

White Paper · Document Management Solutions

Teams Usage in Legal

Deployment Strategies and the
Implications for Information Governance

By David Malkinson



Microsoft Teams




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TABLE OF CONTENTS

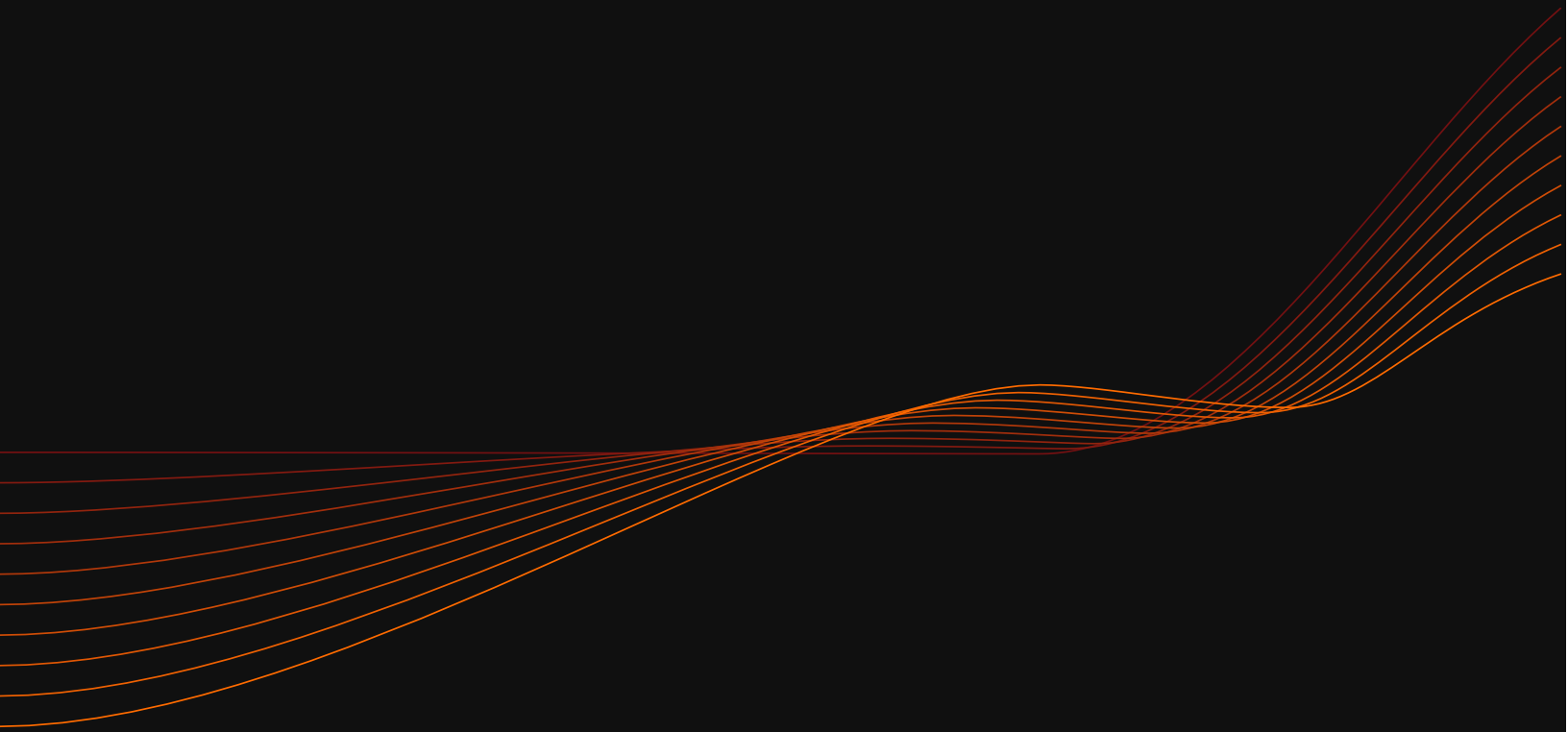
Introduction	4
Terminology	5
What System Does What?	5
Only Create a Team for Effective Use Cases	6
Example Use Cases	7
Teams Doesn't Work Without a Provisioning Strategy	8
Create Teams not Channels	8
Where to Message - Private Chat or Team Channel?	9
Working with Files	10
Using Teams for co-authoring	11
Team Expiration & Data Retention	12
Teams as an Extranet	13
Managing Guest Access	13
Permissions and Private Channels	13
Org Switching	14
Industry Trends	14
Conclusion	14





Microsoft Teams is a critical tool for cutting email noise, reducing app fatigue, and enhancing collaboration with team members and business partners. The challenge is to deploy in such a manner to retain confidentiality and privacy, whilst eliminating any barriers to adoption. To get this right, firms need a careful blend of configuration, tooling, defined ways of working and change management.

