other teams.

* Measure reversed as a higher score equates to reduced performance.

5.3.2   Team type classifications

Our inaugural 2020 Microsoft Teams benchmarking study used statistical machine learning techniques to identify what distinctive clusters of teams could be identified through assessing four key dimensions of group structure, identified through their interaction patterns:

Table 9 - Key team dimensions.

Key Dimension	Interpretation
Key Player Dependency (KPD)	Measures the degree to which a single team member facilitates team interactions, or if it is distributed across many members.
Connected Core	The % of team members the most connected member reaches.
Reciprocity	The proportion of member-to-member two-way interactions i.e., reciprocated.
Gallery	The % of passive members, i.e., members that have been inactive.

Each of the benchmarked teams was assessed according to these four key dimensions. A statistical clustering process then identified four clear clusters of team types:

Table 10 - Team Types identified.

Team Type	Key Characteristics
Self-Directed Team	Self-Directed teams have many connections between the members and nearly everyone participates. Therefore, Self-Directed teams have exceptionally low KPD, extremely high Connected Core and Reciprocity, and a low or non-existent Gallery.
Single Leader Team	Single Leader teams rely on a single person to connect the team members, but nearly everyone participates. Therefore, Single Leader teams have a high KPD. The Connected Core is also high as the leader connects with team members. Reciprocity and Gallery are at modest levels.
Community	Communities have a small group of connected members that all interact with each other, and then a larger set of people who are passive. Therefore, Communities have low to moderate KPD, a high Connected Core, and moderate reciprocity. Gallery levels are modest.
Forum	Forums have a lot of people following what is happening (reading), but only a minority are actively contributing. Those who are contributing are not tightly connected to each other. Therefore, Forums are mostly characterized by larger galleries. The Connected Core and Reciprocity levels are at the lower end and KPD at the higher end.

Looking at the team classifications across the 820 meaningfully active teams:
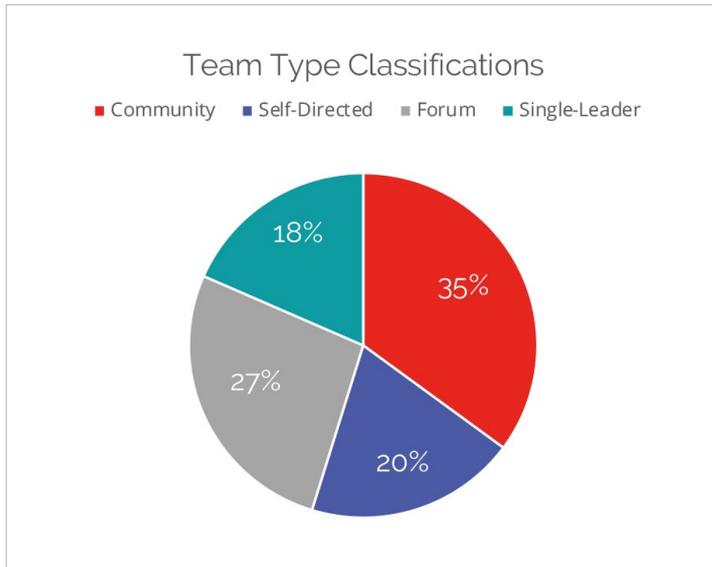

Figure 18 - SWOOP Analytics team classification.

The Community has the largest proportion at 35%. We can think of Communities as a "Self-Directed" Team with a large gallery of passive participants. The 30% increase in average team size is reflected in the larger %Gallery scores and therefore the %Communities. It appears that since 2021, more Self-Directed Teams are inviting passive stakeholders into their teams.

Forums and Single Leader Teams are likewise related. Think of a large functional group which has been established as a digital team. The Forum is facilitated by the Group leader, with little expectation of self-management.

Overall self-direction (Communities + Self-Directed Teams) at 55% is slightly higher than Single Leader-led teams; down from 70% in 2021. This reflects a broader use of Microsoft Teams channels by larger functional groups.

The SWOOP dashboard can show the team classification composition for your enterprise or business segment. Depending on the context, this report can identify whether Microsoft Teams channel use is aligned with the enterprise/departmental intent.
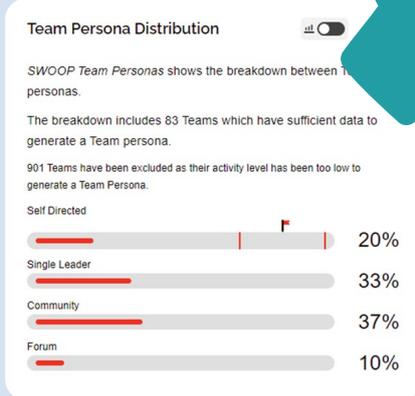
Finding the Teams persona in SWOOP
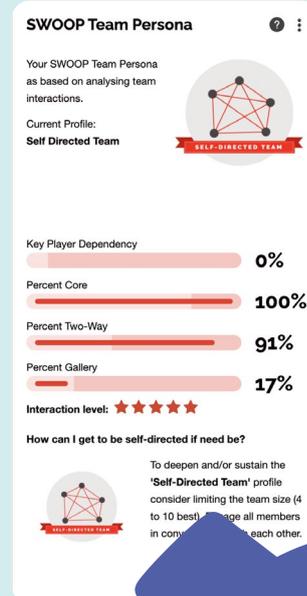
Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can find your Team Persona by selecting the team within the Teams dashboard and then looking at the SWOOP Team Persona report in the Collaboration tab.

Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can find the distribution of Team Personas in the Enterprise dashboard under the Collaboration tab.

Finding the type of Teams for your organization in SWOOP

5.3.3   Team types for elite teams

Our "elite teams" have been selected as the top 100 from a ranked list of the 820 very active teams. They have a team performance score of more than 65.
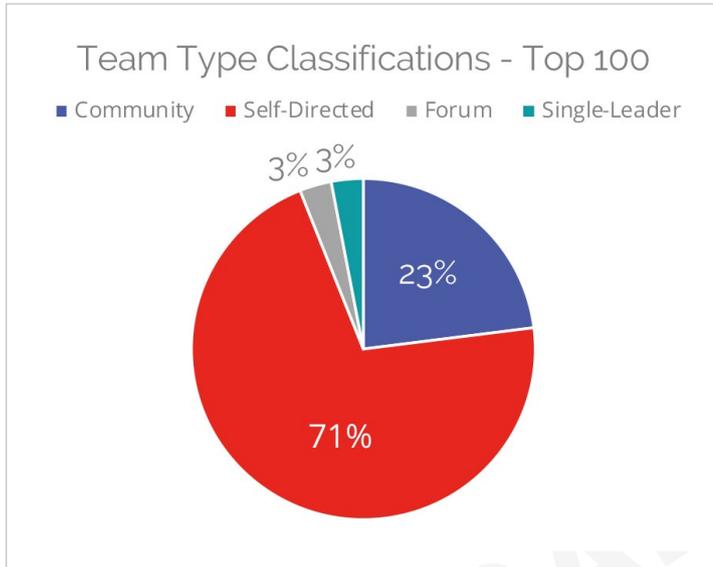

Figure 19 - Team type classifications for elite teams.

We can see the team type classification algorithms are favoring Self-Directed teams as the aspirational team type (71%), with only 23% being classified as Communities, 3% classified as Forums and 3% classified as Single Leader teams making the elite list.

This result provides validation for the ranking algorithms by identifying teams exhibiting high-performing interaction patterns, consistent with the academic research. This is not to say that in certain contexts, Communities, Forums and Single Leader teams cannot be valuable. What this result shows, however, is that best practice digital collaboration habits are most visible in self-directed teams.

In our view, greatest value for an organization is in developing self-directed teams.

5.4   Microsoft Teams as a hub for workplace applications

Teams and their channels on Microsoft Teams are designed to be the hub for access to many workplace applications, both from Microsoft and external vendors.

From our shortlist of 820 elite teams, 63 different applications were added to the Microsoft Teams channels workspace, including the SWOOP Analytics app.

Finding the tabs added to Teams for your organization in SWOOP
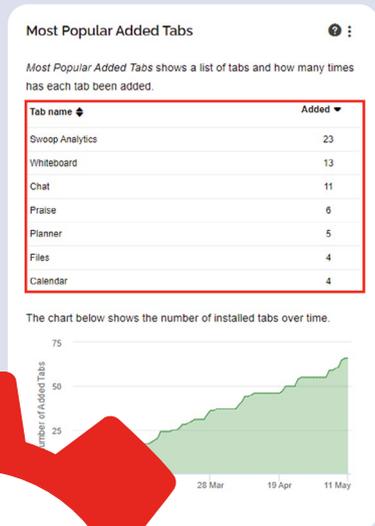
Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can find the most popular tabs added to teams in the Enterprise dashboard under the Activity tab.
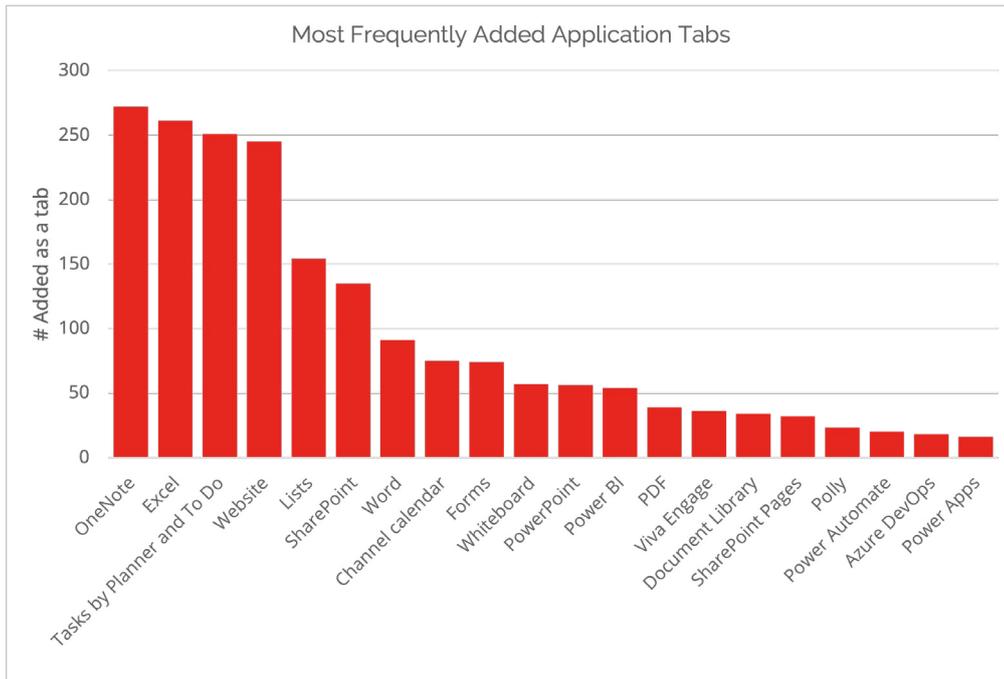
Figure 20 - Applications accessed through Microsoft Teams channels in elite teams.

We can see that OneNote, Excel, Planner tasks and Website (likely intranet) lead the way, as they did in 2021. The Whiteboard and Channel Calendar are new to the top apps list. Viva Engage (Yammer) has dropped back, but is now also available as a separate app in Teams so there is little need to install as a tab in a channel.

5.5   Team maturity

Introduced in our inaugural 2020 Microsoft Teams Benchmarking Report, we use the popular "Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing" framework to position teams according to their SWOOP performance measures. The chart below illustrates the typical phases teams using Microsoft Teams mature through to the aspirational Self-Directed team type. The SWOOP Microsoft Teams metrics most relevant to each stage of development are identified.

"Digital teams" only include teams that have been formally created in the Microsoft Teams product, which may or may not include channels within which interactions and discussions occur.

Within the M365 suite, we acknowledge the Active Directory includes "groups" that at times will also be teams that are not formed as teams within Microsoft Teams. Sometimes these groups are replicated as formal teams within Teams. This can cause confusion about what constitutes a group, team, or community. In our experience, M365 "groups" tend to mimic groupings withing the formal organization structure. They may also be replicated as a team on Microsoft Teams or a community in Viva Engage. The graphic below provides our view of how organizational groupings are being used:
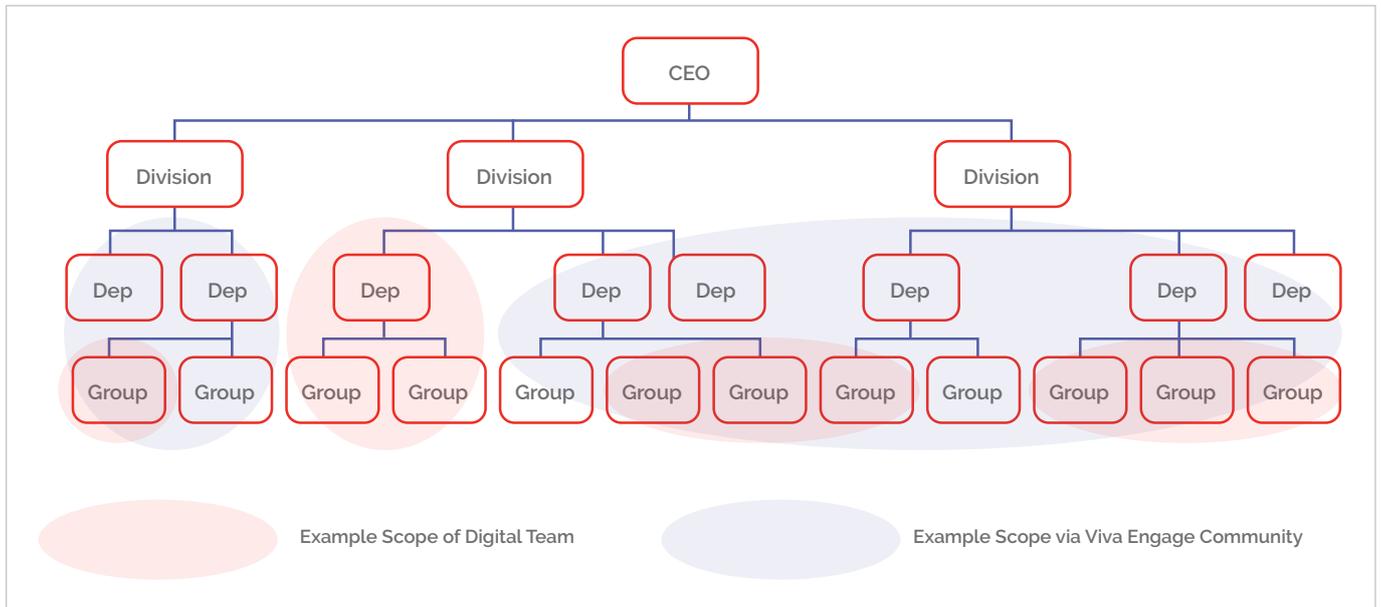
Figure 21 - Groups, teams and communities.

