

October 2021

# Acceleration Economy Journal

cloud enabled. ai empowered. human optimized.

Special  
Community  
Summit North  
America Edition

 **COMMUNITY  
SUMMIT**

## The Customer Centric Reimagination of Microsoft

Microsoft's Amazing  
Journey: An MVP's Perspective

How Business Apps from Microsoft  
Serve the Acceleration Economy

Gender Inclusion is Still Fragmented:  
An Acceleration Economy Path to Parity

At Microsoft, Customer-Centric Vision  
as Important as Superb Technology

Three Microsoft Products That Make Digital  
Transformation Possible in the Mid-Market

# Oct 2021

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Intro column

# Microsoft's Amazing Journey: An MVP's Perspective



**Aaron Back**

Acceleration Economy Analyst Network

#### AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Cyber Security

AI/ML

Automation



## What are we addressing in this edition?

For this edition of the Acceleration Economy Journal, we will be digging more into Microsoft's business applications and its customer-centric focus. However, we will also be addressing the most important aspect of technology: the people.

With the intense push of artificial intelligence, the technology would be nothing without the people that make it happen. Microsoft has been listening to people to redefine its applica-

tions focus and its internal employee focus. This has shaped much of the technology being developed today and on the horizon.

Further, technology **REQUIRES** diversity of people, thoughts, and ideas, and inclusion of all types of people. Without this, technology would not represent all of our humanness - our aspirations, our goals, our accomplishments, our dreams, our creativity - all of which make us human.

So, I leave you with these challenges:

If you haven't looked at Microsoft in a while, say the last decade, then

look again. They are truly pushing the boundaries and are really changing the business applications space.

Be open to ALL types of people, internally and externally. If you aren't, you will be unable to #competefast. Instead, you will just concede faster.





## Phase 1: PCs and Windows

**“Empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.” This mission statement set the tone for CEO Satya Nadella’s leadership style - and ushered in a new era for Microsoft.**

But, let’s take a step back a moment. Many will recall their first edition of Microsoft Windows with fondness (or loathing - you know who you are). Although Windows was first introduced in the 1980s, the 1990s saw a boom in the home PC and the explosion of the internet (I still remember modem sounds).

This first phase of Microsoft’s evolution was focused on getting PCs in every home and every business. And, to accompany this effort, Microsoft released Microsoft Office 1989 with the familiar Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Further, this was when the internet was just starting to get accepted and fax machines still ruled many offices.

**“By the late 90s, many people were using Microsoft Office at work, but there was more needed to streamline how people worked.”**





## Phase 2: Business Solutions and Microsoft Dynamics

Business applications have evolved to a point where we sometimes forget their origins because of the massive shift in how we work today compared to decades prior.

In the late 80s and early 90s, three ERP solutions were being created and rolled out to companies:

- Great Plains Software (developed in Fargo)
- Solomon Software (created in Ohio)
- Navision (originating in Copenhagen)

In the late 90s, Axapta was rolled out to do more than just finance by including inventory and production management.

Each of these ERP solutions took its own approach in how things were set up and used, and which computers they would work on.

But, in 2001 things changed. Microsoft realized that computers were everywhere throughout the business world. People and work processes changed, and Microsoft Business Solutions was created to address this.

To kick this off, and in quick succession:

- Microsoft acquired Navision and Axapta in 2002
- iCommunicate in 2003 (to be later named Microsoft Customer Relationship Management)
- Great Plains in 2004

In the early 2000s, Microsoft Business Solutions quickly got a reboot in 2006 with the launch of Microsoft Dyna-

mics. Each of the acquired products was renamed as well to Dynamics AX, Dynamics NAV, Dynamics GP, Dynamics SL, and Dynamics CRM.

The era of strategic business applications for Microsoft working alongside Microsoft Office was the new focus. However, they still struggled with how to incorporate the internet into these applications as on-premise solutions were the norm.

## Phase 3: The Cloud

For many, Microsoft always seemed to be trying to catch up to what others had already put in place. In the early 2000s, Amazon started creating Amazon Web Services (or AWS) based on a surprising growth in usage from a hungry developer community. Among the other surprises was Microsoft using AWS EC2 as the first enterprise customer.

Around the same time, Microsoft was waking up to the fact that fully internet-based solutions were needed. But, they had to catch up with the fast take-off of AWS.

Originally code-named “Red Dog”, Microsoft Azure was made generally available in February 2010 as an alternative to AWS EC2 and Google App Engine. This initial offering was introduced as a “Platform as a Service” (PaaS) solution.

However, this early effort floundered compared to AWS and caused Microsoft to rethink its cloud approach. So, Scott Guthrie, along with Mark Russinovich, set out to rebuild Azure from the ground up - and shift gears from a PaaS to IaaS (Infrastructure as a Service).

To show their continued commitment to the cloud and broader developer communities, Microsoft partnered with Red Hat, Oracle, SUSE, and Canonical in 2014 to make Azure the best place to run Linux.

But, let's but through all the app and technical jargon to ask this: **How has the cloud impacted Microsoft's customers, personal and business users alike?**





## Phase 4: Customer-Centric Product Development

Today, the customer has the strongest voice. Period. That voice is heard through reviews, videos, comments, blogs, and purchasing decisions - all of which impact a company's bottom line.

Though Microsoft stumbled early on to understand customer needs, the mission statement from current CEO Satya Nadella echoed throughout the company. He helped Microsoft find its footing which has led to tremendous company growth.

Why? Can one person make a huge difference like what we have witnessed? It would seem so. But, I'm of the mind that Satya put Microsoft into not only a "cool" category but a REAL player in the cloud game. And, to be quite frank, Microsoft had long played bullish with "what we say goes". The Steve Ballmer era reflected this with a few exceptions. He had built quite a few trenches and had a staunch "Microsoft only" mindset.

As a result, the market reacted. Amazon and Apple were eating Microsoft's lunch - and something needed to change. The customer voices spoke loudly for a different Microsoft and a strong focus based on their feedback.

A slogan that Satya touted when he first became CEO was "mobile first, cloud first". This slogan really defined the direction for Microsoft. It forced Microsoft to take a hard look at its goals and to shift its priorities regarding its business applications. And, at the same time, address shifting customer expectations from laptops to mobile, from big unwieldy applications to easy-to-use apps.



- First, they had to reimagine their Office Suite to tightly integrate with its Dynamics 365 Business Applications.
- Second, they repositioned Microsoft Azure and broadened its capabilities to address Big Data, IoT, and Analytics.
- Third, they extended Azure and IoT further to what they call “The Intelligent Edge”.

## The Big Shifts

A large company like Microsoft, with thousands of global customers and billions in revenue at stake, can't just throw out something on a whim. They need to either fold it into something else, replace it before killing it, or update what is currently available.

With this in mind, Microsoft took some bold steps over the last decade to climb its way to a market cap of over \$2 trillion dollars and to become a real contender against Google, Apple, Amazon, and more. The steps surfaced in three key areas:

### Cloud:

- Microsoft Azure revenue grew 50% year-over-year in fiscal Q2, 2021, contributing to a 26% increase in Server products and cloud services revenue.
- Commercial cloud gross margins increased to 71% in the latest quarter, up from 67% a year earlier.
- This year, Microsoft announced

its industry cloud options for Financial Services, Manufacturing, and Nonprofit.