DAVID MALKINSON



Introduction

Business communication in the last 12 months has undergone a sea-change akin to the dawn of fax and email. Instant messaging is now the primary form of internal comms, with email used primarily for external communication, formal notifications and forwarding information.

The rapid rise of Teams adoption isn't explained solely by the pandemic – for many years, firms have been working more collaboratively and informally, whilst spending an increasing amount of time searching for information. Teams is seen as an easy win for collaboration and a remedy for disconnected information silos and is now the center piece of Microsoft 365.

Alongside online meetings and private chat, Teams serves as a front door for Microsoft 365 apps and provides a baked-in file repository via SharePoint Online. For those firms who have invested in a dedicated Document Management System (DMS) as the system of record, having a separate SharePoint repository front and center of the firm's primary communication tool is problematic.

Many Teams best practice guides argue for a 'free and easy' usage policy advocating self-governance of Teams, in order to drive up adoption. For lawyers, this approach is a road to disaster. Left ungoverned, a rapid adoption of Teams can leave documents and chat data saved randomly in personal OneDrive, mailboxes, and SharePoint sites. Worse, there are no real guarantees that this data is secured properly, nor has the right retention and sensitivity labels applied.

Legal professionals need absolute assurance that data is secured in line with firm policy and client terms, and that every detail of the matter is available many years after the fact. A rapidly deployed, accept-the-defaults Teams setup will run a steam train through many firms' information governance policies, particularly those who have invested in a DMS.

The challenge is to make the DMS and Teams work together in harmony, providing the collaboration power of Teams and the legal specific storage and retrieval provided by the DMS. To get this right, you need a careful blend of configuration, tooling, defined ways of working and change management, which we'll explore here.

Terminology

Unsurprisingly, we'll use the term "teams" a lot in this document, with slightly different meanings:

- **Teams:** (capitalized, plural) the Microsoft software
- **Team:** (capitalized, singular) a collaboration and coordination space created using Microsoft Teams
- **team:** (non-capitalized) a "real-world", non-digital team

What System Does What?

Teams by its very nature is purpose built for collaboration, whilst the DMS is the system of record that should (if it's been deployed properly) be the primary storage location for legal work product.

Translating this into the physical world, think of the DMS as an intelligent filing cabinet and Teams as the break-out room or co-working space where the work gets done.

You wouldn't leave files permanently stored in a meeting room; you'd pull the ones you needed out of the filing cabinet and put them back when you're done. So it should be with Teams and the DMS.



DMS

- Matter file's golden source
- Filing and storage of formal communication
- Provides access to prior knowledge assets

TEAMS

- Informal internal communication / conversation threads
- 'Front Door' to M365 apps (Tasks, Lists, OneNote)
- Real time collaboration on documents



Best Practices – Working Practices

Staff need to know that if a client document resides in Teams, this is temporary, and content must be saved back into the DMS. Utilize reporting, synchronization tools and expiration policies to enforce this behavior.

Only Create a Team for Effective Use Cases

At time of writing, there is an [upper limit of 500,000 teams per organization](#), so creating a Team for every matter by default isn't an option for most firms.

Being a member of more than 20 active Teams makes the UI navigation awkward, in particular scrolling up/down the Team list. Careful definition of the use cases is required to ensure that the UI stays clean and you don't end up with redundant or dormant Teams with no engagement.

The collaboration patterns of legal matters vary significantly depending on the makeup of the team and the nature of the work. As a result, not every matter needs a Team setup. Whilst you don't want to be too prescriptive on what matters qualify for a Team, it's useful to define this in advance.

Example Use Cases

As the functionality and app ecosystem grows so does the use cases that benefit from a Team being setup. Some proven use cases in legal are:

- Collaboration between legal departments and the business (i.e. non DMS users)
- Working with multiple team members, typically 3 users or more. This is particularly beneficial when working across time zones.
- Collaboration extending beyond documents to include workflows, shared task lists, shared mailboxes, and key documents. This can often replace much of the functionality provided by firm intranets, and avoids the app switching challenge.



