

# Collaborative events highlight digital transformation at Microsoft

## Abstract

Digital transformation isn't only about how technology changes, it's also about how corporate culture—our people—adapt to that change. At Microsoft, we're changing company meetings from static presentations into dynamic conversations, and we're empowering attendees by giving them a voice. Using Skype Meeting Broadcast, Yammer, and Microsoft Pulse, we engage our employees around the world during corporate events by encouraging interaction, collecting real-time feedback, and promoting collaboration.

## The imperative for digital transformation

Make no mistake: the digital world has arrived. From cloud-based computing, to the Internet of Things, to big data, mobile devices, artificial intelligence, and more, technology is providing new opportunities and making demands for how companies do business. The advent of this technological revolution is impacting every industry, not just technology providers. Customers expect better services, faster deliveries, and personalized user experiences—and they want it now.

As CxO, what does this mean to you and to your leadership team? Pure and simple, *survival*. If your company can't provide what your customers need, your competition will. You must drive your organization's adoption of technology to better serve your customers and maintain a competitive edge in the market, or risk obsolescence. The challenge for any enterprise is massive. Virtually every aspect of the business will require an overhaul—a *digital transformation* of the company that replaces "business as usual" with a new digital core that engages customers, empowers employees, optimizes operations, and transforms products. At the core of this transformation is a mandate for better communication: a need for leadership to connect regularly with employees to ensure that the entire company is headed in the right direction.

Although the effort required to make such a transformation is huge, so are the rewards. A recent study by PWC<sup>1</sup> describes how 86 percent of surveyed CEOs believe that technology will transform their business more than any other trend, making Digital their top priority.

86% of CEOs consider Digital their #1 priority



<sup>1</sup> PWC. "A Marketplace Without Boundaries? Responding to Disruption. 18th Annual Global CEO Survey." 2015. <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/ceo-survey/2015/assets/pwc-18th-annual-global-ceo-survey-jan-2015.pdf>.

*Figure 1. Transforming companies into digital businesses is a top priority for most CEOs. And rightly so: enterprises that embrace their digital transformation can better serve their customers and pull ahead of the competition.*

## Staying on target to drive transformation

Regardless of their industry, most CxOs recognize the need to transform their business into a digital enterprise. But the devil is in the details—where do you start? As CxO, what does *digital transformation* mean to you? Do you have an enterprise-wide transformation strategy in place, and is your company ready to embrace the required changes? Which aspects of your business would be the easiest to transform, or would benefit the most, by going digital? What roadblocks might hinder you reaching your digital transformation goal? What mechanisms can you put into place to drive your transformation?

Every company is unique, and so is their transformation process. At Microsoft, we view our transformation as an ongoing progression, a journey that isn't always in a straight line. As business demands change and new technologies emerge, we must constantly readjust the technical and cultural drivers of our transformation efforts to best serve our customers. The image below depicts four key aspects of digital transformation—engaging customers, empowering employees, optimizing operations, and transforming products—that act as systems of intelligence to help us accelerate our transformation efforts. When the technological and cultural drivers of all these accelerators are in balance, we have optimized our customer outcomes.



*Figure 2. At Microsoft, we're constantly adjusting our transformation efforts to engage our customers, empower our employees, optimize our operations, and transform our products. Systems of intelligence help us accelerate toward better customer outcomes, which are achieved when both technological and cultural drivers of these transformations are in balance.*

## Microsoft's cultural transformation journey

At Microsoft, we've been working on our cultural transformation for several years. One facet of these ongoing efforts is how we are making a major shift in the way we run our live corporate events so that they directly empower our global employee audience—regardless of whether they attend in person or online.

### How we used to run live corporate meetings

Before we began our transformation, our internal corporate meetings were similar to those run by many other large enterprises, both in terms of format and capability. We held one major employee communication event per year. This annual meeting focused on disseminating information about the coming year's business and our product strategies, where leadership would deliver their messages and insights to the local audience. The presentation would also be broadcast via a live-streaming feed for remote viewers.

However, these events were expensive, fixed venues. Each meeting had to be presented exactly the way it had been planned—there was no capability to make content changes mid-stream. Any audience engagement also had to be planned in advance and was restricted to the few attendees on the actual event floor; there was no digital means to engage with online participants. Although we would collect feedback about the event, it wasn't live. Instead, collecting

and processing the data would take up to two weeks. Without a more responsive feedback loop in place, we had no ability to know what the audience was thinking or what their most common or pressing comments were, which meant we had to address these items long after the event ended.

