IPS/BAS 495 Undergraduate Capstone Projects

Student Research

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Transition a Squadron to Microsoft Teams

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Abstract

Over the past six weeks, I have embarked on a quest to increase my squadron's productivity by addressing continuity, communication, and file storage. The method by which I addressed these issues is by transitioning the squadron to Microsoft Teams. The transition to Teams required planning, as we have four major sections of the squadron, all working different shifts because we operate 24/7. It required creativity, not only because of the 24/7 ops but also because utilizing Teams was different from the traditional way in which we would solve these sorts of problems. It also required me to get out of my comfort zone. I am an instructor, so teaching others was easy, but I am not technologically inclined, so tackling a project about technology required me to push myself.

The project was an overall success, with room for improvement and growth in the future. We have transitioned roughly 90% of the squadron to utilizing Microsoft Teams for their shops and teams. We have created an easy way to communicate with each other and track goals, tasks, and projects. Overwhelmingly, the people utilizing the new system agree that it is a good move and valuable.

Keywords: Teams, leaders, improvement, continuity

Introduction

The inspiration for this project happened as I attempted to create a reminder about a due date in a new software I found on my work computer. At the same time I was attempting to figure this out, I could hear people in a nearby cubicle discussing how frustrating it was that they could not reach anyone in the individual work centers whenever we were on our 24/7 ops rotation, which we were then and still are now. The software I was using was Microsoft Teams. I did not realize it then, but that moment was the catalyst for me attempting this project, a deep dive into Teams and a complete transition for our unit from our old systems to this new system.

The project began with the planning from the last course. This plan gave me the timeline and expectations for this course. Next was taking two Teams training in Udemy to ensure I would have the knowledge base to teach and create an adequate system. After receiving the training, I began teaching the other leaders in the squadron the basics of Teams and allowing them to create templates for how they wanted their Teams to look. After creating individual teams, we began transitioning their daily tasks and communication to facilitate conversations about issues or concerns, and we then began the process of moving files over from the old electronic storage to the newly created Teams. After the transfer of files, we were entirely able to utilize the system and begin troubleshooting and improving the system. As we continued through this process, I began soliciting and receiving feedback for the whole process to further continuous improvement.

Elements Coming Together

Innovative Approach

After thinking through our problems, I concluded that we could either transition to an entirely new system, starting from the ground up, or attempt to make incremental improvements

to our current system. After some thought, I realized that the impacts on myself and others would be worth starting fresh. After this project, we would have a dramatically more streamlined system of processes, which would create extra time and energy that could be spent on more critical tasks. I decided to take an action approach to the project since it allows for and encourages a step-by-step approach to completion. In order to begin, I needed to become a Teams expert, so I picked the courses I would take in order to facilitate this education, after the completion of which I would be able to coach the roughly 40 other leaders through this transition.

Personnel from at least five career fields work in my squadron at any given time. I began by speaking with the leadership within these teams to determine their desires and concerns. These talks were part of what made this approach innovative. In the Air Force, we typically "shoot first and aim later" when it comes to processing change (we definitely aim first, then shoot when it is combat). This idea of sighting the problem, creating a plan to address it, and then addressing it completely contradicts our usual method of addressing these types of things. I scoured the web for resources to help with everything from creating buy-in to measuring impact and then began implementing the plan.

Emotional Intelligence

To begin this project took some awareness of self and others. I chose this project because I had enough emotional intelligence to understand that people were having problems they could not understand and, therefore, could not address. I was one of these people until I finally decided to use this project as an opportunity for growth. I believe the other teammates and I did not address this problem primarily because it feels like something above our heads or unreachable. It felt too big for us to undertake because it is a problem for the entire squadron. Understanding this

was key to understanding that addressing these struggles that every unit member feels was more

important than our feelings about solving them. Our unit is in combat right now, and not solving

this issue takes away the time we have to train and fight. Being emotionally aware enough to

understand why this is valuable to every unit member would be the key to fighting any negativity

that would eventually creep in.

Creative Thinking

The primary component utilized in my creative framework was seeking alternative

approaches to the problems we routinely had. I usually address problems as they arise; I do not

typically plan and forecast them. I accomplished this by asking myself what the issues we had

had in common so that I could look for a solution to most or all of them rather than working on a

solution one at a time. My approach was not unique in the way of necessarily creating something

new. However, it was unique to how I usually approach things, and it was certainly unique in

how my unit typically addresses things. It ended up creating a unique solution to a common

problem.