### Opensource:

- Back in 2001, former CEO Steve Ballmer had said Linux was “cancer that attaches itself in an intellectual property sense to everything it touches”.
- To fulfill its promise to adopt opensource as part of its strategy, Microsoft acquired Xamarin, a leading platform provider for mobile app development, in 2016. And, in 2018, they acquired GitHub, a popular code-repository service used by many developers and large companies, for \$7.5 billion.



- Microsoft’s current opensource position is: “Open Source enables Microsoft products and services to bring choice, technology, and community to our customers.”

### Artificial Intelligence:

- 2016 saw Microsoft truly invest in AI with the creation of

its Microsoft AI and Research Group led by Henry Shum.

- Just this year, Microsoft invested \$19.6 billion in health care AI with its acquisition intent of Nuance Communications.
- Microsoft’s “AI for Good” has set a goal of providing technology and resources to empower organizations working to solve

global challenges to the environment, humanitarian issues, accessibility, health, and cultural heritage.





# The Final Frontier is not Space its Equality



**Janet Shijns**  
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**AREAS OF EXPERTISE**  
Partners Ecosystem  
Women in Tech



Where did the Women in Technology go? From the women that were coding, managing technology for their businesses as CIO's, or working through the technology channel in the partners ecosystem; where are they? That's a question for the ages and one we all need to be worried about and acting upon. After decades of pushing to have talented women consider a career in the technology category, we had been on the right track in 2017-2019 with more women joining the

industry than in any previous two-year stretch. Make no mistake about it, those women were stressed by their career choice. Look at the facts from our JS Group study pre-pandemic:

- 47% of women in our 2019 survey said "their job stress was rising", while 67% said they felt that the opportunity for promotion for women was not the same as it was for their male counterparts,

- In technology, men received higher pay than women 59% of the time for the same job1 creating an economic imbalance
- In technology, the penetration of women in the C-Suite continued to falter making little progress
- And to add insult to injury, 60% of managers who are men now say they are uncomfortable participating in common job-related activities with wo-





men, such as mentoring, working alone together, or socializing together<sup>2</sup>

Then Covid-19 hit, and women, already struggling with the imbalance in their career in the technology market, got hit the hardest by this crisis. Today, 1 in 4 women are considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce entirely due to burnout according to the Women in the Workplace study McKinsey and Co and LeanIn.org March 2021 report<sup>3</sup> Burned-out, paid less, lacking male mentors, and challenged with child and elder care in a pandemic, women have quite frankly reached a point of exhaustion that leaves them with little choice but to downgrade or eliminate

their career. That decision creates severe impacts for the entire economy, not just the technology industry and partners ecosystem channel.

Prior to the pandemic the labor force was growing – but now 2.3 million fewer women are working than should have been due to the pandemic disruption. In fact, for every 10 percent increase in women working, economists see a 5 percent increase in wages for all workers according to a recent University of Akron study<sup>4</sup>. Enabling women to stay working and return to work should be a top priority for everyone if we truly want to compete and thrive in the global Acceleration Economy.

These are my seven ideas to inspire

change through the technology industry and partners ecosystem as a female leader in the technology category:

### 1. Accommodate Women

- a. build more flexibility in their job roles to meet individual issues
- b. Ban video conferences and meetings outside work hours
- c. Ban unnecessary travel

### 2. Stop the “Work Break” Penalty

- a. When women take a break to have children or care for a family member, they experience up to a 30% pay cut
- b. Rating jobs with a set salary and then not varying from this salary due to “years wor-

ked” could be an effective way to stop the inequity

### 3. Outlaw asking for previous salary

- a. Extending the salary history ban5 to all states vs the current 21 states that ban this practice today would help but stop the practice
- b. You can make a different today

### 4. Training and Immersion

- a. Create programs during work hours that help to close experience gaps
- b. Build hands on leadership for female candidates
- c. Don't assume everything can be learned “on the job”

### 5. Change Communications

- a. Women think, act and feel differently than men
- b. That doesn't make them wrong it just makes them different
- b. Celebrate the difference and you will see bottom-line improvements

### 6. Train Male Leaders

- a. To understand and help with some of the most difficult ‘on the job’ issues facing women
- b. Empower them with tools and programs to help

### 7. Child and elderly care

- a. Offer support or flexibility in job hours
- b. Lessen the stress and burden

on women and families

As women we cannot solve these issues alone, we are tired, and we need the support of everyone in the technology industry to support change. In fact, more than ever before we need men to get engaged in the solutioning for these problems. There are too many “for women by women groups” that try to help with these issues; we need active participation by men to help find the right path forward. After all, if a few committed billionaire men can launch a space rocket and visit Mars they can figure out anything, so perhaps they could study this issue and set out for a new frontier – one that benefits women and the Acceleration Economy – equality.