Best Practice – Defining Use Cases

Define and socialize use cases for when a Team should be setup prior to launch, concentrating on those which demonstrate high priority and high value. Identify new use cases by encouraging user submission and identifying and analyzing those Teams with high levels of engagement.

Teams Doesn't Work Without a Provisioning Strategy

First things first, you should disable Teams creation.

When you enable the Teams license in Microsoft 365, anyone and everyone can create a new Team. The idea of allowing this by default is to encourage collaboration. However, there's lots of evidence to suggest that allowing ad-hoc Team creation will spawn multiple duplicates, many Public Teams called 'Test' and the firm complaining that they can't find anything. I can't put it plainer than Robert Bath in his excellent [blog](#) on Teams governance:

“Seriously, if your staff are able to create their own Groups/Teams, then stop reading this and disable self-service creation straight away.”



Microsoft describes how to disable this [here](#).

Create Teams not Channels

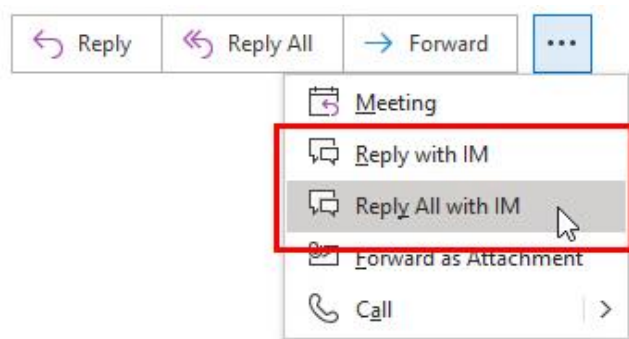
Like all UI designs, keeping the design as simple and straightforward as possible makes Teams easier to both use and explain to new users. Here are some general guidelines on Teams design:

- Create multiple simple Teams with minimal channels on each. Any Team with multiple channels for different matters are very difficult to secure properly or apply retention policies to. Ethical walls are often impossible to implement at the channel level.

- In most cases, the default 'General' channel is all you'll ever need. Only create additional channels if there are sub-teams that need to collaborate separately.
- Create based on source systems metadata – commonly this is the time & billing system, CRM, or matter management system.
- Make sure the Teams membership matches security in the DMS.
- Add in a tab for DMS content, often enabled by a link to the URL of the matter. (see [here](#) for instructions on how this works with iManage)
- Create Teams off a template to automatically create channels and include Tasks, OneNote, Lists and a link to the associated DMS workspace.
- Make sure the system admin is the Owner of the Team. You run the risk of creating ownerless teams if you use a 'real' user as the Team owner and that user subsequently leaves the firm.

Teams provisioning is really no different to workspace management in the DMS. As Microsoft doesn't provide any tooling for this, you will need to either develop a custom tool or buy a dedicated provisioning tool such as [Prosperoware's CAM](#).

Where to Message - Private Chat or Team Channel?



Reply with IM – Outlook's best kept secret to reducing email traffic

Private chat is a very effective way of cutting down on email traffic, especially when you use this button in Outlook:

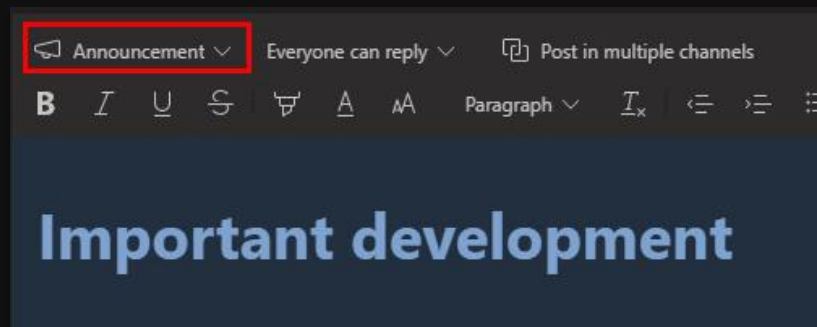
Beware though, private chat is retained in a hidden folder in each user mailbox and is fully discoverable. There's been more than one case where privilege has been broken by an off-piste private chat.

If the conversation is related to the client or matter, then it should be on the Team Channel if there is one. However, you can find Team chat gets 'lost' as it doesn't produce a notification by default. This is a good thing – notification overload can really harm Teams adoption and needs to be used mindfully. Use @mentions (either to the group name or target individuals) and/or announcements if you need the message to gain immediate attention.