My Innovative Solution

The primary way in which my project was innovative was that it combined multiple

processes and combined them into only one resource. The innovation could have been further

improved throughout this project in a couple of ways. The first is the idea of perfection. I did not

start the project on time, and I missed my deadlines a couple of times simply because I did not

think things were "perfect" enough to have a conversation with leadership or I did not think my

knowledge of Teams was perfect enough to have a training session. The second way my

innovation may have been improved was something I learned late in this course. It is the idea

that "frustration is the process" (Ted, 2015). Instead of waiting on a perfect time or perfect

solution, realizing that frustration is the entire point of creativity and innovation would have allowed me to circumvent a few of the headaches I experienced.

Results

The benefits of this project to the stakeholders are numerous. However, they will only be seen minimally in the short term but will be significantly noticed in the medium- to long term. The first benefit is quality improvement. Before this project, our systems were torn between multiple different methods. Having different ways to do the same thing caused many headaches with essential things, like continuity between all three of our shifts. The lack of continuity created many gaps in quality because one shift is unaware of the status of a project because another shift does not have a good way of communicating about it. Another benefit is a higher level of customer service. This benefit is closely tied to the previous benefit but is specifically related to our ability to manage projects and tasks adequately. We have historically had such an issue with continuity that it caused many customer service issues. It was to the point where many things that are not what we refer to as "no-fail" just get accepted and may not get completed for months. This, honestly, should have been unacceptable. The new system allows for more and easier communication and task/process tracking so that customer service will reach new highs.

The primary impact is an improvement in the systems. Our systems are outdated, and this will dramatically refresh them. There will be better retainability within our unit because our flail and lack of communication is a huge sticking point with many of the people within it and their desire to stay in the Air Force. Our lack of good communication is why an unreasonable number of people look for jobs outside our unit. A short-term negative impact is that there was and will be extra time required by every member to get more familiar with the new system since they are used to how they were doing things before.

I chose to measure the impact of this project by two methods: face-to-face, general feedback, and a more formal and specific survey. Images are provided in the Appendix, but this project has succeeded. 32 people were directly involved and trained for this project. Out of those 32 people, I was able to speak directly to more than 20 of them. I have also sent out an 8-question survey to those same people and have received 4 of them back. I only received two points of negative feedback. The first is that I should have stuck to my proposed schedule. I was never more than 1-2 days off, but I did not maintain the schedule, and that created flail with some members due to being 24/7 ops. I had two instances where I changed meetings at the last minute, and others needed to flex to another day because I was not ready for that particular meeting. The other piece was more a reflection of the individual than the project, but one member said it would have been better to find a solution that did not involve everyone needing training on a new piece of software.

My leadership has been supportive the entire time, and they are becoming more excited about the change as the days go. I have shared the feedback with them, and the fact that it is overwhelmingly positive has begun shifting their mindset. The hesitancy to get entirely on board was tied to how much change the project was creating simultaneously. The more messages and tasks are shared and the easier it is to find files, the more I see them becoming a fan of the system.

Conclusion

I anticipated the results to be positive, and they have been. We are seeing a massive increase in communication amongst the teams, shops, and shifts. My role in the unit means meeting with the night-shift leadership when I come in for the day, interacting with the day shift while I am there, and meeting with the afternoon/evening shift when they come in for the day. I

cannot overstate how much more each shift is already getting done since the transition. We had issues getting people trained in combat, which was a big deal because they needed to accomplish menial tasks like signing forms. Most of the shifts have been using Teams to plan who does what and on what shifts it gets done, and they have been able to track it and communicate it effectively. This has given hours back to the shifts each day to do more important stuff. The results are almost exactly what I expected, and it is less due to my intellect and more to do with the fact that I chose this project because I had heard the same complaints for so long.

If I were to do this project over again, I would have created an even more detailed plan for completion. Instead of saying, "This week, I am meeting with flight leaders," it would have said, "On Thursday, I am meeting with Daniel to teach Channel creation and file manipulation." Having a more detailed plan would have been helpful to me, but it would have been more valuable to the other people who had an active role in the project.