Tech From the Top Down

# How Business Apps from Microsoft Serve the Acceleration Economy

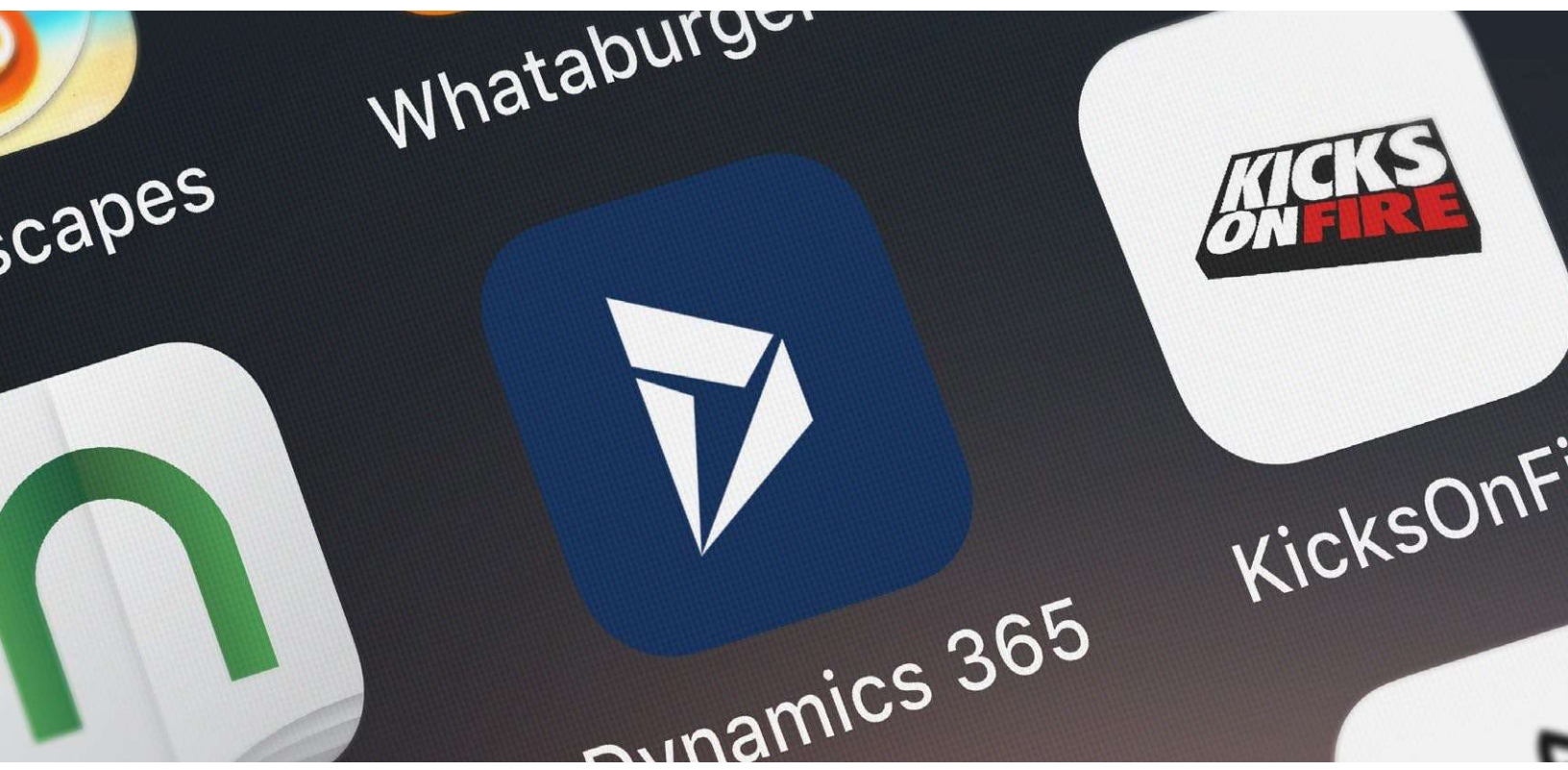


**Kieron Allen**

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AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Business App





Since its inception, Microsoft has been trailblazing customer solutions. The company has adapted to varying economic, technological, and social developments with innovative products and services each decade.

Today, with cloud technology powering the acceleration economy, Microsoft is once more providing users with the cutting-edge tools they need to compete.

In this article, we'll be focussing on Microsoft's defining business apps and how they play a critical role in the cloud today. The best way to do this is to outline the core areas of cloud services. We've chosen to cover cloud security, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), data analysis, cloud storage, and cloud-based communication.

## Cloud security

One of the core concerns for developing an organization in a cloud environment is security. Microsoft provides a market-leading solution to cloud security, its Cloud App Security solution.

Microsoft Cloud App Security monitors, identifies, and obliterates threats to your cloud services. The technology enables secure access, from anywhere, to a company's business-critical cloud apps, providing an extra layer of security, and ultimately, peace of mind. To date, the platform is capable of protecting over 17,500 cloud applications.

## Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Microsoft Dynamics 365 is one of the most popular CRM tools available. The platform operates on a modular basis, and users can add components to build the perfect CRM environment for their needs and objectives.

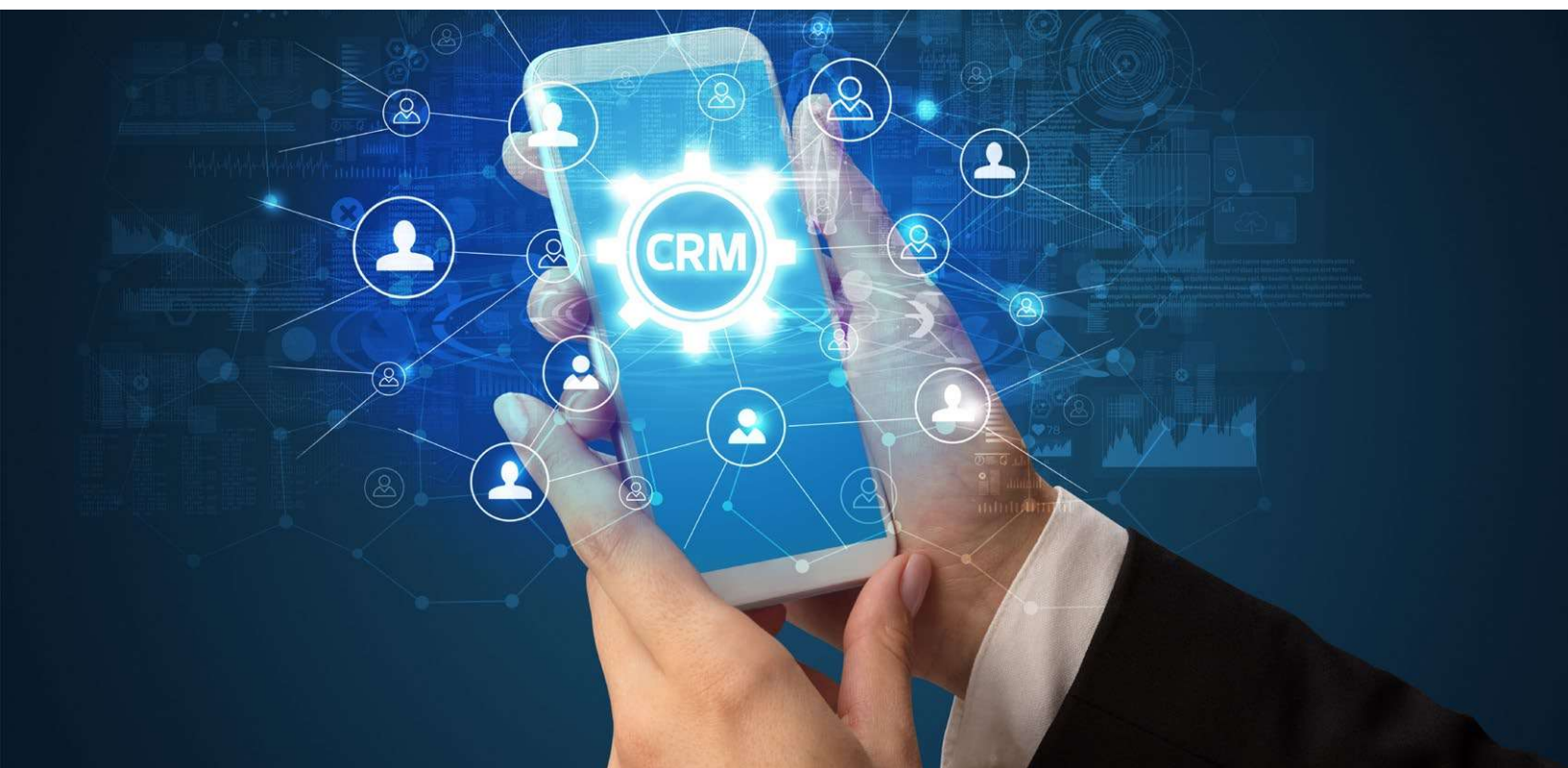
Dynamic 365's pre-built modules cover multiple areas that, collectively, boost customer relationships and aid critical business services. These crucial areas include sales and marketing, customer services, commerce, finance, field services, and more.

Beyond this, Dynamics 365 can be tailored to specific use cases through the Microsoft Azure cloud environment and integrates natively with many Microsoft apps, such as the Microsoft 365 suite.

## Data analysis

Built on Microsoft Azure, Microsoft's game-changing cloud landscape, PowerBI is a cloud-based data analytics tool. The app enables business intelligence activities through the exploration, visualization, collection, and sharing of data assets.

Data is fuelling the acceleration eco-



nomy, and a cloud-based, scalable solution to data analytics is critical. For thousands of industry-leading organizations and countless smaller companies, PowerBI is that solution. Easy-to-operate and familiar to Excel users, PowerBI is a brilliant introduction to data analysis.

### Cloud storage

Storage is a defining characteristic of the cloud. Countless cloud-based data storage platforms follow the same prescription of affordable and scalable storage solutions, and OneDrive is a key player.