Best Practice - Chat

Use Teams private chat for disposable, internal communication only, and encourage chatting on the Team if it's related to the matter. Promote the use of @mentions and announcements for messages requiring immediate attention, and customized channel notifications to ensure important messages don't get lost.



Working with Files

This is by far the toughest and most important problem to solve with Teams deployment. For those with a non-SharePoint DMS, the Achilles heel of Teams is that [you can't rename or turn off the files tab](#). Any documents shared in a Channel's chat are viewable in the Files tab and stored in a dedicated Team SharePoint site. As a result, it's very easy to end up in a mess, with duplicate files in the DMS and Teams, causing a version control nightmare.

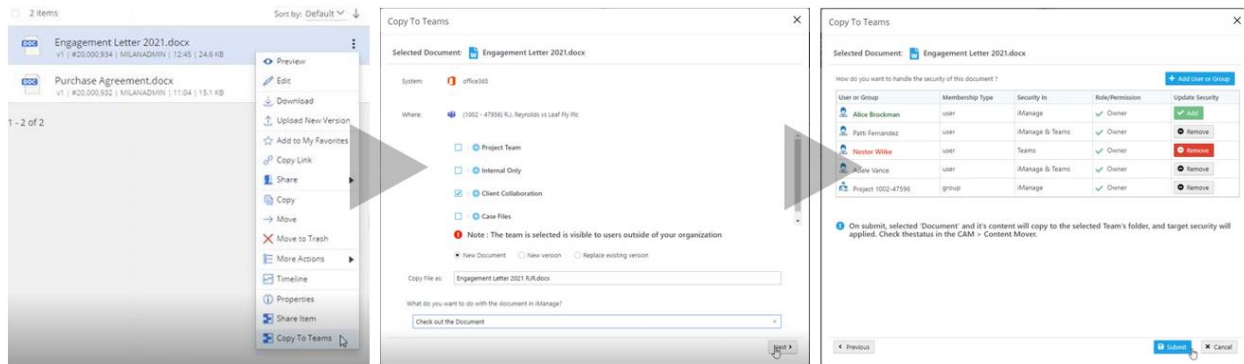
To work around this, some firms have removed group permissions to the underlying SharePoint folders. Whilst this does workaround the duplication issue, it can be a confusing user experience, as users will receive error messages. It's likely that Microsoft will provide the ability to cleanly disable OneDrive and SharePoint within Teams to remove these error messages. However, disabling M365 storage from Teams will also remove one of the most useful Teams features: co-authoring.

Having the file in a Team (or OneDrive for that matter) makes it very easy to work on files with colleagues in real time. With a single click, multiple team members can co-edit the document (real-time redlining), during a video call or chat all in the same window. Many find this a better experience than being in-person in a meeting room. To avoid multiple-versions of the truth, you need to ensure users know that documents should only be held in Teams temporarily, and you have a robust process in place to both sync the document back into the DMS and delete it from the Team.

Using Teams for co-authoring

- Make sure the document is stored in the DMS first
- Check out the document
- Upload the document into the Team for collaboration
- When complete, check-in the document to iManage as a new version, optionally replacing the Teams document with a DMS link, and delete the file from the channel.

Without additional tooling, this is very much a cumbersome workaround and can leave temporary copies of files on local drives. There are a number of products on the market that provide tooling to make this process a lot slicker, including Prosperoware's CAM product:



Copy to Teams, enabled by Prosperoware CAM

An emerging use case for Teams is as a collaboration space for groups containing DMS and non-DMS users to collaborate. Provided a smooth check-in/checkout process to/from the DMS, this functionality acts as a content 'bridge' between teams that would otherwise be done over email.

Team Expiration & Data Retention

No matter what requirements gathering you do or provisioning strategy you employ, you'll find that some Teams are used heavily and others not at all. Due to the upper limit of Teams in a tenant and keeping the UI usable, firms need a strategy to dispose of any Team that is not being used.

To enable disposition, create a dedicated retention and expiration strategy for Teams. The [Microsoft 365 Groups expiration policy](#) is a popular way to remove inactive Teams, but this will remove all the associated files and services with it.

Once a Team becomes inactive, any 'loose' supporting files not present in the DMS, chat, Tasks and OneNote data should be stored in the DMS prior to expiring Teams. It's not really practical to do this manually, so an automated process should be put in place to ensue this happens every time.

This is why it's so important to provision Teams and DMS workspaces with common metadata, and to use a provisioning tool to do it. That way, you can be sure that retention will push data back into the right spot, which is secured and governed correctly. It's very difficult, if not impossible to do this with a 'create what you want' provisioning strategy.