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Appendix
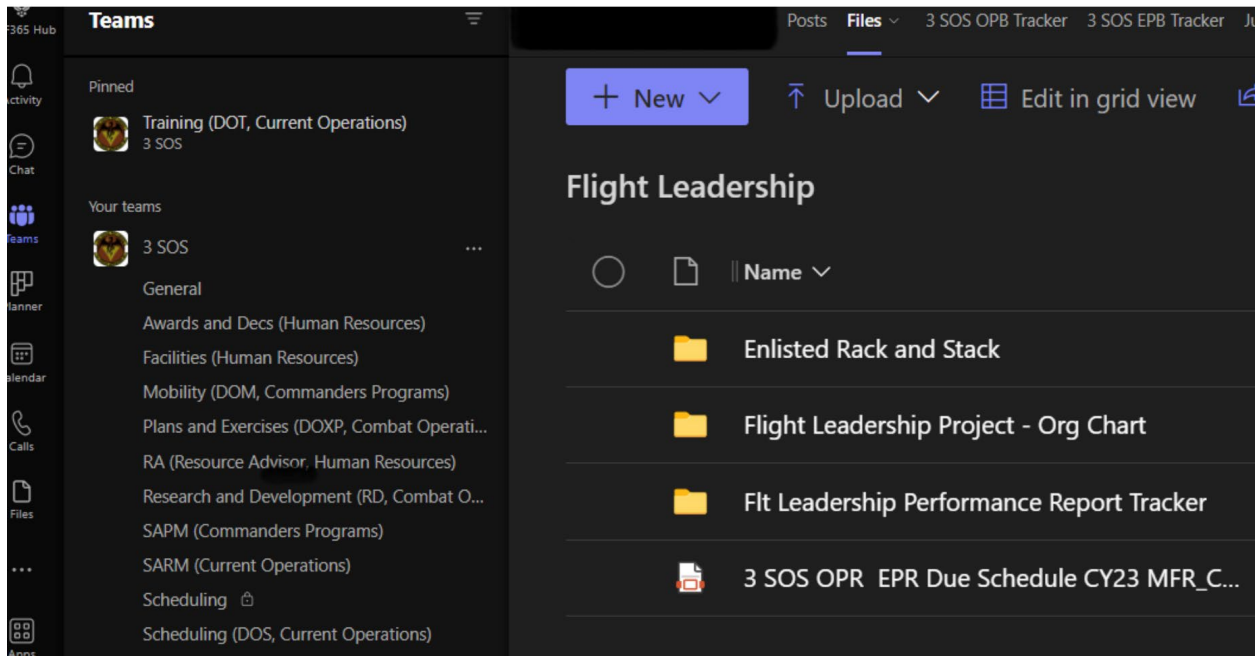
Screenshot of the Team and Channels created, along with a demonstration of file