Microsoft 365 users will be familiar with OneDrive as a means of personal data storage. However, this capable app is ideally suited for enterprise use too. Of course, as an integrated app, it communicates effortlessly with the rest of the Microsoft 365 Office suite as well.

## Cloud Based Communications

Another market-leading Microsoft business app is Teams. Microsoft's standout productivity and cloud-communication tool is ultimately the essential Microsoft app for remote workers. With Teams, Microsoft covers many, but not all, of the challenges faced by users adapting to WFA culture.

Microsoft is continually updating Teams with new features to meet the demands of fully remote and hybrid environments, but as of October 2021, the most important components are as follows.

Perhaps the most critical element of the Teams platform is its communication tools. Teams enable secure communication over the cloud via voice, video, and chat facilities.

However, this communication facility

isn't limited to SMEs. Using Teams, it's possible to hold virtual conferences with up to 10,000 participants.

While virtual communication channels aid collaboration amongst dispersed teams, other aspects of Teams make collaboration even more effective. As well as providing facilities to share images, links, videos, and other files, the Teams app integrates with Microsoft 365.

This function enables users to collaborate directly and in real-time on critical Office apps such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Configuration: As a fully customizable platform, business leaders can configure Teams to suit their organization. So, companies can avoid rolling out a suite of tools and functions that employees won't use and will ultimately hinder, not help, the WFA adjustment process.







## What Next for Microsoft's WFA Business Apps?

Although Microsoft is empowering remote and hybrid workers to adapt to WFA culture, its approach has some glaring gaps. Microsoft doesn't cater as well to direct consumers as some of its competitors in that its focus is on wider teams and companies.

For example, its primary WFA business app—Teams—focuses on the collaborative element of remote work and not the direct needs of employees. Although this approach is beneficial to companies in the acceleration economy, Microsoft might need to

diversify its offerings to match shifting attitudes to work. Employees are becoming increasingly independent from the office, and they need business apps to fit their uniqueness.

For example, time tracking and productivity apps, like Clockify and RescueTime, are wholly focused on the individual and contribute to making the working day more focused and productive. From a security perspective, users can access apps like LastPass and BitWarden to manage personal and business credentials. In a WFA world, employees are becoming increasingly empowered and demand business apps that cater to their individual needs and requirements.

Furthermore, although Microsoft's WFA applicable apps cater very well for users already working with Microsoft products, they lack the variety of third-party integrations some of other independent apps boast. Perhaps Microsoft's best course of action would be to develop a suite of personal apps that constitute a WFA toolkit and integrate with many of the existing solutions already available. The WFA revolution could teach us that bigger is not necessarily better, and a fleet of precise, highly-focused apps could serve the remote working community more effectively.



Feature 1

# Gender Inclusion is Still Fragmented: An Acceleration Economy Path to Parity



**Gayle Keller**

Guest Acceleration Economy Analyst

AREAS OF EXPERTISE  
Technology



It's hard to turn on the news or read a business journal or magazine article on social media and not hear the terms and phrases such as woke, underrepresented, diversity, and gender inclusion being bandied about. In today's global climate, these themes, specifically gender inclusion, are top of mind for many leaders. But what does gen-

der inclusion really mean? How do we achieve it in the corporate arena? What are the desired, collaborative outcomes? And how do we successfully tackle gender inclusion if the rungs on the corporate ladder are still built for men?

We cannot have diversity if we don't

have inclusion; that's what one of my podcast guests, Melyssa Barrett, Vice President at Visa, Inc., mentioned during a recent conversation on Theodora Speaks™ (a podcast series where women talk about their professional reinvention and risk taking). Melyssa eloquently said, "We spend too much time trying to figure out what some-



body is or what ethnicity they are, but we don't engage in order to create the conversation and the dialogue to actually get to know someone...I am not just a woman. I am not just black. I'm not just Hispanic. I am all of that." Instead of piling on to the fact that gender inclusion is an issue, my focus is on finding tailored solutions to help universities, companies, and men utilize gender inclusion to their benefit. I also coach women to take calculated risks to reinvent themselves at their current employer or in a new venture.

At its core, gender inclusion is about attracting, retaining, and developing women of all races, colors, and ethnicities. It's about uplifting and celebrating women while inviting men along on our journey to be our allies side-by-side until the topic of gender gaps is no longer relevant. We've come a long way since the 1950's where wo-

men's roles in society were stereotyped as secretaries, household bakers or stay-at-home mothers, but in WiSTEM (Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) industries there is still room for executional improvement. To be fair, STEM companies and universities are offering women higher pay, and many have Board Member, Management and/or percentage of employee targets, but the execution and processes to achieve gender inclusion are lacking and, in some cases, build hostility on multiple fronts. Instead of rushing to solve gender inclusion by hiring a woman for a role only because she is a woman or promoting a woman just to fill a predetermined quota, we need to shift our thinking away from panicked decision-making and political correctness and toward proper analysis and sustainable solutions.

In the 2018-2019 school year women

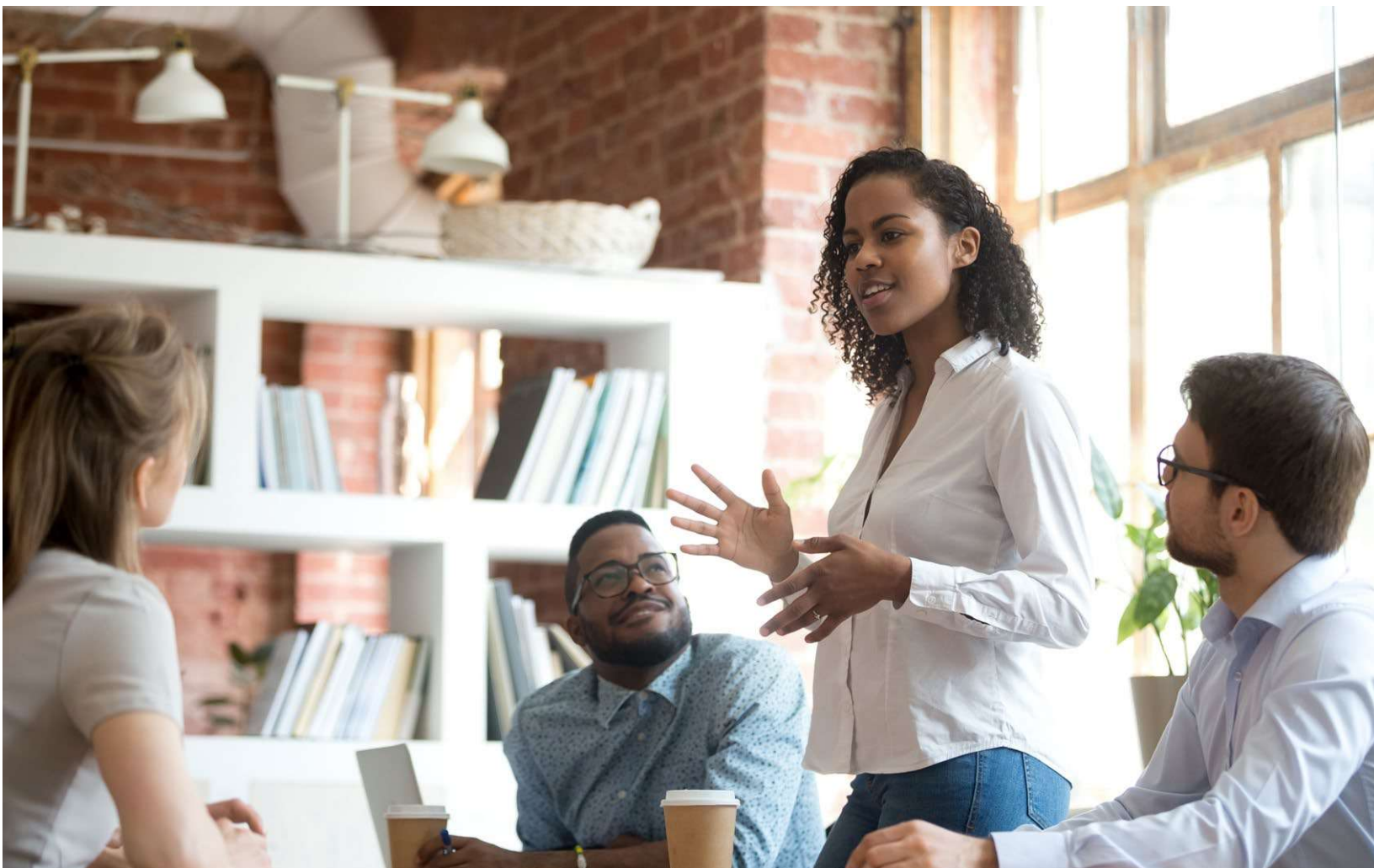
accounted for about 33% of STEM college graduates. What is interesting is that this is a close correlation to the 28% of WiSTEM; the gender gaps are particularly high in some of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs of the future, like computer science and engineering.<sup>1</sup> Attracting and encouraging girls with a passion for STEM careers begins at a young age and needs to be continuously nurtured from high school through college. Women overlook, avoid or switch away from STEM programs because they often feel like a minority in the classroom, face sexism, lack role models, and lack support. For example, if you read Shannon Wilkinson's book (CEO at Teg Cyber and a past guest on my *Theodora Speaks* podcast) *Ripping Off the Hoodie: Encouraging the Next Generation of STEM Girls*, she states "...while 53% of young women between 16-20 years old are interested in STEM, 78% of them are discoura-