As the use of the M365 suite has matured, we have seen a better delineation of communities that exist within Viva Engage to connect employees more broadly across the enterprise. Teams are regularly seen now as where employees group together to do their day-to-day work. For the majority of employees, their day-to-day teams would involve less than 10 colleagues, with an optimal size of between four and eight.

In between these groupings, we have the larger groups that might typically be used by senior leaders to communicate with their respective formal organizations. Historically, these groups were serviced by email groups (also known as distribution lists). Senior leaders, however, are now looking for more interactive means of engaging with their employees. The "reporting" groups can find themselves also formed as large teams on Microsoft Teams, which are by default "invitation only", or sometimes as Viva Engage communities, which are by default open. Additionally, now we have another grouping for Viva Engage premium users, where leaders can specify their own audience.

Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can select a specific segment of people to report on by navigating to the Segment dashboard and then entering the attribute for the segment (such as a department name) in the search bar. You can then select the attribute and all the reports will show the analytics for that particular group of people.

Selecting a specific segment to report on in SWOOP

Our Teams maturity model positions an ideal team as a "real team" i.e., your day-to-day working team. It tracks how a typical team might evolve from its foundation Forming through Storming, Norming and Performing, by which time the team and the organization is performing as a high performing agile team-based organization. SWOOP uses interaction network measures with machine learning to classify Microsoft Teams teams based on their interaction patterns within the team.

The Microsoft Teams team types have been incorporated into the maturity model below:
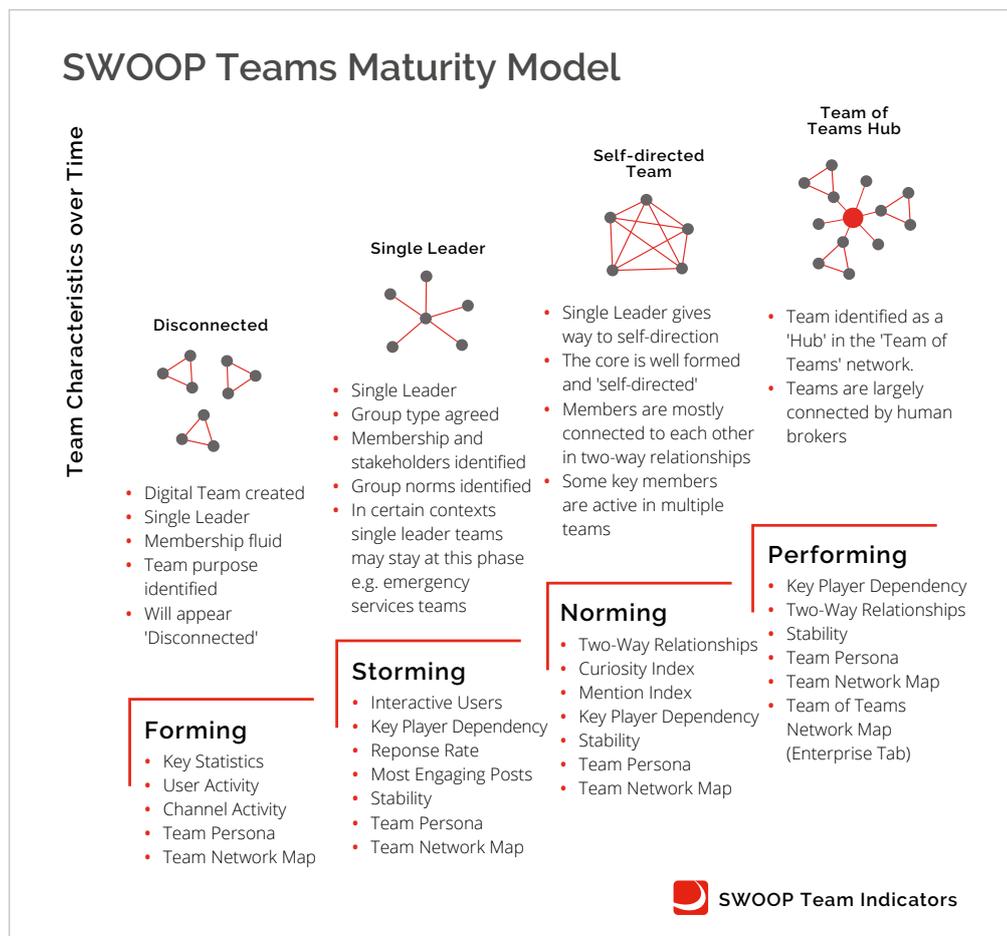
Figure 22 - SWOOP Analytics Microsoft Teams Maturity Model.

There will be formal organizational units formed in Microsoft Teams that may, by design, not aspire to reach the "performing" level as a team. For example, a team comprising a whole division for communications purposes may be happy working as a forum. Our analysis from section 5.3.3 indicates that high performing organizations will have a higher proportion of teams at the "performing" end.

**Setting targets
for reports
in SWOOP**

Within **SWOOP Analytics
for Microsoft Teams** you can set
or adjust your own targets for
different reports in place of using
the predefined goals from the
benchmarking. To do this, select the
three vertical dots on the top right
of the report and then choose the
Adjust Goals. You can then set the
target you want to display as
the small flag.
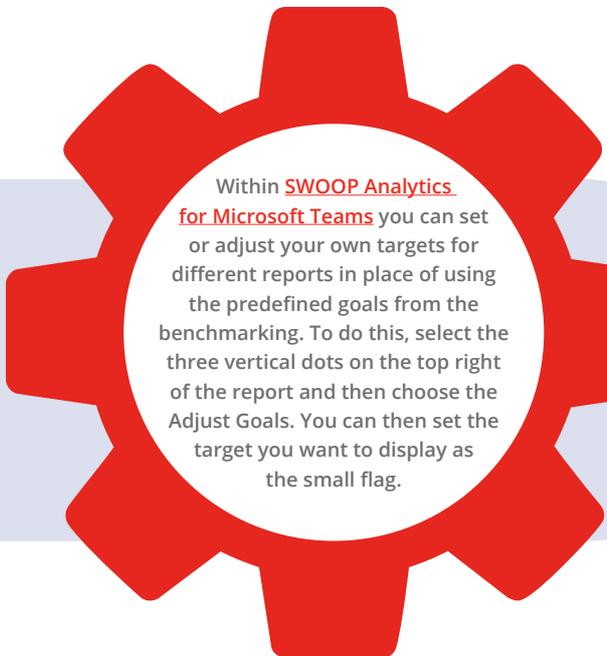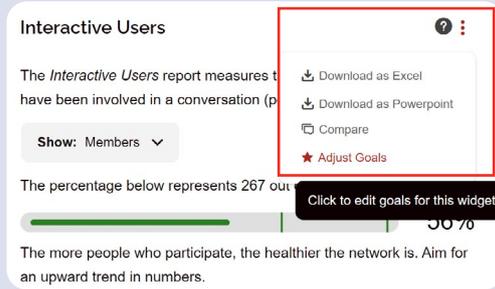
5.6   Microsoft Teams channels targets

In this section, we provide practical targets and goals arising from our benchmarking
activities. Goals and targets are embedded in the SWOOP dashboards; providing
continuous insights into how you and your teams compare with the best. Our practice is
to set goals at the 80th percentile (top 20%) scores from our benchmarking. In this way,
the goals are both challenging, yet achievable. Selected SWOOP reports identify targets
for selected key measures based on these benchmarking results:
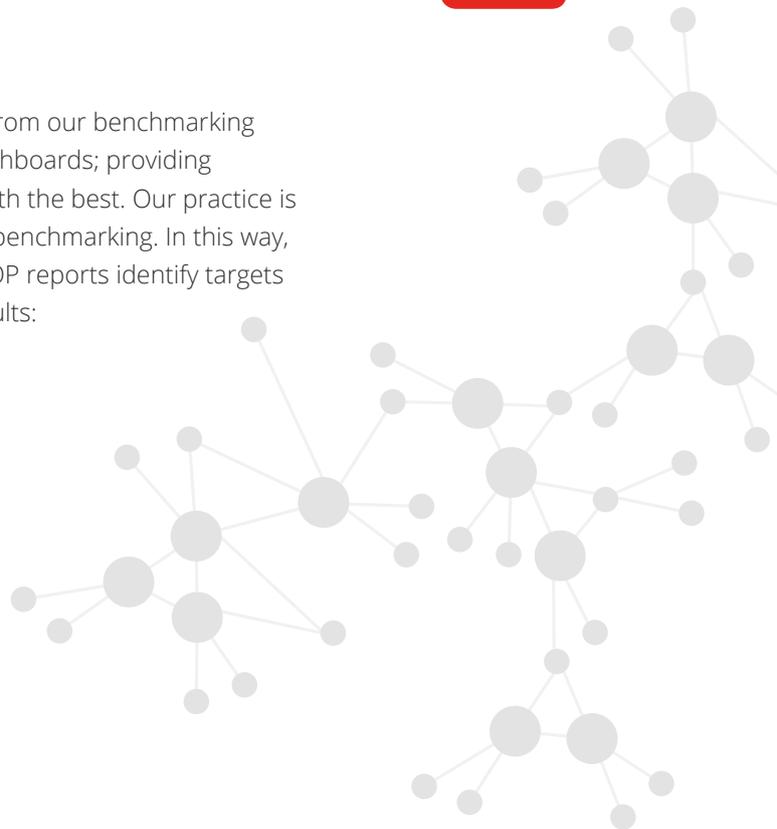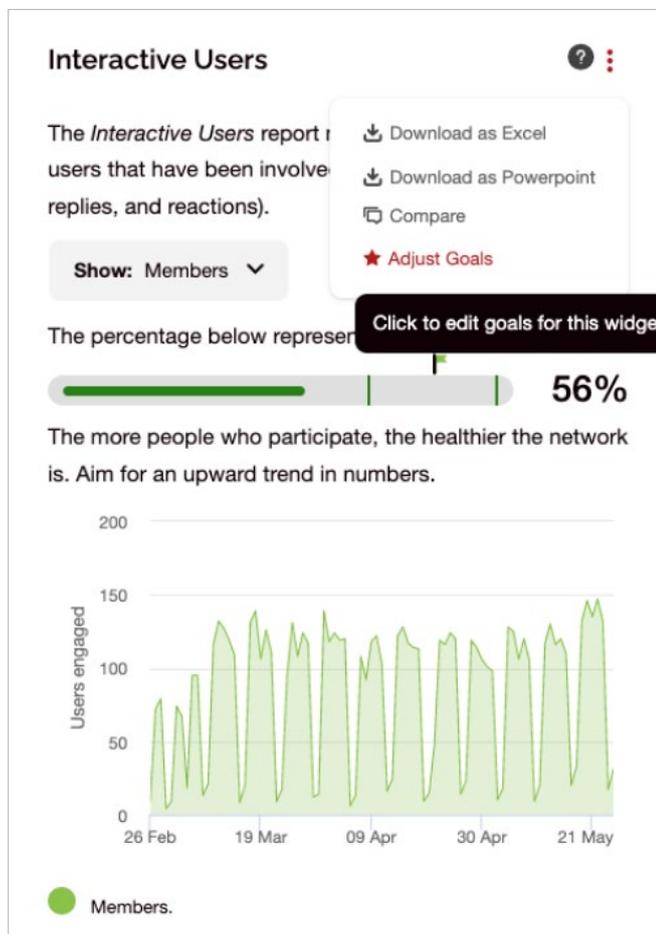
5.6.1   Targets for teams on Microsoft Teams

The following tables provide targets for teams on Microsoft Teams. The targets have been generated from our list of 820 meaningfully active teams.

Table 11 - Digital team level targets.

Metric	Target	Comments	Found in SWOOP
Team Size	8	80th percentile, though research identifies 4 – 8 as a sweet spot.	In the Key Statistics report on the Activity tab.
Team Interactions/ Day	235 (or ~ 30/member)	80th percentile, though will depend on Team size.	In the User Activity report on the Activity tab.
Number of Teams Channels	6	80th percentile, though will be context dependent.	In the Team Channel Activity report on the Activity tab.
%Response Rate	92.4	80th percentile.	In the Response Rate report on the Conversations tab.
%Diversity	60	80th percentile – measures the degree to which employees are members of multiple teams.	In the Multi-Group Participation report in the Collaboration tab.
%Curiosity	23	80th percentile.	In the Curiosity Index report on the Conversations tab.
%Two-way (Reciprocity)	80	80th percentile.	In the Two-way Relationships report or SWOOP Team Persona report in the Collaboration tab.
%Key Player	0	Set at zero to avoid key player dependence at any level.	In the Key Player Dependency report or SWOOP Team Persona report in the Collaboration tab.
%Core	100	Will depend on the size of the team, but a connected core is always desirable. For larger teams aim for 80%.	In the SWOOP Team Persona report in the Collaboration tab.
%Gallery	14	80th percentile. Again, depends on the size of the team, but an average 14% is good.	In the SWOOP Team Persona report in the Collaboration tab.
%Private Channels	0	Unless purposefully using channels for guests.	In the Team Channel Activity report on the Activity tab (look for the padlock icon).