organization and storage.
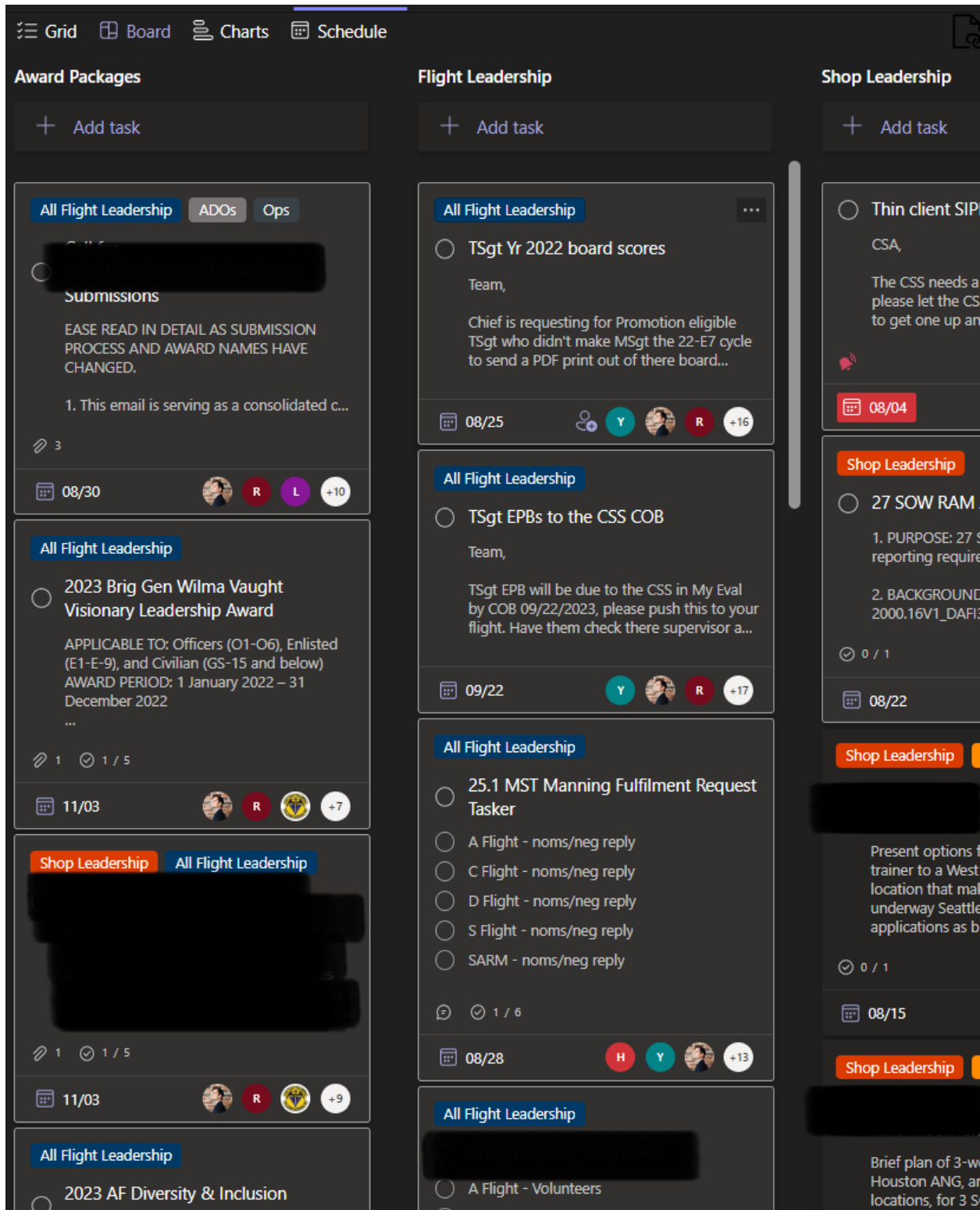
Screenshot of one of the channels being heavily used for task tracking. Areas that might reveal sensitive information are blacked out.
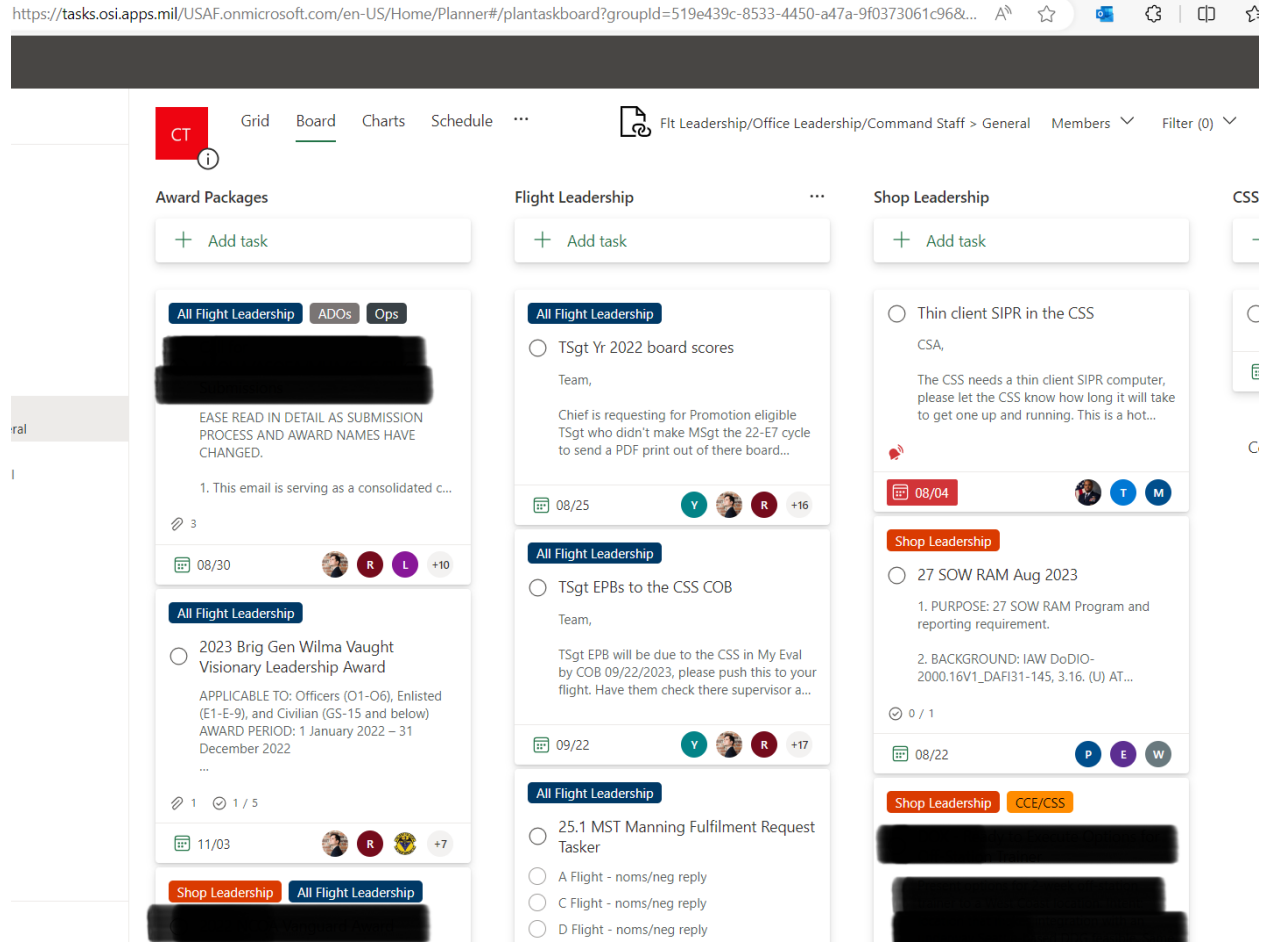
Screenshot demonstrating that SharePoint and Teams accurately mirror each other and are usable.