ged by gender bias.<sup>2</sup> In a 2018 study published in the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, it was found that 60.9% of the undergraduate females surveyed had experienced gender bias...that resulted in a decrease of their motivation and their desire to pursue STEM professionally.”<sup>3</sup> It will be challenging for companies to hit a 50/50 male to female workforce ratio goal when the STEM educated talent pool of women is a third that of men. So how can we close the educational gap? Solutions may include expanding upon current STEM educational programs by implementing female only foundational programs, creating tailored corporate internship programs, building structured female mentorship programs,

establishing WiSTEM focused college scholarships, and structuring marketing and advertising campaigns to ensure awareness.

In the near-term, companies are focused on retention. We are amidst ‘The Great Resignation’ where women (and men) are leaving companies in droves for numerous reasons. According to INC., a recent Microsoft survey of 30,000 workers showed alarming results, one of which revealed that 41% have considered quitting.<sup>4</sup> Turnover costs are expensive, impact productivity and profitability, and when significant in percentage or numbers make for bad PR. Furthermore, Built In “reported that 57% of women have

felt burned out from the mandatory work-from-home caused by the pandemic. This burnout, from struggling to balance being both a working professional and a functioning parent, is leading to a mass exodus of women from the workforce. In 2020 alone, 1.2 million parents exited the workforce with a staggering three-quarters of those people being women. A large portion of those who have stayed in the workforce report that being behind screens has caused a regression of gender parity that was pacing in the right direction pre-pandemic... hitting working mothers in tech especially hard.”





Companies need to ask themselves: What kind of continuous learning is offered to employees, especially women, that will help them grow both their confidence and skill set, so they climb the ranks vs. leave a company altogether? What kind of mentorship and coaching programs are available to qualified female employees that are underwritten by the company? What type of leave of absences are offered from caregiving to wellness where a woman will not feel like a target is placed on her back when she takes advantage of those benefits? What flexibility is offered for women to get their tasks done successfully on their own terms? How do we provide options to account for women's cycles? Do the current initiatives and programs help minimize female turnover or do they add to the stress level as work piles up? I was fortunate to take advantage of a generous (multi-month) maternity leave program when I had both of my children. It was wonderful to spend this time with my family, but the stress of returning after leave was extremely high as I knew that my work was not covered, piled up and was waiting for me upon my return. Plus, I was continuously asked if I would return to work after my maternity leaves which created unwanted stress and anxiety. Upon my returns, instead of gradual ramp-ups, I was thrust into hyperdrive which could easily have led to burnout.

Some of my best corporate clients are

the ones who I work intimately with to co-create programs that foster inclusive behavior, minimize stress, and that benefit both the company and its employees. The March 2021 Built In article, focused on the lack of women in technology and that we still have a long ways to go with respect to closing the gender gap, emphasized survey results that concluded "43% of Americans believe women create a safer, more respectful work environment than men...[and that] gender diversity breeds higher quality products, companies, and sectors. Different backgrounds, experiences and ideas ultimately help make any business or industry stronger."<sup>5</sup> To that point, women also bring fresh perspectives and empathy to the table which are known to increase productivity within organizations. Women are inspired by seeing other women in roles they aspire to fill; this visualization alone will, in turn, attract more women to the industry.

As mentioned earlier, working with men is another key ingredient. Compared to women, men are usually better at taking calculated risks in their careers and embrace the "fake it until you make it" mentality where women think they need to have achieved all necessary skills prior to applying for a new role. Not true. If you have some of the desired skills and are a qualified candidate to apply, you should apply for the position as you will continue to sharpen your skills while in the role.

Men need to respect a woman's point-of-view and let us speak for ourselves. Alternatively, silencing us or not listening or considering our solution as the chosen one for the task at hand is not practicing inclusion -- and what's worse is when men take credit for coming up with a solution that a woman at the table may have previously suggested. This happens all too frequently. Also, men need to be more empathic and have more grace in the workplace and understand that a working mom, for example, may require more flexibility with respect to getting her job done well and providing her with the autonomy to do so without bias and/or judgement. One recommendation for men is to hire a business coach on how to interact with women in the workplace. Some of my male clientele reach out to me because they are tasked with hiring more women on their team but do not understand how to professionally engage women because they simply cannot relate to them. What holds WiSTEM back? According to Tech Jury, reasons include

**"...gender bias and derogatory behavior in the workplace, unequal growth opportunities with male coworkers to [earning a] lesser wage for the same position."**



fashion when it comes to diversifying their teams, while keeping both the goals of their organization and individual career goals top of mind.

And women, this tip is for you. If we want to see gender inclusion in our lifetime, women need to include other qualified women on their journey of climbing the ranks. Given there are only so many seats at the table, women need to stop bullying and cannibalizing each other as they excel in the workplace. Far too often, women feel threatened by other women and therefore do not help nurture top talent as they build their teams. Instead, I invest my time coaching women to be focused on building out their personal portfolios like an artist while also harnessing the values they seek from other women and invite them to be on their professional team. One of the women

I work with switched roles within her organization and is going through a reinvention in her career coming from an entry-level position to a managerial role. I helped her harness her experience to create a portfolio that highlights her best work/experience that proves she is the right candidate for the position. Another suggestion is for women to mentor other qualified women and help them climb the ranks and shake the generational tone of isolation is best – “figure it out alone and then we will see if you have what it takes to succeed?” The quit rate for WiSTEM is ~53%.

