



## 'Discovering the art of the possible with Microsoft 365'

*By Hannah Lock*

### Beyond Communication – MS Teams for *Collaboration*

I think we can all agree that we've well and truly adopted and adapted to 'new ways of working', but as we look forward to a post-Covid world there is no question of returning to our previously inefficient and clunky ways of collaborating in the office. So how do we start thinking about what collaboration looks like in a hybrid work environment? What tools are available that will help us to connect with colleagues wherever we are; office, home, café, or train?

We think the answer lies with Microsoft Teams. Here at 3C, MS Teams is our go-to platform for all things communication and collaboration, and you are probably no stranger to it yourself. But the question is, have you merely scratched the surface of Teams, or have you moved beyond communication to collaboration?

#### *What's missing?*

Over the past few months, we've been listening to what you have to say – what you find challenging about remote and mobile working and the little things you miss from being in an office with face-to-face contact. Two of the questions we've heard a lot are;

- How do we recreate those '**ad-hoc desk conversations**' or those 'peering over someone's shoulder' to see what they're talking about moments?
- What does an effective **problem-solving or creative thinking** meeting look like when we're not in the same room with a good old-fashioned flip chart?

MS Teams excels at offering a wide range of functionality that will help housing providers to support colleagues achieve their desired ways of working, ironing out those little niggles and frustrations. To get you started, we thought we'd share **our top four features** that help take Teams from being a simple communication tool to a game-changing collaboration one.

#### *Four features that make MS Teams good for collaboration*

Coming in at first place is *version control*. Now, this may not sound exciting, but we promise you it is! We all love a bit of real-time working, and thanks to its SharePoint foundations, Teams makes that not only possible but easy. There's no magic button or secret functionality that you have to switch on every time, it's just the way Teams rolls – to collaborate efficiently you need to get the foundational building blocks right and the strong security of Teams makes this a no-brainer.

Using Teams to store and manage documents is a key step to establishing these building blocks, it will enable you to;

- Take advantage of version control to reverse any unwanted changes, see when the document was last updated, and by whom.



- Have an audit trail that doesn't end up with you having 'Draft 1, Draft 2...Final Draft' clogging up your folders.
- Work on the same document at the same time without confusion.
- Share documents in channels or chats, which not only gives you greater control over who has access to the document but reduces that age-old headache of emails flying back and forth with different people commenting and editing silo copies of the same document that you then have to amalgamate.

Our second fab feature, which is only made better by this built-in automatic version control, is *guest access*. Collaboration with Teams isn't just limited to your internal colleagues, guest access means you can collaborate with your suppliers, partners, and contractors all in one place (regardless of whether they have a 365 account or not). This feature not only helps to cut out the noise of emails bouncing back and forth but by focusing collaboration into teams and channels it streamlines the way you and your partners' communicate, work and share documents together. This offering improves communication, enhances efficiency, and streamlines compliance, keeping all comms and documents within one secure platform.

Next, we're going to take a quick look at how Microsoft has enhanced their communication tools to be better suited for virtual collaboration. Over the past few months, we have all become *very* familiar with video calls, and whilst I am sure we are all very grateful for the way in which they've helped us to maintain contact with our colleagues, maybe it's time we changed them up a bit (and no, I'm not talking about using a new background)? These are some of the features that we've been using to make our video calls more interactive and collaborative;

- **Screen sharing** – you don't have to share your whole desktop, just the window or application relevant to the conversation. This is a great way of recreating those ad-hoc desk conversations.
- **Calling people into a meeting** – got a question that you can't answer? No problem, just use the 'request to join' feature rather than trying to remember to follow up on it later.
- **Recording and transcripts** – this means you're not trying to take notes and listen at the same time, you can focus on the meeting rather than trying to make sure you've written your actions down. If you do still want to take notes, you can use the 'meeting notes' panel so everything stays within one screen and can be easily shared afterwards.
- **Whiteboard function & polls** – these are the 'fun' features, use the whiteboard to get creative, capture ideas and make things a bit more interactive and visual. We also like using the embedded forms feature to create polls – a good one for those larger, perhaps more formal meetings where you want to keep people engaged and collect feedback.



Last, but by no means least, is the feature that enhances all of the functionality mentioned above – is the ability to **embed apps**, making Teams your ‘everything in one place’ environment. There is so much to cover with this one feature that we can’t even begin to scratch the surface, so here’s a few tips; if you love a task list, then try embedding ‘**Tasks by Planner and To Do**’ in your channels – you can assign and check off tasks to your heart’s content, keeping your projects on track. If you like visuals and dashboards, then why not embed a **Power BI** report into your channel – this can be particularly helpful for managing performance. Or maybe you’re a notetaker? Add **OneNote** as a tab to take notes easily and share them with the team.

Whichever apps you choose to use, the power of this functionality is that the team or channel members can access everything from one place, helping them to move away from the temptation of keeping everything in their private file storage or notebook.

Taking your organisation’s use of Teams to the next level goes hand in hand with making the most of the whole M365 application suite. These four features are just the beginning of how Teams is more than just a communication tool and has hopefully given you some ideas of how you can make some quick collaboration wins.

### ***What’s in it for you?***

So, why does this matter? Elevating collaboration is all about building strong, efficient, and secure relationships, both with your internal colleagues and your external partners. If you can communicate and collaborate effectively, you’ll have more time and more headspace, something that is particularly important for your frontline workers. According to the Forrester Impact Study in 2019, frontline workers saved **45 minutes per week** by using Teams to collaborate with colleagues, and on an organisation-wide level, there was an **18.9% reduction** in meetings each week – collaboration should prioritise quality over quantity.

### ***What next?***

Hopefully, you’re feeling excited about the potential of taking Teams to the next level (or maybe you’re feeling a little smug because you’re already using these features!), but perhaps you’re also not quite sure about where to start. Here are some of the key questions that 3C can help you think about to support you to take your next steps;

- Are you getting the best value for money from your Microsoft 365 licensing?
- Do your staff have the skills to keep up with this new technology and functionality?
- Have you got the right devices to make the most of the Microsoft applications?

Look out for our other top tips for discovering the art of the possible with M365 coming soon.