Teams as an Extranet

Traditional extranets suffer from adoption problems; from a client's perspective, managing multiple URLs and credentials can be burdensome, which often means reverting to email to distribute content, killing the extranet in the process.

Teams might become the solution we've been waiting for. It is (or soon will be) deployed on most desktops, meaning no need for training product familiarization. Whilst Teams may not have some functionality that vertically focused extranets have, effective collaboration on documents combined with live chat is often the primary use case.

However, there are a number of fairly significant hurdles to get over before Teams can be deployed as a firm standard for external collaboration.

Managing Guest Access

[Guest access](#) allows external users [nearly](#) the same rights as an internal Team member. By default, Guests can make calls, participate in chats, set up meetings and access shared files.

Allowing anyone to add a Guest user is not an option for most, if not all firms. This can put a huge burden on IT to manage guest access, and whitelist domains. ISO27001's requirements around Access Controls means firms need to regularly audit who has access, removing accounts that are no longer needed – that means the same policies for internal leavers to those external users who have Guest access. Microsoft's [entitlement management](#) helps with this, but if there are numerous external organizations, this can become very time consuming to manage.

Permissions and Private Channels

You'll likely want to provide access to some, but not all content in the Team. By default, Guest members have read/write access to all content on the channel. Applying more granular permissions on a file or folder level is far too cumbersome, and requires [diving into the underlying SharePoint site and setting permissions there](#).

[Private Channels](#) are often seen as the answer to this, but again they are difficult to manage and it's too easy to chat or share on the wrong channel, increasing the risk of data breach.



Best Practice #4

Create a dedicated Team for Client extranets for client collaboration and information sharing, 'publishing' content to it as you would a traditional extranet.

Org Switching

Switching between organizations is not a great user experience – notifications get lost, and it's too easy to forget to switch back and join subsequent calls as an external user.

Most often, org switching isn't even possible as many firms simply setup external consultants with a dedicated account that's not linked into their own AzureAD.

Thankfully, Microsoft has added the [ability to manage multiple accounts](#) into Teams onto their ever evolving roadmap which should make a significant difference to the user experience.

Industry Trends

Teams for external access in legal is still an emerging use case, that doesn't have a wealth of field experience to support a definitive best practice just yet. Law firms are increasingly being invited into their clients Teams, but access into law firms has only seen a limited take up amongst smaller firms.

We expect this to evolve significantly in 2021, so watch this space...

Conclusion

Whilst there's a lot to consider for a Teams rollout, it doesn't need months and months of planning or an army of resources to deliver. What's critical is that the deployment strategy is mindful of the potential pitfalls and has a robust plan to address them:

- Create a provisioning strategy that ensures confidentiality and client terms are applied to Channels. This can be done by a request workflow or a self-service provisioning tool that applies metadata and enforces matter security.
- Where possible, create Teams and Channels only for those use cases that benefit from them, identifying additional use cases, and socializing any early win success stories. Roll out to matter teams and practice areas in phases, prioritizing high priority, high value use cases.
- Implement a firm policy on the use of the Files within Teams, stating how and when files should reside in Teams. Use reports and tooling to enforce this policy.
- Expire and dispose of any Team that is no longer in use, retaining any content in the firm's system of record.
- Ensure that both the benefits of Teams and usage policies are communicated effectively, and the project has strong executive sponsorship.

For M365 accounts, Teams is at a place where it has overtaken email as the primary internal communication tool. For many users, it's the first thing they check in the morning, and consumes the most active screen time. There are some functionality gaps, but very soon email, like physical mail, will be a communication reserved only for formal communication and monitored less frequently as a result.

Let's just hope Teams stays free of spam....



About the Author

David Malkinson is a managing director at Morae. David helps deliver solutions to legal teams and professional services firms, using technology to help firms be more efficient, ensuring their data is more secure, better managed and understood.

With more than 20 years working with corporate, legal and professional service firms, David has designed and delivered hundreds of Document Management projects, and was instrumental in establishing the global consultancy arm of Phoenix Business Systems (acquired by Morae in 2019) from a small 4 person consultancy team to the 100+ team size it is today. During this time he gained insight into the different challenges and complex environments that companies must manage, and delivered complex and advanced solutions for the small-medium enterprise through to large conglomerates and global firms. These include a number of top 10 global law firms, financial institutions and professional services firms.

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