Let’s foster a welcoming environment that is inclusive to our fellow women in the ranks. Hiring a professional coach can be quite powerful. I have personally invested in business coaches throughout my career and it’s

money well spent. Just like a diploma, the value gained through coaching is an investment in yourself and something that no one can take away from you. I am extremely passionate about helping women take more risks in their professional careers. I left a Fortune 100 technology company to tackle gender inclusion unflinchingly with inclusive gender-neutral methods that benefit companies, universities, and female (and male!) employees alike from those just entering the workforce to those ready for a pivot later in their careers. With well thought out approaches and processes, I believe it’s not only possible but mandatory that we address these challenges head-on so that ultimately there’s not even a need to talk about them because we will have successfully bridged the gap.

Feature 2

# At Microsoft, Customer-Centric Vision as Important as Superb Technology



**Bob Evans**

Acceleration Economy Analyst Network

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Digital Business  
Cloud



There's an old bromide about how "if all you've got is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail."

For many years—or even decades—the major players in the tech industry attempted to spin various versions of that vision to business customers who knew that they needed stronger IT capabilities but didn't really know where or how to start.

Some said that the database will cure all your earthly ills; others promised

that the mainframe was, is, and always will be what big companies need; others recommended that wall-to-wall credit-card purchases of cloud infrastructure would lead to nirvana; still others said on the first day, the Good Lord created ERP and then spent the rest of the week creating people who would buy it and maintain it; and another preached that if only every big corporation had been smart enough to deploy cloud technology even decades before cloud technology was invented, the world of IT would be much sim-

pler.

Meanwhile, those business customers remained largely on the sidelines because, while they didn't have all the answers, they sure as heck knew that while buying more of the specialty of the house might be good for the vendors, it wasn't doing those businesses a darn bit of good.

And in time, a lot of those businesses started to feel pretty damn sick and tired of being administered to with a hammer.





In my opinion, Microsoft was the first major cloud company to break this cycle of tech-industry-centric product development, tech-industry-centric marketing and language, and tech-industry-centric solutions for business customers whose unique and differentiated needs generally remained worlds apart from what the big tech companies were proposing.

One of the fruits of that achievement is that in 2021, Microsoft has an excellent chance to reach \$80 billion in cloud revenue. \$80 billion! So just Microsoft's cloud business—not the entire company; just its cloud business—would be one of the largest enterprise-tech firms in the world.

And I have no doubt that Microsoft's

customer-centric approach—what Nadella below will describe as “our sense of purpose”—has been a massive element in that unprecedented success.

How does a tech company break out of this self-centered, tech-focused mindset? In my opinion, the greatest achievement of CEO Satya Nadella across his 7-1/2-year reign (recently expanded to include chairman of the board, by the way) has been his relentless placement of the customer at the center of everything Microsoft does. This is not a recent achievement, and that transformation did not happen easily or quickly—it's something that Nadella's been hammering home in

very public ways for at least the past 4 years.

In making that breakthrough, Nadella and Microsoft have created the industry's deepest and broadest set of cloud solutions to complement its existing and still-growing on-premises products—and Nadella and team are ruthlessly expanding those portfolios and capabilities because the global surge to digital business is requiring exactly that type of expansion.

In a **Cloud Wars** article posted way back in July 2017—about 6 months after I launched the site—I centered on three enormous undertakings by Nadella:

1. Framing and clearly articulating that the company's sense of purpose is all about its customers
2. Establishing a vision and a mindset unlike what any other tech companies were doing
3. Aggressively and fearlessly re-making the company—more than once—to map to that new purpose, vision, and mindset.

While Nadella has said many powerful things since July 2017, I wanted to take this quick trip in the way-back machine to underscore that this unique mindset and outlook has been there for a long time, and has been hammered into the very essence of the company for many years. As we take a deeper look at each of those highly successful initiatives, I have to say that I hope some other major tech companies will undertake similar overhauls designed to put the customer at the center of everything they're doing. Customers are setting the course in every industry, and the cloud industry should be at the forefront of that. And one of the main reasons Microsoft has become one of the most successful, admired, and valuable companies in the world is because it locked onto this idea—and then turned that idea into reality—years ago. From my Cloud Wars article following Microsoft's FY17 Q4 earnings call on July 20, 2017, here are three excerpts built around Nadella's vision.



## 1. “Our Sense of Purpose”

“As technology disrupts every industry and has the power to make a difference in the lives of everyone, we strive to create local opportunity, growth and impact in every country around the world,” Nadella said. “Our platforms and tools help drive small business productivity, large business competitiveness and public sector efficiency. They also support new startups, improve educational and health

outcomes, and empower human ingenuity. Our sense of purpose lies in our customers' success. Transformation is a continuous process of renewal and reinvestment. We will continue to invest in the highest growth opportunities, lead innovation in the cloud and AI, and bring our technology and products together into experiences and solutions that unlock new value for customers.”





**Satya Nadella  
has made  
Microsoft  
into that most  
formidable of  
competitors**

## 2. Reimagining the World Through the Eyes of Customers

What is so impressive about Nadella's achievements as CEO, however, is that he's achieved all of those striking financial results while also retooling the company for the future—a future that Nadella says will require constant transformation and a relentless re-imagining of how it does research, how it creates products, and how it goes to market.

In doing so, Satya Nadella has made Microsoft into that most formidable of competitors: while it can surely float like a butterfly, it can also develop products faster than ever before, put more resources in front of partners and customers, plow more investments into promising technologies, share more world-class ideas, and tie its customers vast and disparate "digital estates" together seamlessly in ways no other enterprise-tech company can come close to matching.

## 3. Relentless Transformation Inside Microsoft

"Overall the approach we have taken for multiple years now is to transform everything that we do inside the company, whether it's about creation, how we are organized in R&D, how we think about breaking down any silos and category definitions we may have had in the past, how we think about even marketing and the marketing approach and then, of course, even with the go to market. And this transformation is ongoing. This has been happening over multiple years, but we now have very good customer

momentum, because ultimately this is all driven by the opportunity at hand, which is much bigger than anything that we have participated in the past, so the total addressable market is much bigger. And second, our customer expectations and our partner expectations of how we show up with them has changed. And so over the years we have been making changes and now that we have a lot more momentum and critical mass we're going to that next phase and that's what you are seeing us in terms of changing the skill sets, changing the scope of how we show up to support the digital transformation needs of both large customers, as well as small businesses."





## From Nadella's Overarching Vision into Powerful Customer Solutions

In the second of the three excerpts above, you'll see the term "digital estates" attributed to Nadella. In his quiet way, he has repeatedly made the case that business customers are not looking for narrow or fragmented or siloed solutions, but rather for end-to-end capabilities—approaches that do indeed touch every facet of those vast and rapidly expanding "digital estates." As Nadella has said more than once, Microsoft's ability to meet the widest array of customer needs has translated into the company winning more deals, and more big deals, and more huge deals, than any other cloud provider in the world.

### Here's how it works:

Microsoft plays in all 3 layers of the cloud, which means it can not only address more customer needs but also do so in an integrated, cohesive, and better-for-the-customer fashion.

Microsoft is willing to pull down out-of-time icons. The company rose to power on Windows—but today, Windows has been swept aside to make way for new and more-modern innovations that customers want.