%Mentions	55	80th percentile. Should aim to tag relevant people in teams posts to help gain their attention.	In the Mention Index report on the Conversations tab.
%Guests	Contextual	This will differ depending on the type of organization. e.g., should be maximized for project-based organizations.	Can be calculated from the Key Statistics report on the Activity tab.

Taken from our 820 meaningfully active teams, targets have been set in most cases at the 80th percentile (top 20%). The team targets have increased for most metrics from 2021, likely a reflection of more experience with the product. That said, we believe there is significant room for improvement as to how Microsoft Teams teams and channels are used.

5.6.2   Personal targets for Microsoft Teams users

In this year's data set, the average activity per person is less than in 2021, at less than one activity a day compared with around five a day in 2021. With the size of a team on Microsoft Teams up by 32% to 64.7, we are seeing a longer tail of inactive team members, which is driving the average scores down. The variation in activity is also extremely high (up to 500% coefficient of variation), meaning the averages are meaningless.

The picture being painted is that there is significant confusion as to how to use Microsoft Teams channels within teams. We found only 820 of more than 67,000 digital teams were meaningfully active. It appears many teams are being formed without a clear purpose, or an engagement of team members.

As an individual, we believe you should aim to have the people you work with on a day-to-day basis, working in a team on Teams. For this team we would expect elevated levels of interaction i.e., several interactions/day/members. You should also be a member of a functional group, i.e., your position in the formal organization chart[4]. Functional leaders should also be creating teams for group members to post and interact in on functional matters. These teams may be larger and less active. They will be classified as Single Leader teams or Forums. We see evidence that this practice is starting to happen but needs to be escalated.

The average and maximum performance scores are provided below for completeness. We have set the targets at levels we believe are appropriate for your day-to-day team.

Table 12 – Personal targets.

Metric	Target	Comments	Found in SWOOP
Posts/Day	0.12 (Max. 32)	While context dependent, if this is your day-to-day team, you should be posting several times a day.	We filtered out automated email posts.
Replies/Day	0.22 (Max. 11)	Aim to reply twice as much as you post.	Similar to Viva Engage (Yammer).
Likes/Day	0.27(Max. 12)	Aim to react or like as much as you reply.	A little less than say for Viva Engage (Yammer).

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4 If your functional group does not have a digital team established, our recommendation is to suggest to the functional lead that one be established.

Mentions/Day	0.18 (Max. 14.7)	Aim for 50% of the time as a rule.	When appropriate, it is good practice to target your posts or replies with a mention.
Teams Participating in	2.9 (Max. 40)	2 -- 3	Aim to be in at least one or two information sharing teams as well as your main day-to-day team.
%Curiosity	14 (Max. 100)	23	One in four posts or replies should be a question. Questions seed discussions and speed work.

Your Personal Dashboard in SWOOP
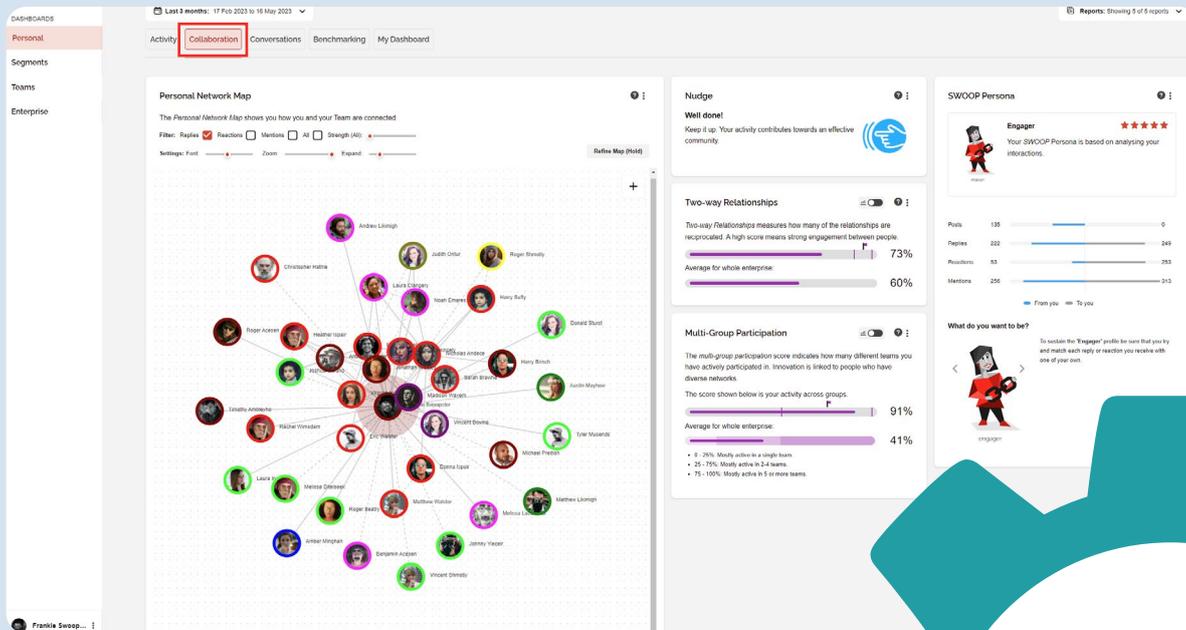
For those who have access to the SWOOP dashboards for **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams**, on logging in you will be presented with a personal dashboard, secured to yourself. The targets for several metrics will be shown as a flag on each individual report. To see your closest collaborators, and your individual persona, switch to the Collaboration tab.

6   Workplace analytics – "What Tool When?"

There has never been a time when employees have had such a rich and varied selection of digital tools to choose from to do their work. The pandemic and the migration to hybrid ways of working have created a complex work environment, where not only is there a choice of hybrid working flavor, but also a need to navigate the plethora of digital tool choices.

Even if your organization has chosen to settle on the Microsoft 365 suite alone, the choice within this suite is still substantial. For example, one can still choose to work only in email and Microsoft Teams meetings; something we see most employees doing. Other organizations are learning how to best balance the portfolio of tools in maximizing productivity.

A recent employee experience report for the Bot Platform reported on their survey respondents' experiences with technology tools:

"Unfortunately nearly half of the people using these technology tools also dread using some of them. Responses from the survey include people 'hating email communication', 'Excel with little training' and Microsoft Teams as 'it is only used for remote meetings yet there is so much more'."

Much of the complexity currently being experienced in our digital environments is a result of the digital tools marketplace itself. Even organizations like Microsoft, which stand alone as having the dominant "office" digital work platform, did not have the luxury of stepping back and designing a product suite that fundamentally meets the workplace themes of its end users. Instead, we can see a typical product development cycle, driven by marketplace competition, and product priorities driven more by the need to maintain or grow a market share. The end result is toolsets that resemble a busy marketplace, more so than the tailored suit that end users desire.

6.1   The Microsoft Teams "marketplace"

Microsoft Teams has become a clear success story for Microsoft. A short six years since its launch in 2017 it now has over 1.4 billion active users and a 42% market share. Its marketplace success can be attributed to its telephony features (online meeting and chat) inherited from its Skype acquisition in 2011. Digital telephony experienced explosive demand with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and solely responsible for the 300% growth in a single year for telephony competitor ZOOM.

Now that the dust has settled on the pandemic, a more clear-eyed assessment of just what employees need to work effectively can be had. It acknowledges that an unbalanced promotion of synchronous online meetings is far from optimal for workplace productivity. Some 92% of employees now consider meetings costly and unproductive. While the market has spoken, the damage has been done. It is time to step back and identify what that "tailored suit" should really look like. The Teams product itself does little to hide the separation of its telephony features from its Teams channels features. There is no overlay across the telephony services and Teams channels. Their integration is in name only. The suit has mismatched colors!

We don't expect Microsoft, or any other vendor for that matter, to ignore the competitive marketplace in developing its products. It is therefore left to others to build that tailored suit, in the form of designed work practices, supported by workplace analytics toolsets. The "which tool when" dilemma will only become more complex as the market for such tools continues to grow. It's now up to the "suit designers" to fill the gap and deliver on the productivity promise enabled by more flexible work practices.

6.2 The Viva Engage (Yammer) or Microsoft Teams channels confusion

It seems like we have been addressing the confusion of Viva Engage and Microsoft Teams since the initial launch of Microsoft Teams. The confusion today is a little nuanced. We believe most organizations "get" the fact that Viva Engage (Yammer) addresses enterprise-wide connections and communities, while Microsoft Teams is for day-to-day work. Where confusion still exists is where to host online discussions.

From a purely technical perspective, the functions that facilitate online discussions vary little between Viva Engage communities and Microsoft Teams channels. Many organizations access their Viva Engage communities through their Microsoft Teams apps. Some using this approach might question why they should be using Viva Engage for online discussions at all. One such organization is VHB, making the conscious decision not to use Viva Engage but instead establish Communities of Practice on Teams. Details are in the case study in section 3. Other organizations, like RealFoundations, see Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage as two distinctly different "places", with different interactions as spelled out by CEO Chris Shaida in the case study in section 3.

The bottom line is that online discussions have the lowest level of adoption of all the M365 functions. Microsoft Teams channels, in particular, have been overall poorly adopted (see Figure 14). We looked across the 125,000+ employees to see what proportion had engaged in an online discussion (Viva Engage or Teams channel) over the past six months. Alarmingly, 59% had not. Encouragingly, when we looked across the six "best practice" digital specialist firms, the proportion was less than 17%; an astounding gap.

6.2.1 Leveraging Microsoft Teams channels to engage with external stakeholders

So what is stopping employees engaging with teams and channels on Microsoft Teams; which are designed as the "hub" for the workplace? To explore further we looked at seven organizations from this year's cohort who were being benchmarked for both M365 and Microsoft Teams.
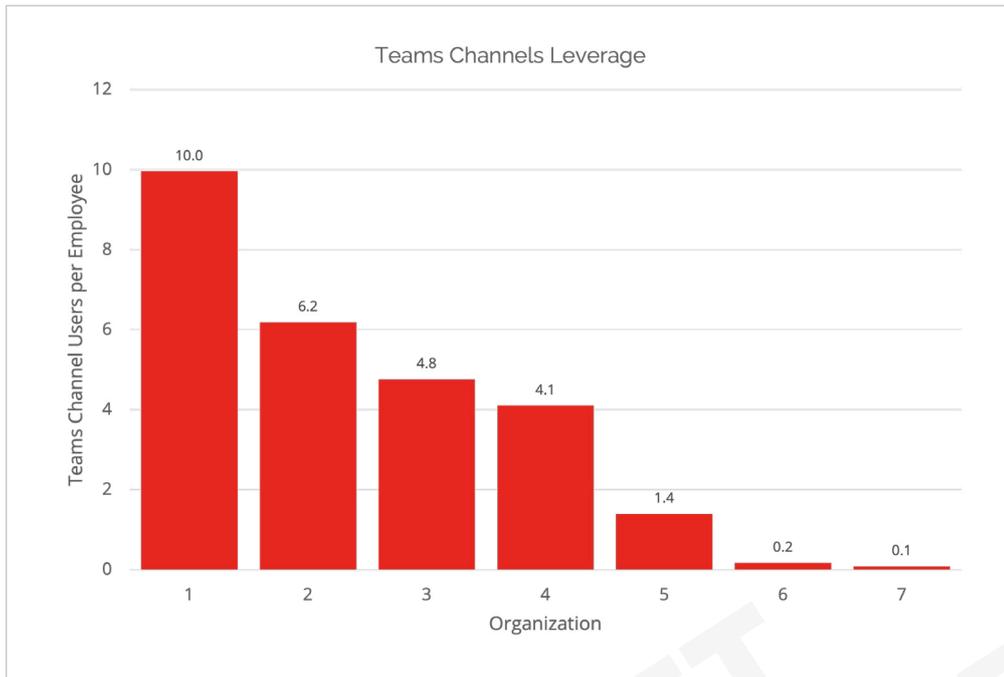
Figure 24 – Microsoft Teams channel leverage.

The above chart shows the number of Microsoft Teams channel users per employee for the seven organizations analyzed. We can see five of the seven have more Teams channel users than employees. This means these organizations are leveraging Teams channels to engage with external stakeholders. Organization "1" is [Engage Squared](#), a digital specialist and Microsoft Partner of the Year, who invite their project clients into their Teams channels; to the extent that they have 10 external users for every employee. This is considered a "best practice" for Microsoft Teams usage.

At the other end of the scale, we have two organizations that have less than 20% of their employees using Teams channels, and few, if any, external participants. What is your Teams channels leverage?

Your Microsoft Teams channel participation in SWOOP
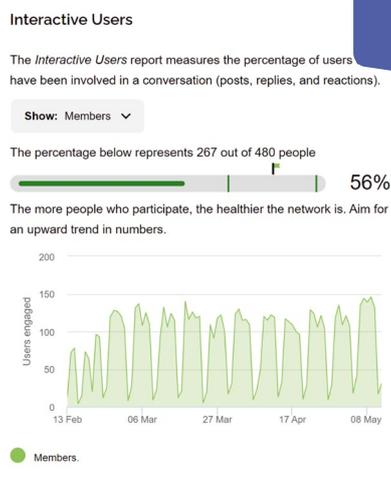
Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can find the percentage of people taking part in Teams channels by posting, replying or reacting by looking at the Interactive Users report on the Activity tab of the Enterprise dashboard.

