

Conversational Teams Management and Migration

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Learn about:

- Learn about what Microsoft's native tools are and are not capable of with Teams
- Discover how to bring your Teams deployment in line with the rest of your IT infrastructure

MINI
Edition

Conversational Teams Management and Migration (Mini Edition)

by Brien Posey

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Note from the Author

Hi, I'm Brien. In this book, I wanted to write about something that has been getting a lot of attention lately – the adoption of Microsoft Teams. The pandemic forced many of us to quickly adopt solutions such as Teams without taking the time to put a lot of thought into it. I want to use this book to talk about what the native tools are and are not capable of, and why you may need to take a step back and consider the risks posed by your current Teams deployment.

Oh, and one more thing, this book is not intended to be a vendor product pitch. My goal here is to take a vendor neutral approach to the subject at hand.

Brien M. Posey



The “Conversational” Method

We have two objectives when we create a “Conversational” book: First, to make sure it’s written in a conversational tone so that it’s fun and easy to read. Second, to make sure you, the reader, can immediately take what you read and include it into your own conversations (personal or business-focused) with confidence.

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We infuse humor into our books through both cartoons and light banter from the author. When you see one of these boxes it’s the author stepping outside the dialog to speak directly to you. It might be an anecdote; it might be a personal experience.



Within these boxes I can share just about anything on the subject at hand. Read ’em!

Time to Take Stock of the Rush to Microsoft Teams



*“You’re the new Teams admin. Read these...
you start tomorrow!”*

I think that most people can probably agree that 2020 was a year like no other. We’ve never seen a period of time like that before, and hopefully never will again. When you look past all of the chaos,

however, there were some pretty interesting things that happened. For one thing, the abrupt transition to everyone working from home forced IT to cut through all of the usual bureaucracy and extensive planning and deploy remote work solutions, such as Microsoft Teams, much more quickly than anyone would have thought possible.

Of course, there are both good and bad things that have come out of the rapid transition to work from home. One of the good things was that the rapid adoption of Teams and other work from home solutions proved to be the very definition of IT agility. It showed definitively that those of us in IT can take fast and decisive action when it is needed. This plays directly into another good thing that came out of the rapid adoption of Teams.

Because IT was able to quickly deploy Teams and other work from home solutions, it meant that a lot of businesses were able to stay in business, and that a lot of people were able to keep their jobs in spite of all the restrictions.

As great as these particular things might be, the rapid adoption of Teams certainly wasn't perfect.

Because Teams had to be rolled out so quickly, there was relatively little thought given to things like backup and recovery, security, and governance. Now things are starting to settle, at least from an IT perspective, organizations need to take a serious look at what needs to be done to bring their Teams deployment in line with the rest of their IT infrastructure.

Backup and Recovery for Teams

Because Microsoft Teams has quickly become a mission-critical application, organizations must consider how best to protect Teams data. To see why this is so important, imagine that one of the teams that you depend on is deleted.

There are any number of reasons why this might happen. For example, your organization could be hit by a Ransomware attack, or be breached by a hacker, or some other types of malware. It's also possible that a disgruntled employee could delete the team in an effort to harm the organization.

Keep in mind though, that a team can be accidentally deleted even in the absence of

malicious activity. For example, a user could accidentally delete the Microsoft 365 group that is associated with the team. It's also possible that an automated policy may identify the group as being inactive, and therefore expire the group. I have also seen poorly written cleanup scripts that have unintentionally deleted live data.

These are just a few of the things that could potentially result in a team being deleted. The question is, what can you do about it?

Microsoft is quick to point out that when a team is deleted, whether accidentally or as a result of malicious activity, the team is only soft deleted. This is loosely equivalent to what happens when you delete a file in Windows. The file isn't actually gone. It gets placed into the Windows Recycle Bin. The same sort of thing happens with a deleted team. Once deleted, the team stays in a soft deleted state for 30 days, and during that time you can easily recover both the team and its connected resources.

As nice as that sounds, however, the recycle bin was never intended to be a backup replacement. The recycle bin is a protective mechanism that can help

you to recover from an errant mouse click, but should never be relied upon to take the place of a proper backup.

So why do you need a backup if you can just recover a deleted team from the recycle bin? Well, there are several things to think about. For starters, when a team is deleted you only have 30 days to notice that the team is missing and to recover it. After that, it's gone for good.

Keep in mind that there is no guarantee that the team will remain recoverable for the full 30 days. An administrator (or malware running under administrative permissions) can manually purge a soft deleted team, effectively removing it forever.

Another thing to think about is that the recycle bin only allows you to recover a team in the state in which it existed at the time that it was deleted. There isn't a way of rolling back unwanted changes within the team. For that you need a third-party recovery solution.

Finally, if you delete a team and then later decide that you need access to the team's data, you will

have to recover the team. Only a third-party recovery solution will let you restore team data without actually restoring the team itself.

With all of that said, you may be wondering what it is that you actually lose if a team is permanently deleted. Some team items are lost forever when a team is deleted. These include things like channel chats, guest user messages, custom tabs, applications, personal notifications, and several other content and configuration related items.