Microsoft has led the way in creating highly technical sales organizations,

transforming the old and ossified vendor-partner-customer hierarchy, and in turning partners into vendors and customers into partners and customers into co-creators. When you see the world through the eyes of your customers, all such things are not just possible but attractive and appealing. Nadella and CFO Amy Hood, on almost every earnings call, remind analysts that they don't really care if customers are buying on-premises solutions or cloud solutions—they reject the "cannibalization" model. Instead, both Nadella and Hood frame it this way: it's the responsibility of customers to determine which environments to move to the cloud or to keep on-premises. And it's Microsoft's responsibility to allow all of those choices to seamlessly become reality.

Microsoft is constantly pushing into new frontiers. PowerPlatform, Dynamics 365, mixed reality, Cosmos Database, Azure Stack, Teams, industry clouds. And don't forget cybersecurity—and did I mention that Microsoft's cybersecurity business is one of the largest on Earth—and perhaps the largest—with revenue of more than \$10 billion?

### Final Thought

In hindsight, and with the detailed track record Microsoft has assembled in TRON—The Reign of Nadella—the company's dual commitments to (1) advanced technologies and capabilities reflective of customers'

fast-expanding digital estates and (2) customer-centric purpose seem almost simple, or inevitable, or perhaps even obvious.

But they were certainly none of those things when Nadella began imagining them and implementing them in 2014.

And any cloud provider hoping to be a player in helping to build out the digital acceleration economy would do well to follow the Microsoft mindset—and then improve on it.

The SMB CIO

# Three Microsoft Products That Make Digital Transformation Possible in the Mid-Market



**Kenny Mullican**  
CIO at Paragon Films

AREAS OF EXPERTISE  
SMB CIO



As CIO of a mid-market manufacturing organization, I am tasked with finding the technologies, vendors and partners that will enable us to make rapid progress on our digital transformation journey. In my experience, there is no single company that has

done more to make that possible than Microsoft. Before you start raising objections and pointing out all the ways that Microsoft has come up short, I'll just stop and say I agree. I get it. I have complained often enough about how Microsoft caused confusion or frus-

tration through their course changes, complicated licensing, and sometimes shortsightedness. But at the end of the day, there are just so many ways that they have made my job easier that I can't imagine taking on digital transformation in a mid-market company



without Microsoft technology taking a central role in the effort.

There may be major vendors or ecosystems that make more sense for a large enterprise, but in the SMB space, one of our driving mantras is “do more with less”. Every time we implement technology for one area of the business, we look for ways to maximize the return on investment by reusing that technology in as many ways as

possible. When we can use solutions from a single vendor that are easy to use, consistent, and interoperable, we avoid reinventing the wheel.

What has that looked like for my company, and why am I so sold on Microsoft, even though it means putting quite a few eggs in one basket?

There are three Microsoft product groups that have enabled us to accom-

plish a great many of our digital transformation goals as quickly as possible:

- Office 365
- Power BI
- Dynamics 365





## Office 365

We began our journey to the cloud, like many companies, by migrating to Office 365 for our basic office application: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and SharePoint. We were able to keep our employees on the latest greatest version of those applications. They could install them on multiple devices, including smart phones. All the applications had a familiar look and feel so that when a user learned one app, it didn't take much to learn the next one. As Microsoft continued to innovate, we were able to keep adding new features and even brand new applications. Microsoft Teams was introduced. At first, it was somewhat ugly, I will admit. It seemed to be a Frankenstein of patched together applications which sometimes caused more confusion than it solved. But Microsoft had the resources and determination to keep improving it. Microsoft Teams has now become one of

the most valuable pieces of technology in our organization.

When the COVID pandemic arrived, we sent most of our corporate employees home. If they didn't need to be present on the shop floor to manufacture the products, then they suddenly became remote workers. Because we had already started making good use of Teams, the transition was seamless. Meetings could become videoconferences with almost no effort. Sharing documents, tracking projects, and quick conversations that previously might have been around the water cooler, were now handled via Teams. We have also installed Logitech systems that are built on Teams into our conference rooms, so even when we get back to the office, we can continue to utilize Teams for meetings. Whether you are in the room or remote, it is a great experience.

In addition to making me and my

team look like heroes for rapidly enabling a remote workforce, Microsoft has laid a foundation that makes it an easy choice to extend that decision to other Microsoft technologies and solutions. Microsoft has woven a consistent, easy-to-use interface into all the Office 365 applications, whether they are used on a desktop PC, a laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Then, they have applied the same user interface elements and back-end frameworks to several other products, making their adoption that much easier for our employees.

One other point that should be mentioned is that the Office 365 applications are constantly being updated. New functionality and features are added throughout the year. The updates can be pushed out automatically as they become available. You don't have to worry about being a few versions behind on your productivity apps.



## Power BI

The next Microsoft product that we adopted is Power BI, and I can't be more pleased with the results. I have worked for many other companies before my current role, and we had a common goal in each of them to bring self-service analytics or business intelligence (BI) to the workforce. In every company, it was always a work-in-progress that was still a long way from completion. Even in my current company, we tried another product prior to Power BI, and the result was a huge amount of time and money spent without ever realizing the dream of successful self-service BI.

Microsoft Power BI changed all that. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that we have a fantastic data architect. I won't pretend that just dropping Power BI into your company will somehow magically give you all the data you want at your fingertips. But I've

seen past efforts, even with the best people, still fall short with many other data analysis tools.

One of the reasons it works is because it leverages the framework that the users are already accustomed to in Office 365. The consistent UI and easy integration with those other tools make users feel comfortable diving in and taking advantage of the rich feature set.

For my company, the adoption of Power BI has been truly breathtaking. Once we rolled out a few dashboards and reports, the effect was nothing short of viral. As soon as one department saw what another department was able to produce, or one power user saw a dashboard created by another power user, without having to go to the IT department and ask for every little change, that's when things really took off. It is so gratifying to see beautiful charts and graphs and data

analyses that could only be created by someone who lives and breathes that data set every day. Empowering the people who use the data to also visualize and analyze that data with sophisticated tools after minimal training is a great example of the rate of change envisioned in the Acceleration Economy.





## Dynamics 365

Sometime in the early 2000's Microsoft took several different unrelated business applications and ERP systems and relabeled them under a single brand Microsoft Dynamics. This was a bit confusing at times because these various applications were not intended to work together, and often had nothing in common. For instance, Microsoft CRM, a web-based tool meant to compete with Salesforce, was relabeled Dynamics CRM. Axapta, an ERP system with European origins because Dynamics AX. Another ERP system called Navision, came to be known as Dynamics NAV. So, when someone asked "what ERP system do you use?", and you answered "Microsoft Dynamics" and the other person said "oh yeah, we use Dynamics" it might be that one was AX and the other was CRM, with virtually nothing in common between the two.

Fortunately, Microsoft did not stop with simply relabeling a few products. They invested billions into continuing to develop these platforms. At each step of the evolution, the products have moved closer and closer to being a cohesive system. The most recent iteration has been branded Dynamics 365, often referred to as D365, and is completely cloud-based. There are still various flavors, so it is helpful to distinguish between them. For instance, Dynamics AX is now referred to as Dynamics 365 Finance and Operations, or D365 F&O for short. Dynamics CRM is called Dynamics 365 Customer Engagement, or D365 CE.

The family of Dynamics 365 products provides ERP and CRM systems that meet the needs of different sizes of companies, ranging from small business to enterprise. As a cloud-based offering, SMB companies can take advantage of Dynamics 365 without investing in expensive server hard-

ware and infrastructure. The familiar UI and interoperability with Office 365 translate into faster user adoption. With add-ons such as Power BI, Power Apps, and Power Flow a small IT team can take advantage of industry-leading no-code/low-code solutions for automating processes around Dynamics 365.