Microsoft Teams Chat v Channel data in SWOOP
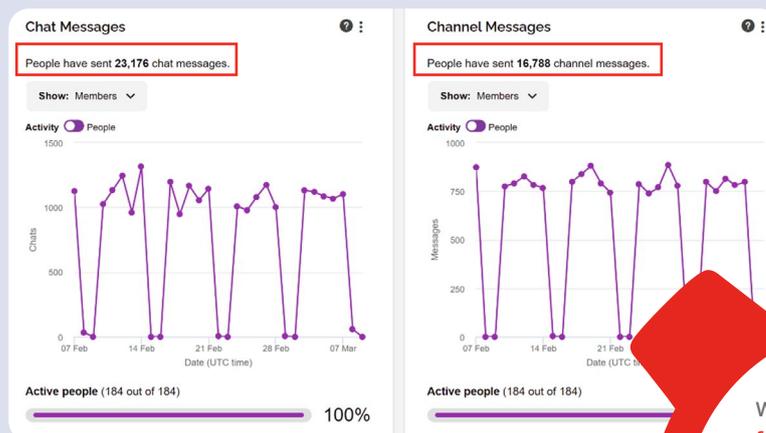
6.2.2   Microsoft Teams Chat vs Channels

The big "competitor" for using Microsoft Teams *channels* is Microsoft Teams *chat*. This is not surprising. Fired by the COVID-19 pandemic, the telephony/chat consumer market exploded. Whether it was WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, FaceTime, Zoom, the telephony/chat functions provided by these platforms; their use has become endemic. It is therefore not surprising that a former member of this cohort, Skype, should emerge in Microsoft's re-imagined workplace – Microsoft Teams. By its very naming, Microsoft was looking to claim the "teaming territory." The addition of teams on Microsoft Teams as a work hub, with their channel discussion spaces, complemented by the former Skype telephony/chat functions, was seen as nirvana for struggling digital teaming proponents.

Winding the clock forward six years since its launch, our data shows 59% of employees do not use the online discussion function of either Microsoft Teams or Viva Engage (Yammer). Most employees are still stuck in online meetings and chat. Our "family and friends" use of the consumer tools has taught us how to create and use chat groups to share experiences on a day-to-day, and for some, hour-to-hour, basis. We easily translate these skills to the workplace, with the familiar Teams meetings/chat functions. Using Teams channels is virtually foreign territory.

There is no equivalent in the consumer world. Yet the corporate world is not the consumer world. Hard won new knowledge cannot, and should not, be discarded with the day-to-day detritus contained in much of what is online chat. In the words of the designer Microsoft, its intended use of channels and chat is:

"Channels are where the work actually gets done—where text, audio, and video conversations open to the whole team happen, where files are shared, and where apps are added. While channel conversations are public, **chats** are just between you and someone else (or a group of people)."

Like the consumer platforms, there is no intent to support chat as a permanent store of knowledge. We use these tools knowing that the provider can wipe out their history at any time. A perfect example of the difficulty in preserving knowledge in chat is when

Virgin Media O2 migrated to M365 and attempted to also migrate the knowledge contained in chat. Read the case study in section 3 to learn more.

Provided below is data taken from this year's benchmarking to give you a sense of the size of the problem:

Channel messages sent = 990,860
Chat messages sent = 241,915,851

Channel messages make up 0.4% of Microsoft Teams messages. What is the potential for lost knowledge?[5]

To be fair, much of chat is one-on-one workday chatter, which is unlikely to amount to the "gold nuggets" of knowledge that we are most concerned about. Important knowledge is more likely to emerge from larger collective conversations i.e., chat groups. So, what proportion of chat is shared beyond a simple one-on-one?

Looking at SWOOP's own chat data over a three month period we sent 48,070 chat messages in the following denominations:


Chat Anatomy

- 64% Peer-to-peer
- 22% In Meeting Chat
- 14% Group
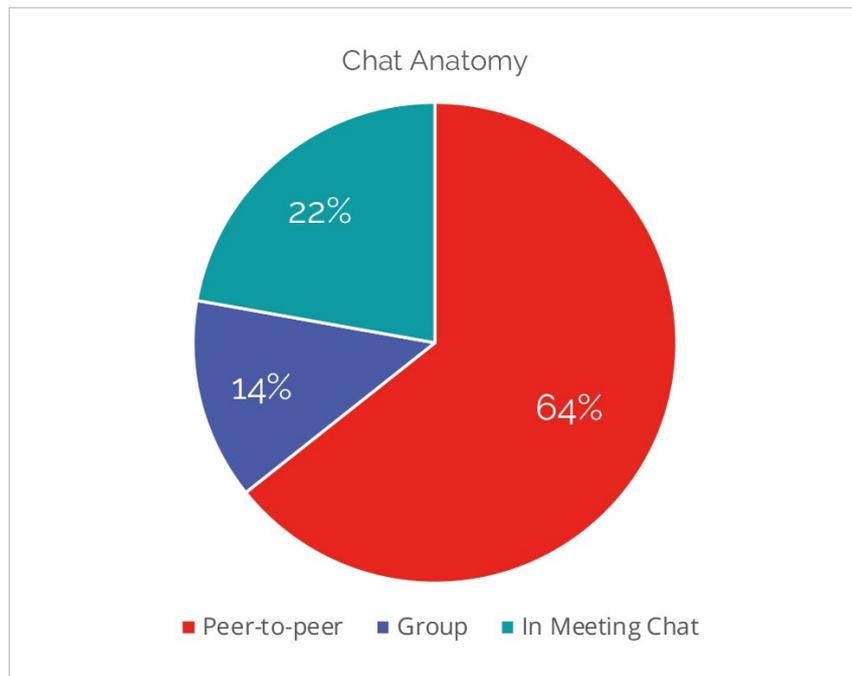
Figure 25 - Chat denominations.

We can see, as expected, one-on-one chat dominates at 64%. Surprisingly, the ancillary chat happening during meetings was significantly more than group chat in general. This may be a SWOOP specific effect. We have a practice of running our developer meetings within a Teams channel; where meeting chat is captured as a channel discussion, and therefore more traceable over time.

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5   One unintended consequence of large stores of chat is its actual management. One of our benchmarking participants bemoaned the amount of work required when a merging of M365 tenants was required. Microsoft recommends that chat stores be regularly purged. However, the overreliance on chat is working against this advice.

We have already noted the six digital specialist firms know the value of, and extensively use, Microsoft Teams channels. One of our customers trying to implement better digital working practices across their organization bemoaned that; "Chat is like heroin"; it's an unhealthy addiction and hard to get people off it.

Even our digital specialist firms send far more Teams chat messages than channel messages. The difference is they know when they see a potential "gold knowledge nugget" emerging in chat and quickly transfer (or even copy) the discussion into the more persistent channel space, where it can live on and evolve. Often the trigger is when the chat evolves from one-on-one to group chat. In our earlier case study with NZTE you can read how one director copies chat messages into the team channel when the knowledge benefits the team.

The consumer use equivalent might be when someone shares an important document or image in a chat. We will copy this to a more permanent store. Personally, I will store amusing photos and videos of my grandchildren posted in chat to compile a "year in review" video for them on their birthdays; the modern equivalent of the family photo album. The behavior pattern exists. We just need to use it in the workplace.

But here is the rub: even if you recognize the potential knowledge gold nugget in our chat, and know you should move it to a Teams channel, is there one for you to move it to? We address this issue in the next section.

6.2.3   Diversity across different teams on Microsoft Teams

Given the confusion around teams and Teams channels, and just how they should be formed, we explored how team composition was represented across the formal lines of business, as identified in the M365 Active Directory (see Figure 21). For each team on Microsoft Teams we identified how many different organizational groups/departments were represented. We also identified the percentage of teams that drew their membership from a solitary group/department.
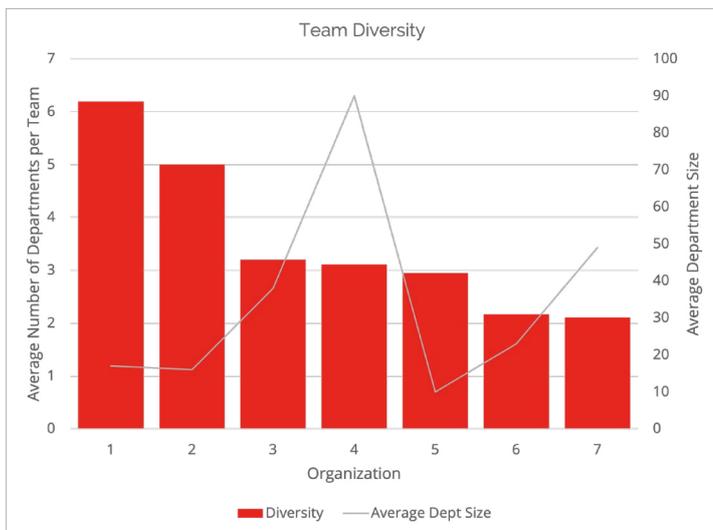

Figure 26 - Diversity across different teams on Microsoft Teams.

These organizational-level results from the chart can be influenced by the organizational departmental structure's granularity. From our full sample of 5,000+ groups, the average group/department size was 23 members, though we can see Organization 4 had an average of 90 members/department. The chart above shows the most diverse organization had an average of six departments represented in each team, which shows significant diversity of functional experience. At the other end of the scale, the average was two departments, with 45% of teams from a single department.

Having a diversity of experience by drawing from different functional groups/departments has shown to lead to higher team performance. Collaboration specialist and Harvard Professor Heidi Gardner's research of professional services firms has demonstrated that engagement teams comprising a diversity of functional experience significantly out-earn their single function teams.

Smart Collaboration Boosts Revenues and Profits (and Performance Outcomes for Nonprofits)

Dr. Heidi K. Gardner, Harvard Fellow, author and acknowledged collaboration guru.

Extracted from Smarter Collaboration.

More collaborators, more revenues

Average annual revenue per account, US$ thousands

- ▬ Revenue from selling integrated services
- — Revenue from selling discrete services
- ⋯ Exponential growth from smarter collaboration

Number of business lines per account: 1: 21 / 21; 2: 80 / 42; 3: 150 / 63; 4: 220 / 84; 5: 430 / 105; 6: 550 / 126; 7: 900 / 147
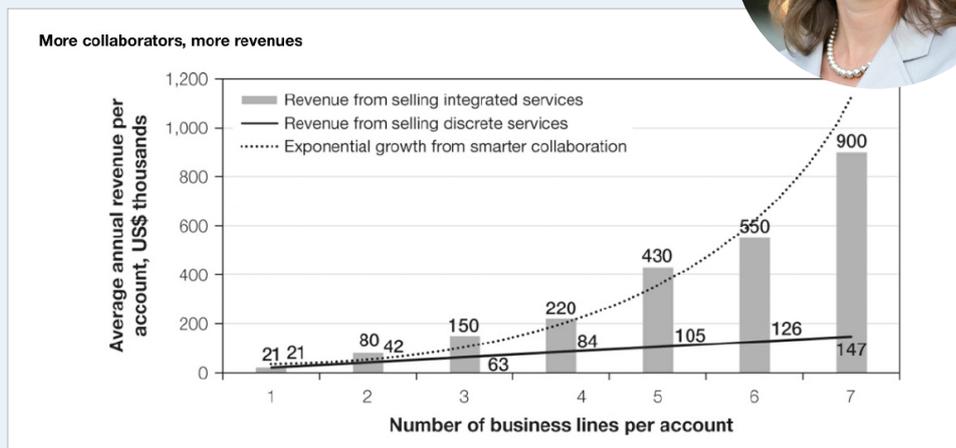
Capturing that exponential value requires experts from each of those separate disciplines (planning, finance, property management, etc.) to come together in a way that we call smart collaboration. It shows rising revenue per customer even as five, six, and seven business lines become involved. Note that as more units collaborate on a client project or product offering, the average annual revenue from that offering (the bars) increases almost exponentially, over and above what each unit would have earned from providing services in a discrete, siloed way (the flatter, hypothetical trend line at the bottom of the graph). In fact, in this company, we saw that revenues were 7.1 times higher for accounts served by three business lines than by a single one. Those customers served by five business lines generated fees 20.4 times higher than those with just one kind of service. Our work reveals this pattern time and time again across a wide array of organizations, ranging from technology companies and financial institutions to traditional professional services firms like law and accounting.

Gardner, Heidi K.; Matviak, Ivan A. Smarter Collaboration (p. 29). Harvard Business Review Press. Kindle Edition.

How diverse is your team on Microsoft Teams?

The above analysis needs to be viewed in the context of an organization's overall engagement with Teams channels. Having diverse teams is one thing; but if these teams only comprise less than 30% of all employees, then the potential advantages are dampened overall.

Given the overall low level of engagement with Teams channels (on average less than 24% of employees in non-digital specialist firms); a significant change initiative is required. Currently, we see most non-channel-using departments restrict their use of Teams to the telephony and SharePoint features. While these departments may not practice the intense collaboration of a project team, their functional leaders would no doubt be continually looking for higher levels of collaboration.

Relying on meetings and SharePoint alone ignores the opportunity for capturing and leveraging functional expertise, as it is being developed and practiced. For example, a HR department may have spent long hours and many meetings developing a hybrid working policy for the enterprise. When it comes to updating that policy, the issues and tensions addressed in formulating the policy will have been lost if they have not been recorded in the Teams channel.

Given the strength of the opportunity being currently foregone, we are repeating our recommendation from our 2022 M365 benchmarking; to create new teams on Microsoft Teams for every functional group/department. We note that teams on Teams are mostly being formed for specific purposes e.g., project initiatives. But by providing each functional group/department with a "digital place" to conduct its day-to-day functional work, the organization can leverage the full scope of its investment in M365 and Microsoft Teams. In this way, when employees identify a potential knowledge gold nugget in chat, they will always have a Teams channel to go to. No excuses! Asynchronous work in Teams channels also reduces stress caused by restrictive synchronous work of meetings or less effective internal emails.

You have paid for it, so why not use it!

Your Teams diversity in SWOOP
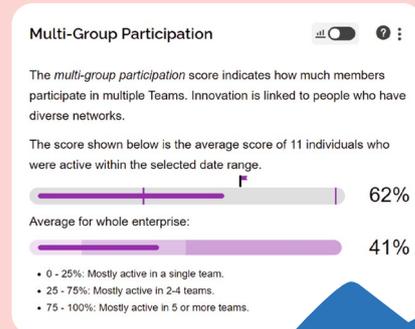
Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can find diversity of a team through the Multi-Group Participation report on the Collaboration tab of the Teams dashboard.