A custom tab is a Teams aware Web page that gets embedded into Microsoft Teams. They can be added to channels or groups. Microsoft also makes it possible to integrate certain apps with Microsoft Teams. For example, adding the Survey Monkey app to a channel makes it possible to take a survey within Teams.

Other items such as shared files, calendars, meeting records, notes, and voicemail messages aren't actually deleted, but their associations are broken. This means that those resources are left orphaned, and it can be extremely difficult to track them down and associate them with a new team.

The bottom line is that Microsoft Teams data is susceptible to loss. You need to backup Teams, just like you would backup any other application.

Teams Security and Governance

Another important thing that you need to be thinking about with regard to your Microsoft Teams deployment is security and governance. Even if an organization is not subject to regulatory requirements, almost every organization has its own internal governance standards. At the most basic level, an organization needs to be able to track its infrastructure components as a way of making sure that their configuration does not deviate from a known good state.

Organizations must also have a way of performing security audits and addressing any vulnerabilities that are discovered. And, of course, a big part of maintaining governance in a Teams environment is having a secure and uniform process in place for provisioning new groups, teams, and SharePoint sites.

Microsoft Teams governance is a complex topic, and in all honesty I could probably do an entire book on this topic alone. Since this is a mini book, I don't want to get too deep in the weeds. Even so, I do want to point out a few of the key things that you need to be on the lookout for with regard to data governance in your Teams environment.

Analytics

One of the most important things to look for is best practices analytics. You need the ability to continuously monitor your Teams environment, especially with regard to its configuration. In doing so, there are two main things that you need to be on the lookout for:

- Watch for unauthorized configuration changes, as such changes could indicate a security breach (or an errant IT operation, which is equally important to know about).
- Watch for deviations from Microsoft's stated best practices.



Even if your organization is not in the habit of making changes to your Teams configuration, it is still important to continuously compare your Teams deployment against Microsoft's best practices.

Microsoft sometimes makes changes to its stated best practices, so a Teams environment that is fully compliant today might not necessarily be compliant tomorrow.

The only native tool for monitoring these types of changes is the audit logs. However, manually searching through the audit logs can be an extremely tedious, time-consuming, and error-prone process. While it is possible to derive the state of things by searching the audit logs, doing so tends to be completely impractical. Most organizations find that they need to use a third-party tool to make sense of the logs.

Monitoring

As important as it may be to be able to monitor your Teams environment for compliance or best practices violations, it is just as important to be able to remediate any issues that you happen to discover. While manual remediation is certainly an option, I'm a big believer in having choices. Personally, I like the idea of having a tool that will allow me to either make an *ad hoc* change on the fly or take automated corrective action against best practices deviations that are discovered.

Provisioning

One more thing that you should be looking at with regard to Teams governance is provisioning. In other words, you need to look at what processes exist around the creation of new teams.

Obviously, creating a team is a simple process. However, things can quickly get messy if teams are not created in a uniform manner. You need some sort of rules-based provisioning mechanism that ensures that new teams are created according to any existing best practices.



When it comes to managing Teams, it's important to avoid overburdening the IT department. Ideally, authorized users should be able to create and manage their own teams through a self-service portal, subject to the policies and limitations that the IT department has put into place.

As you establish governance guidelines for Teams, it's important to also consider Teams lifecycle management. Without a plan for retiring unwanted teams and channels, sprawl can begin to occur. Sprawl tends to increase costs, while also making Teams more difficult to manage.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Even though it might seem like a weird thing to be talking about in this book, IT pros should be thinking about how future mergers and acquisitions might impact their Microsoft Teams deployments.

The reason why I say this is simple. The lockdowns were massively disruptive to the global economy, and while certain sectors have started to recover, some businesses have sustained irreparable damage. As such, there are probably going to be a large number of organizations merging with one another in an effort to survive. Larger organizations may also end up purchasing former competitors as a way of expanding market share.

While I don't have a crystal ball, my prediction is that mergers and acquisitions are going to become commonplace over the next year. That being the case, IT pros should already be thinking about the impact that a merger or an acquisition will have on their Teams infrastructure and on all of their Office 365 tenants. After all, Microsoft doesn't really have any good native tools for helping organizations to merge Active Directory environments, let alone Teams workloads. The only real option is to adopt a third-party tool.

The Big Takeaways

There are several core capabilities that organizations need to be looking for with regard to their Teams deployments. First, organizations need the ability to establish some rules and policies for the creation of teams, and for the removal of existing teams. Along the same lines, organizations must also be able to enforce access and configuration best practices, and to detect and remediate any changes that are made to the Teams environment.

Ideally, policies that are put into place should prevent teams from being accidentally or maliciously deleted. However, if a team is deleted the organization needs a way of recovering the deleted team.

One last thing that organizations need to consider with regard to their Teams environment is how they will migrate teams should the need arise. Historically, this has been extremely difficult to do, but there are third-party tools that will allow organizations to migrate teams with relative ease.

With organizations having to rapidly adapt to working from home, business-saving remote solutions like Microsoft Teams have been rolled out quite suddenly. However, these deployments often gave little thought to backup and recovery, security, or governance. This book will help you take back control of your IT environment in this new arena.



About Brien Posey

Brien Posey is a 19-time Microsoft MVP, a published author and conference speaker with 20+ years of IT experience, and a Commercial Scientist Astronaut candidate.



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