Just like with Office 365, the Dynamics 365 applications are also being constantly updated. Major new features and functionality are rolled out twice a year. As an SMB CIO, it is important to me to have confidence that the technology running the majority of our business is not getting farther and farther behind. I want to know that I am getting the latest, greatest technology advancements without having to plan for a major upgrade or re-implementation every few years.





## Final Thoughts

For the SMB CIO, Microsoft has proven to be an extremely valuable solution provider of the primary tools that my team and I rely on to run this mid-market manufacturing company. As I often say, in an SMB company, we are expected to do more with less, and the range of products coming from Microsoft help us to do just that. I am excited to see other cutting-edge technologies make their way into Microsoft's portfolio, and be added to the tools that we use to stay competitive with much larger organizations.

# The Microsoft Powerhouse



**Wayne Sadin**  
Acceleration Economy Analyst Network

**AREAS OF EXPERTISE**  
Finance  
Board Strategy



I'm getting ready to attend my first Community Summit North America gathering of users, buyers and partners in the Microsoft Business Apps Ecosystem! It's an in-person event, it's driving distance, and it covers two of the most powerful, most innovative technology suites ever created: Microsoft Dynamics 365 ERP/CRM and Microsoft Power Platform. While each of these suites is powerful alone, when used together with Microsoft Azure

and Windows 365, the result is a technology 'super-suite.' CEOs and Boards can use this super suite to transform the way their organizations use technology to deliver competitive advantage[1]. That's a bold statement, but read on to see why it's true.

### Three Approaches to Enterprise Software

ERP (Enterprise Requirements Planning) & CRM (Customer Relationship Management) soft-

ware runs the day-to-day operations of an organization, from Marketing to Sales to Manufacturing/Distribution (or Activity Planning & Delivery, for Service firms), plus back-office functions like HR, Accounting, and even IT). Firms may choose big, integrated ERP/CRM suites from Oracle, SAP, IBM, etc. ('Suite' approach); may choose to stitch together specialized application software modules into a 'suite-light' ('Best of Breed' approach) or



design and program fully-customized applications to meet their needs ('Bespoke' approach)[2]. I'll save the question of "which approach is best?" for a later column. For now, we'll focus on why a modern ERP/CRM system like the Microsoft suite is such a vast improvement over past technologies that it should matter to CEOs and Boards.

### **Big + Old = Technical Debt + Shadow IT**

The predecessors of today's big ERP suites came about more than 50 years ago. Computerized

'Inventory' systems became 'Material Requirements Planning' systems that related supply to demand, and then were integrated with accounting (G/L, A/P, F/A, A/R) suites to become 'Enterprise Requirements Planning' systems. CRM systems originated about 40 years ago to automate physical Rolodexes, and over time added marketing capabilities and integration with ERP. Boards and CEOs need to be aware of a limitation of older technology products—especially big, expensive, complicated older technology products: these products

were built using older, much less capable tools and designs. That older approach makes the resulting products harder to use, maintain, integrate, and operate. This fundamental characteristic of aging technology, called 'Technical Debt,'[3] makes it more challenging (riskier, slower, more expensive) for IT to do what the business wants and needs. And when IT is slow to deliver, impatient business units often go it alone by creating—and increasingly, as Cloud technology came about, licensing—IT solutions to their pressing problems. It's hard



to fault a business leader with a real need but a perceived lack of IT support from taking unilateral action. But the resulting 'Shadow IT' solutions create risk for the organization and extra work for IT—which then falls further behind, setting the stage for more Shadow IT. I'm going to call out one particular form of Shadow IT that's familiar to everyone: the Spreadsheet. Spreadsheets are incredibly flexible tools that most anyone can use to build reports, input forms, even graphical dashboards. But such great flexibility makes it easier for errors to creep in—errors that can find their way

into high-dollar decision packages and audited financial reports. In brief, it's easy to make severe, obscure mistakes using spreadsheets, and equally easy for other Shadow IT applications to cause serious problems for organizations.

### A 21st-Century Solution

Older-technology ERP/CRM suites (which includes most of what firms are running today) are inflexible and expensive to maintain while creating Shadow IT for reporting and other ancillary functions. What Microsoft—and others, to be fair—did was to

combine several modern technologies to mitigate these problems:

Azure Cloud + SaaS (Software as a Service): Hyperscale Cloud<sup>[4]</sup> is built using modern IT tools that allow vendors to construct and operate flexible, scalable, secure technology environments for customers. The top 'layer' of the cloud—the application layer—is called Software as a Service (SaaS). SaaS techniques deliver modular applications that clients can license without worrying too much about the IT 'plumbing' underlying business logic and data. ERP/CRM vendors are rus-



hing to build and re-build their products as SaaS applications, and have succeeded to varying degrees as I write this. Microsoft Dynamics 365 is one such suite. Not a big deal in 2021, but a building block for the capabilities described below.

**Big Data Cloud Database:** Traditional ERP/CRM suites were built using databases designed to securely, accurately, and reliably process high volumes of transactions. High-volume data analysis used for reporting and decision support works best on a different kind of database. Today's cloud databases, like Microsoft Azure Cosmos DB, can handle both transactions and analytics, eliminating synchronization issues (reports run against separate, nominally identical, databases that differ). They also allow reports to access the database without slowing down day-to-day transactional work.

**Integrated Low Code Tools & Published Schemas:** The Microsoft Power Platform includes tools that allow non-professional programmers ('Citizen Developers') to write and deploy

programs. These programs can integrate with the Dynamics 365 ERP/CRM programs and data while adhering to rules set by IT that govern data architecture, security, and release management. Ease of development plus central control solves a fundamental Shadow IT problem by delegating solution creation to the business while allowing IT to enforce rules that reduce risk and cost. By publishing ERP/CRM data specifications in the public 'GitHub' archive (a firm that Microsoft bought), it's easier for third-party vendors and Citizen Developers to create products that integrate smoothly with the ERP/CRM suite. What this means is that IT can support the core ERP/CRM suite, while at the same time a business unit can create or customize a function without breaking the ERP/CRM suite or creating clean-up chores for IT.

**Power BI reporting:** Most ERP/CRM vendors include end-user reporting tools. Microsoft Power BI is a low-cost, easy-to-use tool that's part of the Power Platform. Excel spreadsheet users can quickly learn Power BI and use it in place of desktop spreadsheets. In-

tegration with the Cosmos Database & Power Platform Low-code tools helps eliminate stand-alone Excel reports and dashboards, which improves data quality and data access.

**Office 365/Teams Integration:** Most firms employ Office 365 tools: Outlook, Excel, PowerPoint, Word, etc. And Teams has over 150M users today. By connecting Dynamics 365 and Power Platform tools to Office/Teams, the User Experience is simpler and information is accessible to more users.

## Accelerating the Acceleration Economy

Today, organizations must get better at rapidly moving data from numerous capture points to the corporate data store, and even more rapidly turning that data into insights. A modern ERP/CRM ecosystem can make that possible. Boards and CEOs in the Acceleration Economy need to ask their IT leaders, "what are we doing to modernize these critical systems?" With SaaS ERP/CRM suites such as Dynamics 365 and Power Platform, IT finally has a good answer!

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