6.3   Building and monitoring your "task and technology" profiles

An unfortunate aspect of today's digital working world is that we can never separate how we work from the tools we have available to work with. Inevitably we tend to design the way we work around the tools we have; or more likely, the tools our work colleagues decide to use. In our M365 studies we identified how group collaborative performance deteriorated with the variation in group member's digital habits (see Figure 10).

By applying some design thinking approaches, we can start to explore just what are the fundamental modern workplace needs, irrespective of the toolsets available. In a perfect world with perfect technology, the suit could be woven around such fundamental needs.

With design thinking we start with a problem statement. One like:

"Organizations are struggling to settle on the most beneficial style of flexible/hybrid working."

We could stop here, but the design thinking processes challenges us to keep asking "why" to get to the real core of the problem:

"Organizations lack clear evidence on which flexible work styles work best. Opinions are varied and conflicting."

Drilling further again:

"Organizations do not have available tangible data/evidence to enable them to make confident decisions on flexible working policy."

We could go further, but it becomes apparent that measuring how people are currently working and measuring their results, becomes a key challenge.

Fortunately, observing how people work has been a popular topic for academic research for decades. The growth in "knowledge workers", has resulted in several studies discovering fundamental work patterns, independent of tools used. One well-cited study by Reinhardt et al.'s (2011) on Knowledge Worker Roles and Actions developed a knowledge worker typology for roles, labelling them: "controller, helper, learner, linker, networker, organizer, retriever, sharer, solver, and tracker".
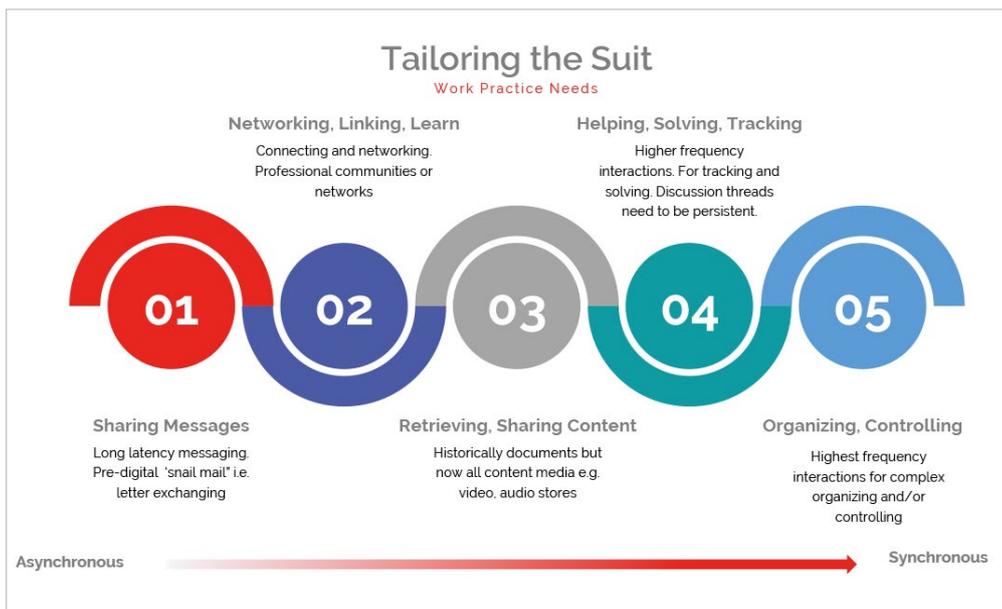

Figure 27 - Weaving the digital worker suit.

In Figure 27 we have identified some fundamental tasks that relate to the knowledge worker roles identified by Reinhardt et al. There is a sense of an asynchronous to synchronous continuum moving left to right, as the identified roles demand.

What emphasis an individual, group or enterprise places on the respective tasks will be contextual. Once the context is defined against the fundamental tasks, we are now able to provide an informed answer to the "which tool when" question.

For example, say you are the Program Manager for a project office comprising several digital project teams; all hybrid working. The "%Emphasis" in the table below is a "time and effort" estimate deemed appropriate for your role and context, set in concert with your line manager. The table becomes your "should be" profile.

Table 13 – Knowledge worker tasks based on Reinhardt's typology.

Fundamental Tasks	Example Context	%Emphasis
Long latency messaging (immediate responses not requited)	As the program manager you are responsible for communicating code of conduct and operating standards for the teams. Messaging on these topics are comfortably conducted asynchronously.	5%
Networking, Linking, Learning	Linking across project teams within the program for cross-group level co-ordination and shared learning.	10%
Retrieving, Sharing Content	Each team will keep its own SharePoint team files. As Program Manager you will need to be across shared content repositories for each team, but also be personally responsible for program-wide stores e.g. program budgets, resourcing etc.	30%
Helping, Solving, Tracking	As Program Manager, you will be responsible for establishing and overseeing program specific goals that each team contributes to. As a senior officer you will be called on to help problem solve and coach teams.	30%
Organizing, Controlling	As the Program Manager, you are responsible for facilitating the work of the all teams in the program. You are also responsible for communicating more |broadly with related programs and executive management.	25%

We can now introduce the "available technology" overlay. The overlay looks to match the technology to the task (what tool when).

Technology mapping

Table 14 - Technology options against fundamental tasks.

Fundamental Tasks	Technology Options (M365)
Long latency messaging	Email or hard copy distribution
Networking, Linking, Learning	Viva Engage; Viva Learning
Retrieving, Sharing Content	SharePoint, OneDrive, SharePoint Online
Helping, Solving, Tracking	Microsoft Teams channels, workflow apps
Organizing, Controlling	Microsoft Teams chat, Teams meetings, project management apps

Monitoring your own performance

Armed with your "should be" allocation, you can now leverage workplace analytics dashboards to track and manage your own time and effort. SWOOP Analytics for M365 provides a "%time spent" for each of the technology options identified.

SWOOP makes it easy to see your technology usage patterns.

As a Program Manager you also play a role in establishing "task and technology" usage at the team level. Ideally you will want teams to be "self-directed". Therefore, you will be involved with helping teams agree on their "task and technology" profiles. This is a critical activity, given what we know about how important agreed and common team collaboration habits are to overall collaboration performance (see 4.2.6).

Finding your M365 activity breakdown in SWOOP

Within SWOOP Analytics for M365 you can find the split between M365 activities in the Activity tab of the Personal dashboard. You can also find the split for the whole organization in the Enterprise dashboard under the Activity tab.
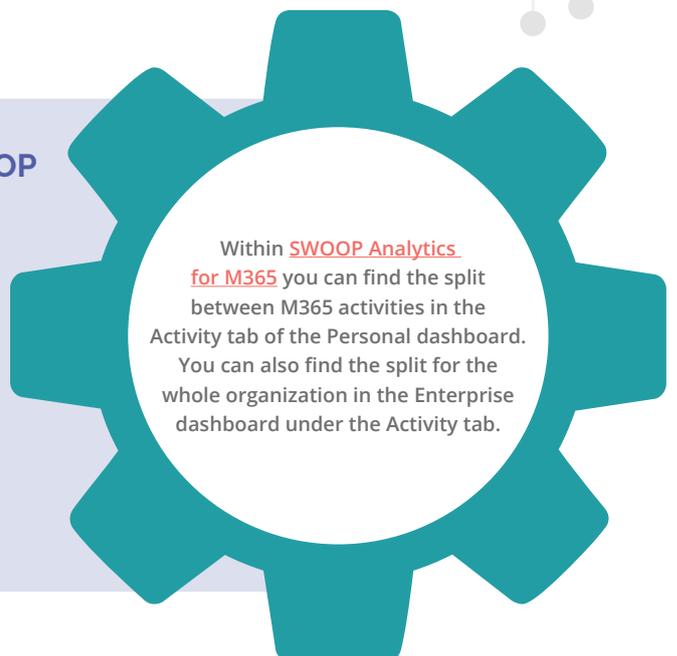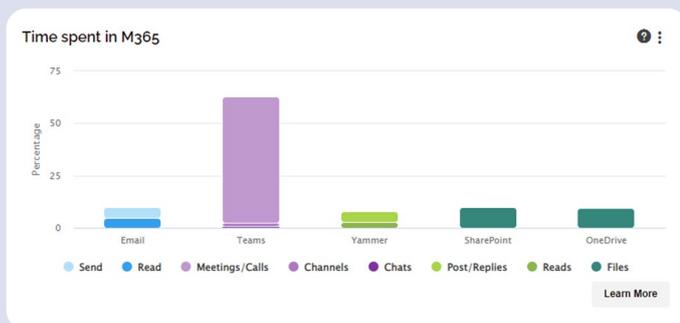
Teams monitoring their own collaboration performance

Armed with a desired "task and technology" profile, teams can look at their M365 technology use profile to track their performance against their desired technology usage profile (see activity profile above) .

For teams though, workplace analytics dashboards can go beyond the high level M365 technology usage. Within Teams channels, interaction data can expose relationship network patterns (helping, solving), app usage (tracking, organizing, controlling), content creation and use etc.

Build a Team performance dashboard in SWOOP

Within SWOOP Analytics for M365 you can find the split between M365 activities in the Activity tab of the Personal dashboard. You can also find the split for the whole organization in the Enterprise dashboard under the Activity tab.

7 Learning in the flow of work

Our years of M365 and Microsoft Teams benchmarking has exposed the huge challenge larger organizations are experiencing in upskilling their employees to be effective digital workplace participants. Peer-to-peer (action) learning to improve collaboration skills has been particularly evident. It is therefore critical that L&D (Learning & Development) practitioners work to maximize collaboration skill development by supporting this preferred mode of learning.

Like every other function, L&D practitioners are re-thinking their practices post pandemic, with the recognition that hybrid working is here to stay. While learning online received a huge boost with the onset of the pandemic in 2020, "delivering content by video alone will not spark behavioral change", L&D specialists found that despite learning virtually, employees still wanted that human shared learning experience. Working in teams to explore concepts to facilitate shared learning and shared stories; doing exercises together and practicing one-on-one or in small virtual groups.

More academic studies are coming to similar conclusions:

"For learning and development (L&D) practitioners, there are implications in relation to tailoring developmental offerings to fit the needs of employees to help them to progress more in the course of their work".

7.1 The challenge of agile learning online

It is one thing to provide a huge learning library of online courses; for which there are now a multitude of options. It's another to deliver learning experiences online to meet the agile "in the flow of work" expectations that employees are now wanting. This does not mean that these huge libraries of online learning resources have suddenly become irrelevant overnight. What it does mean is that organizations and their L&D functions have to find a way to create an online "action learning" environment, where employees can learn in conjunction with their close colleagues, while delivering on their work, simultaneously.

This is the challenge. L&D employees, being the minders of the corporate learning library, are no longer sufficient. Action learning is effective in developing a number of individual leadership and team problem-solving skills, and it became a component in corporate and organizational leadership development programs. This strategy is different from the "one size fits all".

Hybrid working adds another dimension: digitizing the action learning experience. Much of this study and report is focused on understanding the status quo on how workplaces are managing to facilitate digital collaboration. A precursor to being able to learn in the flow of your "digital" work, is to be at least looking to work and collaborate digitally.

7.2   Digital Action Learning – What might it look like?

At SWOOP Analytics we have been thinking for a long time about how we could help people learn "in their flow of work". As an analytics tool, we recognized we would not be on the screen in front of digital workers continuously. At best, we expected that for the individual worker, their personal analytics dashboard might be viewed weekly. Of course, employees conducting analytics as part of their job role would be supporting larger groups of employees; and therefore, accessing SWOOP for longer periods, while also facilitating employees on their learning journeys.

We were motivated by the power of the nudge, as a way of subtly impacting behaviors. We introduced nudges on our personal dashboards to provide context specific nudges to individuals on some simple action they could take to improve their collaboration performance.

Viewing your nudge in SWOOP
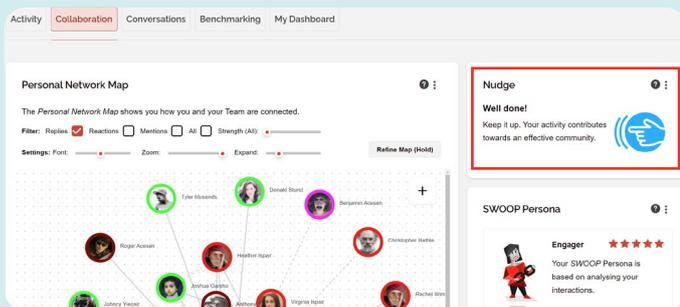
Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can view your nudge in the Personal dashboard under the Collaboration tab. Each person has a nudge tailored to their behavior. It is also possible to export the nudges and create benchmarking lists depending on your SWOOP permissions.

As pragmatic as a nudge is, we anticipated at least some employees, as well as their digital working support employees, would want employees to be able to drill deeper behind that nudge to answer the "why" question. Of course, accessing more extensive resources is totally at the whim of the end user, and therefore positioned by themselves in their flow of work. For SWOOP, these resources are accessed through the contextual Help and Support functions attached to each report or M365 dashboard found under the ? icon.

Within **SWOOP Analytics for Microsoft Teams** you can access our help articles through the Help link on the bottom left of the SWOOP window. Simply select the Help Articles link from the menu.