Days	Useful	Not Useful	Needed	Not Needed	Timely	Not Timely
L.D.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
A.M.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
F.G.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
A.W.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
M.L.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
C.A.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
K.I.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
J.B.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
D.M.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
K.E.	✓	☐	✓	☐	☐	✓
R.F.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
C.S.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D.J.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
K.N.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D.L.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
G.T.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Swings	**Useful**	**Not Useful**	**Needed**	**Not Needed**	**Timely**	**Not Timely**
J.J.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
T.B.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M.L.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M.D.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F.W.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
A.W.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
G.C.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mids	**Useful**	**Not Useful**	**Needed**	**Not Needed**	**Timely**	**Not Timely**
A.C.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P.B.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
C.S.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
E.S.	✓	☐	✓	☐	☐	☐
M.M.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
T.L.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J.A.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
J.P.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
N.D.	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐

Screenshot of my Google Sheets tracker reflecting the major feedback point from the project. Initials were used in order to not put squadron member names in an academic paper.

The following three are from the Survey Monkey feedbacks. Only five people responded at this point.

Microsoft Teams Transition
⊕ SUBTITLE

I believe organizational change is good for the unit.
Answered: 5   Skipped: 0

Microsoft Teams Transition   ▽ (0)

Leadership keeps us informed about the changes before making the...
Answered: 5   Skipped: 0

Microsoft Teams Transition   ▽ (0)

Is this change needed?
Answered: 5   Skipped: 0

Microsoft Teams Transition   ▽ (0)

I have better access to the resources I need while working than befo...
Answered: 5   Skipped: 0

Microsoft Teams Transition   ▽ (0)

Are people's concerns being heard and responded to?

Answered: 5   Skipped: 0

Microsoft Teams Transition   ▽ (0)