Getting help in SWOOP
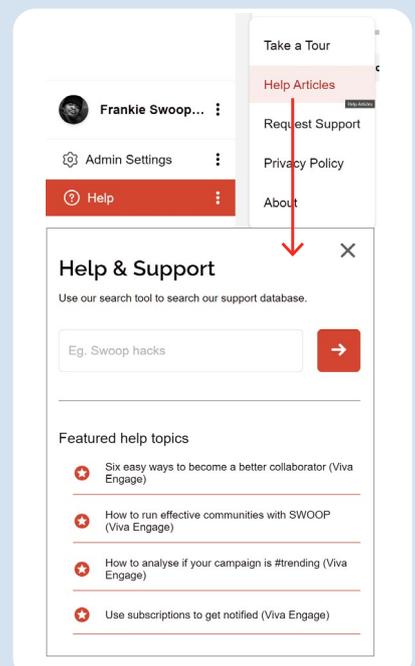
At the first level beyond the nudge, we provide access to some simple "Practice Resources" provided by collaboration consultants Designing Collaboration. Again, these practice tips are positioned with the SWOOP support environment to be context specific for both individuals and group/team leads.
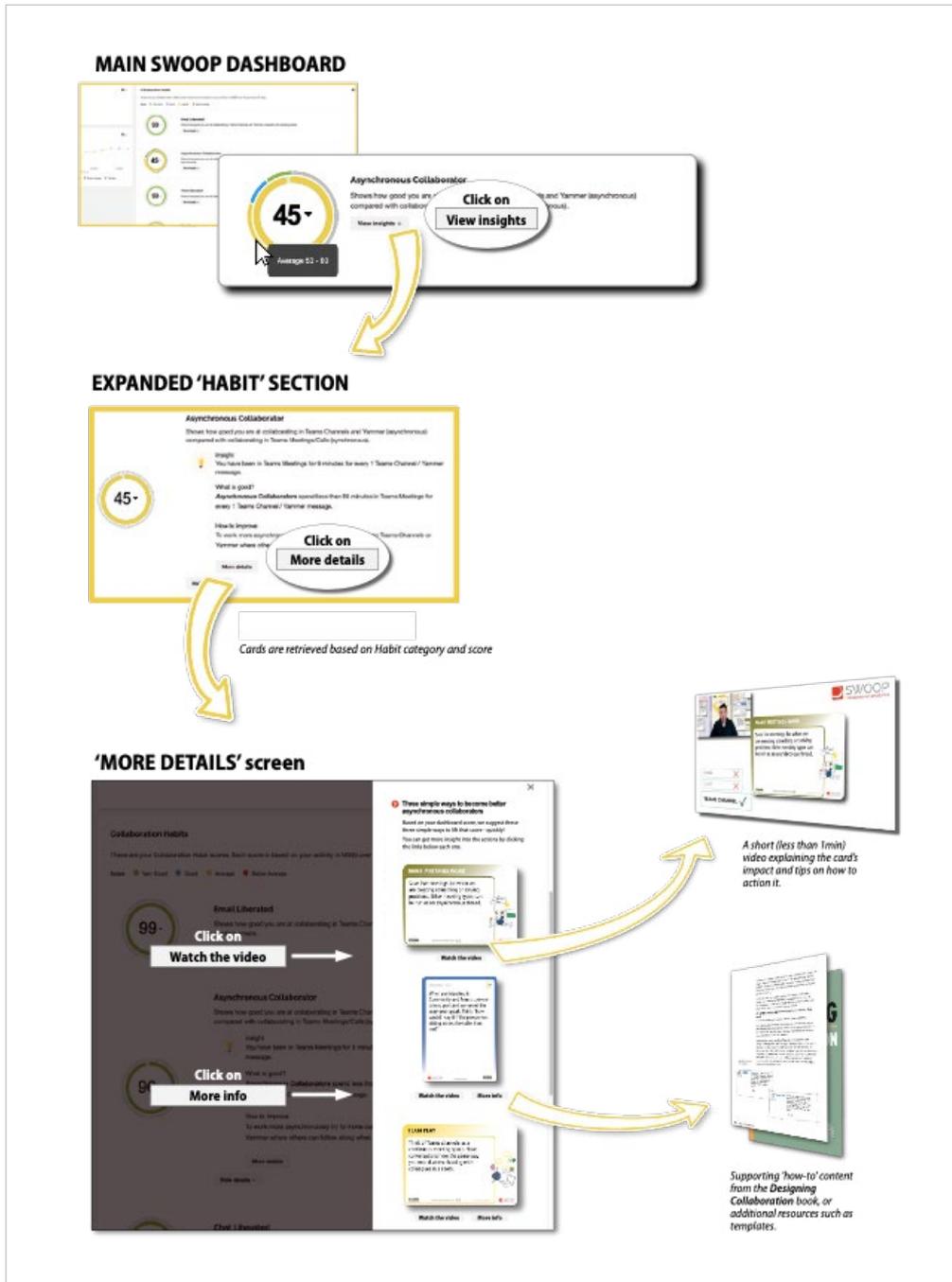

Figure 28 - Access to Designing Collaboration resources.

Doing More With Less in 4-Day Week Trials

A range of industries in the U.S., UK and Ireland — not just knowledge workers but shift workers and front-line workers — piloted a four-day week on a five-day week salary. Notably, resignations dropped and mental well-being improved. And productivity increased.

What the findings showed was that much of the reason behind the four-day week's success was making simple changes to the way we work. Changes that we can all apply to simplify our working week to gain more control of how we work.

Firstly, a reduction in meetings frees up time. Reducing meetings doesn't have to mean replacing them — it means in some instances adopting asynchronous practices, such as running status update meetings as a thread in Teams or Slack. And where a live meeting is needed, make it better. Focusing live meetings on solving problems rather than broadcasting or sharing routine matters means the meetings we hold are more focused on conversations. A strong agenda is also important, not only to make sure the meeting is well run, but also so that those who can't attend are not entirely left out. In fact, at GitLab, meetings are required to have such a comprehensive agenda that in many cases the intended meeting is no longer needed as the agenda is more than sufficient to both convey the intentions and to generate outcomes.

Secondly, consolidating internal communications into one place. For example, Microsoft Teams channels reduces email burden and also increases the visibility of work. This allows easier handovers of tasks, quicker problem solving and more efficient communications — it's easier to understand the context in a thread rather than via an email or 12.

Having time to focus goes without saying. It allows us to actually get work done in a shorter time period. Specifically blocking out focus time for chunks of the day where we feel productive allows more control. It is important, though, to protect these times rather than fill them with meetings. Focus time can also include getting away from the computer or workplace, not just on a designated break.

Finally, reducing distractions allows more time to focus on one task rather than constantly switching. Simplifying where teams collaborate into just one or two places can help to avoid distractions from too many tools. In fact, Microsoft have found that 86% of survey respondents wanted a single, centralised platform or portal where teams can collaborate in multiple ways.

Reducing chat-style communications also helps to manage distractions, as these can be incredibly noisy with their instant messaging nature. However, they are also very popular, with Microsoft users processing a minimum of 32 chat messages on average a day according to Microsoft 365 benchmarking. If less urgent messages can be moved to other asynchronous modes, this offers more time for focused work.

Andrew Pope – Co-Founder, Designing Collaboration.

Extracted from "Work Smarter and Save Time with a Few Simple Changes".

At the higher levels of support, we move beyond the practical "Hints and Tips" to deeper educational content. Labelled our "SWOOP Academy", these resources incorporate our master classes, thought leadership resources, including previous versions of our benchmarking reports, our SWOOP blog and published articles in Reworked/CMS Wire, Forbes, etc.

Figure 29 - Framework for learning in the flow of work.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the move to hybrid working styles is changing the face of how learning now needs to be delivered. Classroom learning is diminishing across the whole education sector. Learning while doing, or "just in time" learning is now even more in demand. That said, the deeper levels of learning will not be abandoned. Deeper learning levels provide the foundations for employees to adapt to changing work environments.

8 Futures: Hybrid work – where to now?

Hybrid working; how to do it, get the most out of it, how to balance the multiplexity of issues associated with it, is shaping up to be the challenge of a generation. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote and virtual work was of peripheral interest. The pandemic brought it right to the center of attention.

We cannot look at hybrid working without considering how employees collaborate and connect to greatest effect. The pandemic allowed us to experience "all remote" connecting and collaborating. We could easily contrast this to pre-pandemic "all in the office" experiences. Good economic and social arguments have been made for both situations, by far the major support has been for "both". This is easier said than done.

While pre-pandemic, there was an expectation that most employees were in the office, and therefore we only had to find a common time to meet. With hybrid working, an in-office meeting is a much bigger deal. To bring selected employees together for a face-to-face event, we need to effectively disrupt their day-to-day work. As Microsoft has written previously, we need to now factor "is it worth it" before we ask employees to come to the office.

The other big issue explored by this research are "job roles". Not all job roles are impacted by flexible work practices. A team leader for a team going from in-person to fully remote is more negatively impacted than the team members themselves. The same goes for job roles that are expected to co-ordinate across a breadth of organizational groupings. The research we reference below identifies these "bridging" job roles, as those most negatively impacted by hybrid work practices.

We spoke with RealFoundations CEO Chris Shaida about the impact of real estate in the hybrid working world, and his idea of "space planning" in the office.

realfoundations

Addressing the physical, as well as the digital, reality of hybrid work

We're never going back to the office for 40-hour working weeks but don't tear up your office lease just yet. It's time to turn your office space into a collaboration, or gathering, space so your employees want to return to the physical workplace.

It's a twist on the traditional office space. While most employees are never going to want to return to the office fulltime, they do want a place to meet with other colleagues, to feel energised, to nut out important work together – all while face-to-face.

Chris Shaida,
CEO, RealFoundations.

For some people, that could be a day or two a week. For others, a day or two a month. Really, a lot will depend on the *type* of work each person is performing, which decides what sort of workspace is best for them when they do make the trip into the office. Which is why it's time to declare the type of work that is expected in every employee's job descriptions.
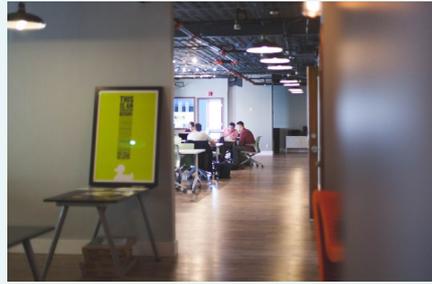
At real estate management consulting and managed services firm RealFoundations, each job has a description about the *type* of work they're expected to do, which they have broken down into three categories.

1. **Solo work** – A given task to be completed by yourself. Think of work like coding, when an employee puts on headphones and tries to block out distractions going on around them so they can focus on their work.
2. **Interactive work** – Typically work that can be done asynchronously. For example, you're working on a budget with someone else but you don't need to be in the same room to work together, and you don't need to interact in real time.
3. **Collaborative work** - Where multiple people need to be interacting in real time to get something done.

"Imagine if every job description outlined what type of work needs to be done," said RealFoundations founder and CEO Chris Shaida.

"You might have a job that's 70% solo, 20% interactive and 10% collaborative, or if you take a collaborative role, you could expect to come together with your people 70% of the time.

"If all enterprises did this, you could do all kinds of space planning."

It's this shift in thinking towards "space planning" that will make the office building a vibrant place once again. Not in the same way we used offices pre-COVID, because in the post-COVID digital workplace there's no need for everyone to be together all the time, and many roles (think solo and interactive work) are more suited to working some days at home, if that's want what employees want. Of course, provisions also need to be made for those who still want to be in the office while doing solo work.

Pre-pandemic: Offices were used only 24% of the time

Since the post World War era, the economics of office space has been predicated on offices being **empty** 76% of the time. Sounds crazy, right?

Do the maths. Most office buildings are used for eight hours a day for five days a week – that's just 40 hours a week from the 168 hours in each week, leaving offices mostly empty for 128 hours a week.

"The reason there hasn't already been a cataclysm in the office market is because the economics are already established for offices to be mostly empty," Chris said.

"So when we say offices are half empty from COVID, we're really saying they're empty from 76% of the time to 88% of the time. This is why there hasn't already been huge bankruptcies."

With the potential for another global recession and ongoing debt on office leases, Chris said some business owners may be thinking about handing back the keys and reneging on their office leases in favor of working from home. But let's face it, there are times when employees need to come together to get energised and do the collaborative work. Spaces need to be provided for this, but there's every chance the current spaces are not conducive to collaborative work.

Chris believes successful enterprises will acknowledge people are not ever coming back to the office 40 hours a week. But instead of tearing up their lease, they will instead invest more money into their real estate to design their offices as a place for people to return to when they want to collaborate in person. The offices will become collaboration, or gathering, spaces. A place to come together to feel energised and to collaborate.

"The winning enterprises, or those enterprises who believe they're in a battle for talent, need to provide reasons for people to physically gather in a place," Chris said.

"What we're beginning to see are leadership teams who get that we can't just make everybody come back into the space as it's currently configured, but people want to be together sometimes."

To make a return to the office successful, spaces need to be designed to allow people to interact.

Chris said asking people to do solo work, like coding, in an open-plan office with cubicles will face huge backlash.

"They don't want to be in the noisy room full of people poking them in the back of the head every five minutes," he said.

"So they end up sitting in a cube, with a blanket over their heads and headphones on. They feel miserable for a good chunk of that time. A lot of people don't need to collaborate every minute they're at work. They need to get work done, but now you're asking me to sit in this giant open plan office and it's not conducive to work that I do for 25 hours a week."

And having groups come together in a huge, open-plan office to collaborate and bounce around ideas won't work either. It's time to repurpose the space. Perhaps have movable walls to segregate small and larger spaces as needed.

Enterprises who recognize that good things happen when people are physically together – sometimes – and know the money they've spent on configuring open-plan offices isn't conducive to encouraging small groups to collaborate together in a safe space, realize the cost of retro-fitting their office space to make it a collaboration space are the ones winning the fight for talent, Chris says.

"The cost of providing people a physical environment that's conducive to them coming together sometimes is not monumental," Chris said.

"In a time of uncertainty, why should I spend more money on space? But once you get over that and you realize a whole bunch of your people are tired of being at home all the time, particularly younger people, the cost to give them space that is conducive to that kind of work isn't monumental."

What a hybrid work office looks like

Following Chris' model, you've acknowledged what type of spaces are needed in your enterprise through job descriptions and reconfigured your office to suit. But there are still going to be times where you need to do collaborative work when some people are in the office and others are online – true hybrid working.

Digital platforms like Microsoft 365, Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage mean collaborative work can continue to happen online, and organizations don't want to be limited by things like geography or accessibility to find their talent. The solution is to design collaboration spaces that give equality to all.

For example, if there are six people in a room at the office and six people dialling in online, the six people online would each have a screen displaying their face, at human scale.

"You want people on the screens to be subconsciously the same size," Chris said.

"You need to get past this one size fits all idea. Smart enterprises can do a lot of things physically to encourage that."

Chris says the understandable misconception about hybrid work is around each individual and where they work, whereas it's time to start thinking about actual interactions being hybrid.

"Actual interactions themselves will become more and more hybrid," Chris said. "We're in an actual real-time interaction and some people will be physically together and some people will be digitally present.

"What we're looking at over the next 10 years is seeing a lot more physical spaces that are tuned to fostering that kind of collaboration."

Tracking when to meet face-to-face

While the COVID-19 pandemic has proved most people and teams can work well and successfully using digital tools, few would deny the benefit of working face-to-face at times, especially if there's brainstorming or true collaboration required.

Chris said that's where using data from SWOOP Analytics can help. Using SWOOP measurements like Activity By Time could helps identify when there are troughs in collaboration and when it might be a good time to get together in person to energize people.

In summing up, Chris recommends:

1. Embrace the idea people are going to work from different physical places and you need to lure them to come to a place – whether it be an inviting office environment, a café, a meeting room, a retreat - when you believe they should be together with their colleagues.
2. Acknowledge not everyone can always be together at the same place so make allowances to include them with things like human-size screens for those joining online.
3. For office real estate, if you already have an ongoing lease, consider reconfiguring the space to make it inviting for staff to come back and meet, or for those doing solo work, give them an environment they can comfortably work in. If you don't have an ongoing lease, realize you can lease a space a day, a week, a month, six months, two years and ensure the space is conducive to coming together to collaborate.
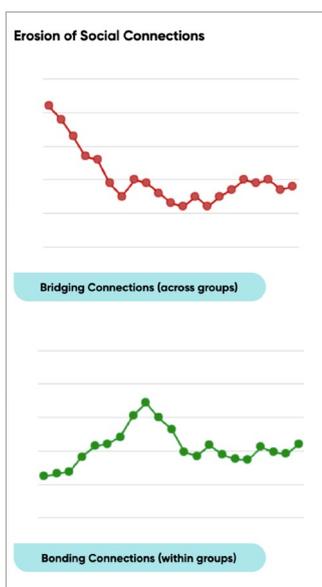
We have now had time to see more detailed studies come forth on the real effects of hybrid working. A recent compelling study on how to make hybrid work effective, by Michael Arena and published in the HR Exchange found that: *"the connections dedicated to thinking more broadly about new possibilities, engaging in early-stage idea development, and socializing solutions with key influencers drops off significantly for those who work primarily remotely."*

Specifically, it is the "bridging ties" critical to ideation and solution scaling that has suffered most from remote working. Bridging ties are connections that employees build to explore and eventually exploit innovative ideas or initiatives. These contrast with "bonding ties" associated with building more cohesive teams. The Arena study identified that bonding within existing teams actually increased at the onset of remote working.

This result is consistent with some of the earlier insights provided by Microsoft in its work trends studies.

8.1 What can M365 collaboration habits tell us about effective hybrid work?

Whether we are in the office or working remotely, one common denominator is that we are using office software like M365. At SWOOP Analytics we specialize in studying relationship networks that can be inferred through how employees interact with each other online. Our current products draw relationship data from Viva Engage (Yammer) discussions and Microsoft Teams channel discussions to develop our people-centered insights.

For this report we are broadening our scope to look at relationship patterns that exist with Outlook email, Microsoft Teams chat, Microsoft Teams meetings, along with Viva Engage discussions and Microsoft Teams channels. Building on the Arena and Microsoft studies, we are looking for a way to predict the "moments that matter" where employees can be encouraged to reach out beyond their day-to-day teams, to create important "bridging ties". At times, this may require scheduling in-office events.
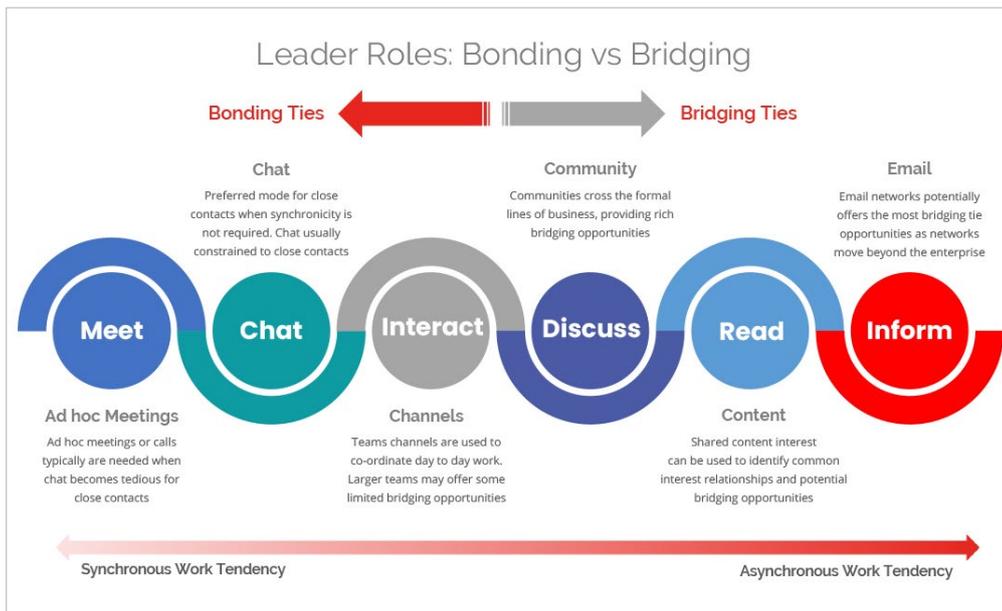
Figure 30 - Bridging and bonding inside M365.

The above schematic identifies each of the M365 communication modes as they relate to the perceived opportunity for creating stronger bridging or bonding ties. We look at individual employee's networks developed within each of the above modes and then aggregate them to identify the nature of the networks for each mode.

As a related observation we can see that "bonding" job roles do tend to favor synchronous (and perhaps in-office) work habits, in contrast to "bridging" job roles which can be conducted asynchronously. That said, the research indicates that being at the extremes can be bad for both job role types.

Our hypothesis is that bridging ties will be mostly identified for the modes to the right of Figure 30. By analyzing these networks, we can identify where the most diverse connections exist and who the "bridge" is in connecting to them.

8.2   M365 multi-modal networks

We used our own internal SWOOP Analytics data to undertake this networks exploration[6]. SWOOP has been a remote working company from day one, where most of our 30+ employees work from home or a shared office. With employees located around the world, it would have been complicated to assemble the resources we have without a remote working model.

8.2.1   Bonding or bridging?

Looking at the modes that create a direct person-to-person interaction (Outlook, Viva Engage, Microsoft Teams channels, Microsoft Teams chat and Teams meetings), we identified the connection networks for each network mode and then calculated the density for each network. Dense networks are seen as a place for bonding. Sparse networks offer opportunities for bridging.
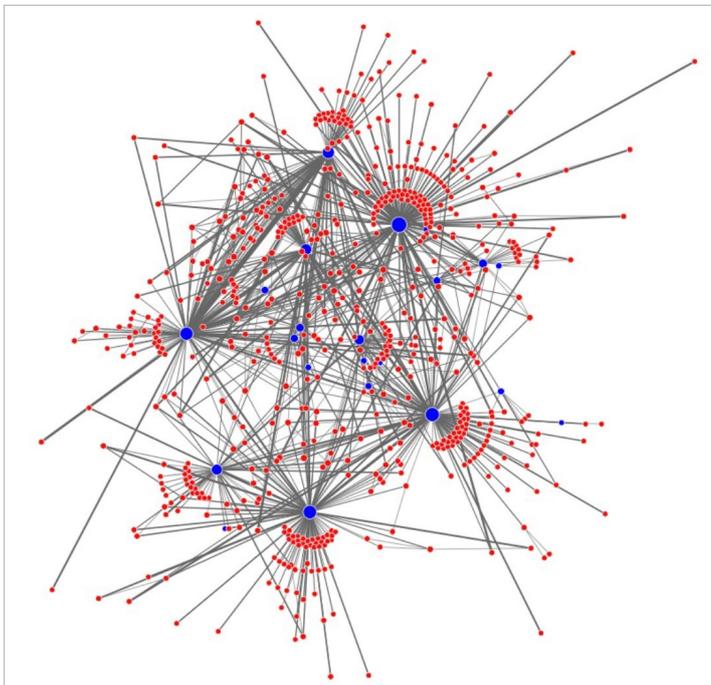
Figure 31 - SWOOP email relationship network.

The above graph shows how SWOOP employees (blue circles) are connected to external stakeholders (red circles) and other SWOOP employees via email messages. Connections must be two-way to be shown. The relative size of the circles reflects the relative number of connections the person has.

We can see that the key brokers in the email network are quite visible as the larger blue circles. The remaining networks (Viva Engage, Teams channels and Teams chat) are not as expansive as many fewer external circles exist i.e. only include mainly internal connections.

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6 This choice was largely for expediency. Access to certain relationship data requires levels of permission that can take some time to negotiate.

The density of a network is the percentage of connections that exist as a proportion of all possible connections i.e. when everyone is connected with everyone else.

Table 15 - Network densities.

Network	Density
Email	0.6%
Microsoft Teams meetings	17%
Microsoft Teams channels	3.5%
Viva Engage (Yammer)	10.2%
Microsoft Teams chat	45.6%

The email network is by far the least dense and therefore provides the most opportunity for those with bridging connections. Predictably, these were mostly our customer-facing employees. Viva Engage, Microsoft Teams channels and Microsoft Teams chat are largely internal.

Teams meetings focused on organic ad-hoc meetings, peer-to-peer calls and scheduled meetings. Network connections were inferred from the common participation of attendees. Scheduled meeting networks, like email, saw external stakeholders invited in. Our recurring meetings are regularly "all hands" meetings used to accelerate decision-making on key topics, but also used as an opportunity for group-wide socialization. They have been excluded from our network analysis, as they are more about communication and less about people-to-people collaboration.
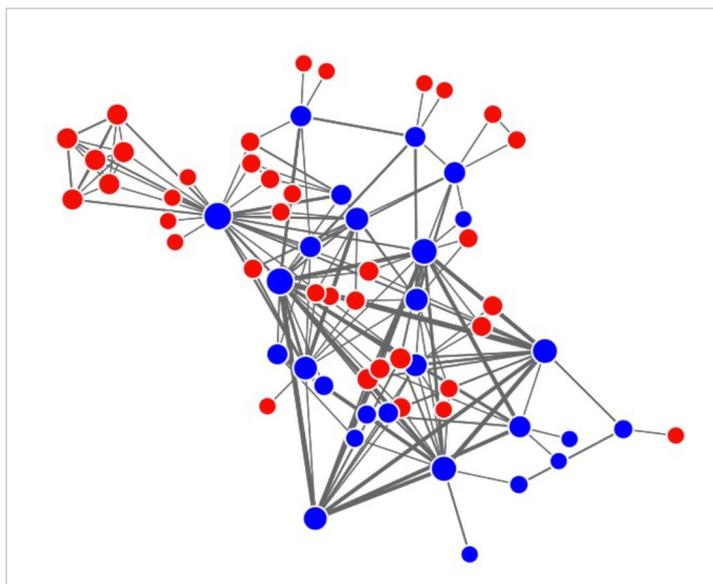
Figure 32 - SWOOP meetings network.

We can see the meetings network also includes connections to external stakeholders. The network is denser than the email network. This reflects the stronger connections that meetings facilitate. The key brokers were a mix of customer-facing and DevOps leaders.

At SWOOP we have always been big Viva Engage (Yammer) users prior to the introduction of Microsoft Teams. Many of our key business communities still exist on Viva Engage, even when they could be comfortably accommodated in Teams. Our DevOps teams, however, are more centrally located in Microsoft Teams. The brokering opportunities between the business and technical groups appear higher in Teams channels, but the densities are similar.

The Microsoft Teams chat network is by far the densest, which suggests that it is a place for "bonding", as we hypothesized. Peer-to-peer meetings tend to flow from chat when more fidelity is needed. Scheduled meetings were regularly used to invite external stakeholders into out networks.

8.2.2   Overlapping networks?

Overlapping networks would suggest that some modes of collaboration may be redundant. Do we have too many modes; or are they adequately differentiated?

For each of the networks we ranked the members by the number of reciprocated connections they had established. We then compared the networks using a rank correlation calculation.

Table 16 - Overlapping networks correlations.

	Viva Engage (Yammer)	Channels	Chat	Meetings
Email	0.1	-0.26	0.18	0.12
Viva Engage (Yammer)		0.04	0.24	-0.03
Channels			0.005	0.24
Chat				0.06

The ranking correlation score can range from -1 to 1, where 1 is a perfect correlation, -1 is a perfect negative correlation and 0 is no correlation. The results suggest the networks are distinctive. The Viva Engage/Microsoft Teams chat and Teams channels/meetings networks are moderately correlated, but otherwise each network is playing a distinctive role.

8.2.3   Which employees are playing bridging (and bonding) roles?

The following table ranks the top 10 employees by the number of reciprocated connections for each network:

Table 17 - Bridging and bonding employees

Bridging Ties ⬅   ➡ Bonding Ties

Rank	Email	Connections	Viva Engage (Yammer)	Connections	Channels	Connections	Chat	Connections	Meetings*	Connections
1	emily	184	cai	30	cai	24	cai	33	emily	24
2	cai	138	benjamin	27	matt	22	maaz	31	cai	22
3	pete	123	jaz	26	benjamin	16	marianne	30	benjamin	18
4	gemma	113	matt	25	emily	15	telford	27	telford	16
5	coco	90	laurie	25	telford	14	paul	26	paul	15
6	serena	71	emily	23	jacky	13	matt	24	laurie	12
7	jeff	61	sharon	22	jaz	13	benjamin	23	matt	12
8	marianne	49	gemma	22	pete	13	emily	21	sharon	11
9	francesca	28	coco	20	maaz	12	jaz	20	gemma	10
10	sharon	23	marianne	20	hayden	12	quentin	18	maaz	10

* Meetings are playing both a bridging (to externals) and bonding (to internals) role.

The above table shows the most important bridging ties exist in our email network. The top five are all customer facing, which seems appropriate. The meetings network top five are a mix of customer facing and DevOps leaders. The Teams channels network was our least dense internal network. The top three have a focus on new product development, which seems an appropriate internal bridging role for a company like SWOOP. The bonding role in our most dense network (chat) sees our CEO Cai playing a lead role again. Maaz, Marianne and Telford all play key roles "keeping the ship afloat" by dealing with our important day-to-day operations.

Meetings provide a dual bonding and bridging role. Peer-to-peer and adhoc meetings are an extension of chat, and provide the bonding power of a synchronous interaction. Many of the scheduled meetings were an extension of external email connections, which had progressed to a more "bonding" external relationships. Whether bridging or bonding, network leaders are your "key influencers".

Is your CEO also the Chief Networking Officer, playing both bonding and bridging roles?

SWOOP is a small organization of just over 30 employees, but the multi-network analysis looks like it is doing the right thing and producing results that pass a sense-making test. Our next task is to try it out on some larger organizations, where these key bridging and brokering roles may be less obvious; and therefore, their identification of critical value[7].

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7 We are open to approaches from organizations interested in pursuing our multi-tier networking analysis to help identify their key bridging and bonding people: https://www.swoopanalytics.com/contactus

8.2.4   The asynchronous/synchronous continuum

The asynchronous/synchronous continuum as shown in Figure 30 identifies where the different M365 toolsets are placed along this continuum. To achieve maximum benefit, it is important to aim to use all modes along this continuum and learn how to seamlessly move along it. As an analogy, think about driving a manual transmission car. Email is first gear. By living in email you can still move forward, but very slowly. Meetings are your top gear and where you can move fastest. But if you try to go directly from first gear to top gear you are in for a bumpy ride and a real risk of stalling completely. For the smoothest journey, it is best to go through all the gears; Outlook email, Viva Engage, Microsoft Teams channels, Microsoft Teams chat and Teams meetings.

The following table provides some triggers for transitioning between the different modes along the asynchronous/synchronous continuum:

Table 18 - Triggers for collaboration mode transitions.

Gear	Mode	Best Usage	Trigger to Engage	Trigger to Disengage to another Mode
1st	Email	Exploring and engaging with external stakeholders. Response time less critical. Internal-only use should be avoided.	When looking to engage with a new external stakeholder. To continue an "arms-length" engagement with an existing stakeholder, where time is not of the essence.	When looking to escalate the current engagement level.
2nd	Viva Engage (Yammer)	Building cross-functional communities is another example. Participating in enterprise wideenterprise-wide communications is another. Largely internal use.	If you are looking to escalate the relationship with an external stakeholder; this is the place to explore pre-existing connections. This is also the place to explore issues that may have implications beyond your day-to-day team. Has a problem already been solved somewhere else? Is there an opportunity to create something new here?	If escalating an external stakeholder relationship is confirmed, it's time to allocate the task to a dedicated team.

3rd	Microsoft Teams channels	This is the best place for day-to-day teams to collaborate, ideally as a self-directed team. It may also be a place for functional group leaders to keep their members appraised and connectedand connected. They will largely be internal, but for say project teams, guest stakeholders may participate.	The day-to-day team is where the "rubber hits the road" for most work initiatives. It may be a project team creating a new product or service. It may be a service team working collaboratively. It may be a functional group instituting a new policy or practice.	When threaded discussions become constraining due to the complexity or urgency of the work, it is time to move to a more synchronous mode. Breakout groups may choose to engage in Teams chat. Team meetings may be called to resolve important issues.
4th	Microsoft Teams chat	Chat is best used for short, sharp interactions of small groups (2-3 people) to achieve a quick response e.g. availability for a meeting, work status check on small tasks, simple time sensitive requests etc. Internal use only.	When a short quick response is required that is not relevant to the whole team e.g. checking on the status of a task from a colleague that you are reliant on. You want to request some quick help from a colleague e.g. can you please copy over your xxx?	When the complexity and/or urgency of a task needs a direct people-to-people meeting. Perhaps the chat is escalating to needing input from multiple people. At the other end, if a chat conversation starts to evolve to the point that the full team should be aware; then it's time to step back into the asynchronous Teams channels.
5th	Microsoft Teams meetings	Within M365 they are labelled "ad-hoc" (calls), "scheduled" and "recurring". Ad-hoc is usually an escalation from a chat that has become constraining. Scheduled is usually to engage the larger team around an important issue or topic. It may include external stakeholders e.g. customers, suppliers or partners. Recurring meetings are often "all hands" events. Meetings should be reserved for topics or issues that are complex and urgent enough to require direct person-to-person interactions.	When we see long asynchronous threads in Teams channels or chat over short periods of time, it is a trigger that a meeting may be the best way to reach an agreement on a set of actions. You may also choose to use a meeting for cultural or social reasons e.g. performance discussions, on-boarding a new team member etc.	It's important not to "get into the habit" of meetings. When the complexity and/or urgency of a work task has been resolved or lessened through a meeting, then the work should move to more asynchronous modes e.g. Teams channels or Viva Engage communities.

For the hybrid line manager, knowing when to schedule a synchronous event, either in person, or digitally can be a huge benefit. Hybrid work has increased complexity for scheduling synchronous activities, especially if they are in-person.
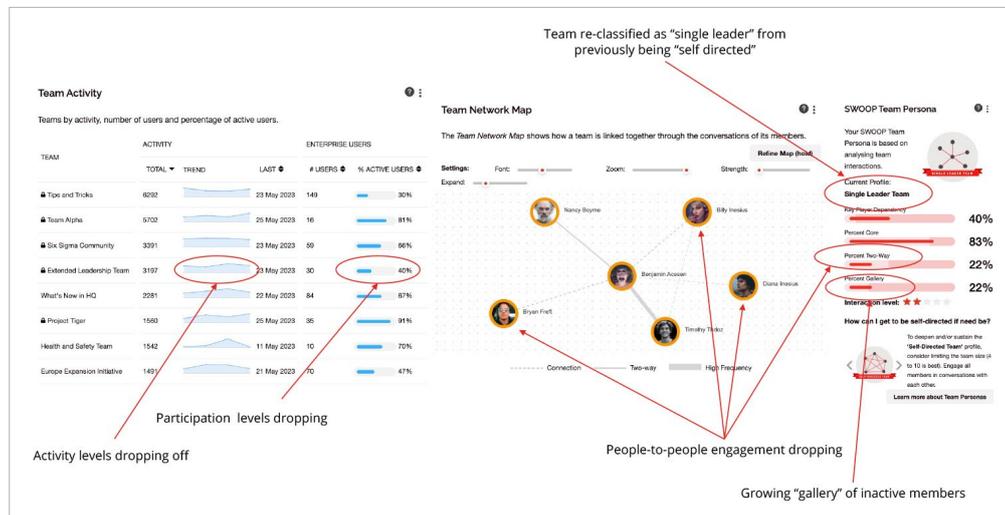

Figure 33 - Using SWOOP data to identify when to meet.

From the SWOOP dashboards, it is possible to observe work pattern trends that could be used to trigger a need for an "office day" or alternative face-to-face event. For a day-to-day team, a growing gallery of passive members, a change of classification from "self-directed" to "single leader" or "community;" an overall drop in team activity levels; a drop in reciprocity levels can all be indicators of a need for a face-to-face intervention.

In the hands of the hybrid middle manager, SWOOP's Microsoft Teams dashboards can play a critical role in helping decide when it is time for a face-to-face event.

As we have reported earlier, increased face-to-face is not resulting in less digital interactions; in fact, the exact opposite. Face-to-face appears to be energizing more digital work, post the event.

People are indeed the most important resource of any organization.

Yet so many leaders are failing to live by that maxim. They instead prefer to do what's comfortable for them, even if it devastates employee morale and engagement. They fail to recognize how doing so deeply undercuts the bottom line through decreasing productivity, growing turnover, and subpar recruitment, while harming collaboration and innovation.

The call by many leaders for employees to return to the office full-time represents an egregious and self-defeating example of top executives choosing to do what's comfortable for them over what's best for their people and their bottom line. We can see that in some reversals by large employers who realized they screwed up. That's why Google, after many months of insisting all employees return to their campus, backtracked from its plans and permitted full-time remote work to many in the face of mass employee resistance and resignations. Amazon did the same for similar reasons.

These trillion-dollar companies lost many billions through their self-defeating actions due to top employees leaving, serious hits to employee morale and engagement, and having to change the basics of their return to campus plans. If these top companies, with supposedly the best leadership and policies, can screw up their return-to-office plans so badly and hurt their innovation advantage, no wonder leaders of less-resourced smaller companies do so as well.

Fortunately, many more forward-looking leaders walk the talk of truly valuing their people. After evaluating the internal and external environment, they recognized that they can't simply try to turn back the clock to January 2020 if they want their organizations to survive and thrive in the post-COVID environment. Instead, they made the strategic decision to support their employees working remotely part or full-time. They saw this approach, though initially uncomfortable for themselves, as a way of gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage in the most important resource for any company.

Tsipursky, Dr. Gleb. Returning to the Office and Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams: A Manual on Benchmarking to Best Practices for Competitive Advantage (p. 10). Intentional Insights. Kindle Edition.

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky – Office Whisperer and Hybrid Expert

Extracted from "Returning to the Office and Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams".

9 Final Thoughts
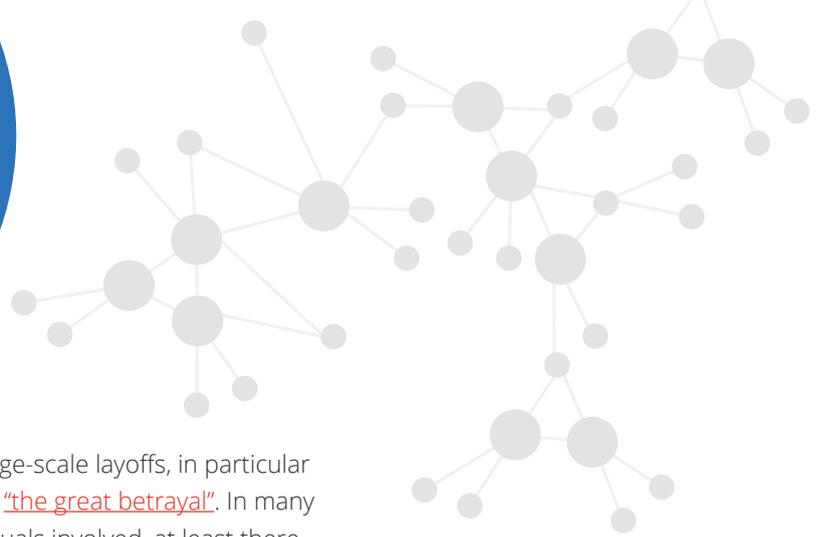
As we write this report, across the world there have been large-scale layoffs, in particular with the large tech companies; which has been described as "the great betrayal". In many cases, whole teams or divisions are being cut. For the individuals involved, at least there is comfort in the fact that it is not just about them. Many of these companies are still recording record profits. The downside is that the years of building up a talent base and a culture of loyalty to the organization, can disappear overnight. Collaboration; so hard to achieve, can quickly be replaced by "me, rather than we."

This point was recently put to former clinical psychotherapist and now workforce management guru Wagner Denuzzo. He believes the whole workplace system needs a rethink. Denuzzo subscribes to the psychological safety theme popularized by Amy Edmonson. hough he believes that workplace systems need to be dynamic; allowing people to move between companies, amongst teams, that will be more dynamic, digital, diverse and discerning.

From this study and our predecessor M365 and Microsoft Teams benchmarking studies during the COVID-19 pandemic; it is hard to ignore how critical the "self-directed" team is to our ability to maximize the value from hybrid working. Denuzzo identifies with "the leader as a coach," who cannot control the performance on the field, but as a coach can observe and assist. This is precisely what the SWOOP dashboards are designed for; to observe teams or groups in action.

SWOOP uses AI based machine learning methods to characterize team behaviors. We identify, as Denuzzo does, the importance of self-directed teams. Indeed, if teams are to traverse the "forming, storming, norming and performing" phases at pace and inclusive of dynamically changing membership; digital teams and their channels are the key. The SWOOP dashboards can inform on an hourly basis the dynamics of team performance using M365 and Microsoft Teams interactions. A self-directed team can quickly regress to a single leader one (and an overloaded one at that) if monitoring signals are not in place.

We were disappointed to see how little Microsoft Teams channels and the teams they support were being used in larger organizations. We are seeing a continual suite of challenges emerging that can disrupt our attempts to achieve better levels of collaboration; yet it is better collaboration platforms that hybrid workers are desperate for.

While digital transformation has been a buzzword in the workplace, its adoption has been slow and uneven, as reflected in the poor uptake of Microsoft Teams channels and the concept of a "digital team". However, our benchmarking has uncovered truly inspirational examples of what can be achieved by transforming digital behaviors. Nonetheless, it is disheartening to see the rewards from such transformation are not shared equitably within, and between, organizations. To accelerate much-needed transformation, workplace analytics can play a key role. Our report and case studies offer a roadmap for inspiring revolutionary change within your organization. Let's work together to create a brighter, more equitable future through digital transformation of the way we collaborate online.

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