While these meetings successfully delivered key messages from leadership, they left little room for employee participation. This was not a forum that reflected the company's commitment to employee empowerment.

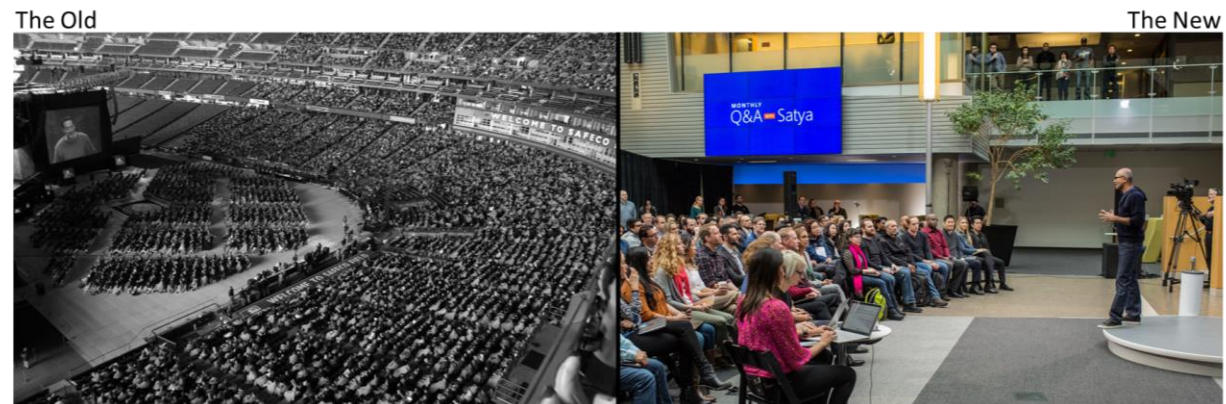


Figure 3. Comparing the old and new styles of our corporate meetings. On the left is an image from an older annual meeting held at Safeco Field in Seattle. On the right is an image of a recent event held in one of our office buildings. Today, our emphasis on the digital experience enables us to hold more frequent meetings in different locations with a more approachable atmosphere that encourages real-time participation while also reaching a global attendee audience.

## Evolving from presentation to conversation

Spearheaded by Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, our leadership team has been working to completely deconstruct our large corporate events, transforming the old monolithic presentation-oriented meeting format into a succession of more personal digital experiences. Our objective is to engage our global employee community and make audience input and participation a core component of each event.

Today's corporate meetings still highlight the company's plans and product strategies like the old-style meetings did, but they do so through a more relevant and engaging experience for employees. We have evolved the theme of our live corporate events from *presentation* into *conversation*. They have been redesigned to promote employee empowerment by:

- **Accelerating our conversations to the speed our business requires.** Transformation isn't about a starting point and a finishing point; it's a succession of moments whose overall direction is shaped by tactical changes and updates. It's critical that the entire company has the agility to stay in lock-step with these changes, and that can only happen with regular strategic communication. That's what our meetings have evolved into: they have become an important means to engage all our employees with key moments, insights, and changes and to ensure that we're all together on our path to "mobile first, cloud first."
- **Adjusting the event's topic content and flow based on real-time crowd sentiment.** What better way to demonstrate employee empowerment than by having the common interests and concerns of the attendees help determine what content is covered during the event? Our meetings support real-time voting, with monitors displaying results throughout the event. This input acts as a feedback loop, giving leadership and the production team insight into the interests and sentiment of the crowd—which in turn can be used to adjust the flow to accommodate questions, delve more deeply into a topic, and more.
- **Sparking new conversations between employees, teams, and leadership.** Popular topics introduced by a speaker during an event can take on a new life as an online conversational thread. Any interested employee can join in, providing their input and exchanging related ideas with other contributors. These dialogs that begin with an idea or comment based on an event topic can live online long past the meeting itself, continuing to forge connections between people and teams that might not have occurred otherwise.

- Reaching a greater proportion of our global employees with less cost and effort.** We now have a more mobile and less costly production process that allows us to hold events at different buildings and locations. By emphasizing the digital experience, these productions reach a greater number of employees than ever before, and have the ability to lower cost and complexity. Moreover, running our events anywhere on campus or around the globe brings regions, cultures, and teams together in a way that strengthens our sense of community. Attendees can watch events as they unfold online, but those who can't join the live webcast frequently use our video-on-demand (VOD) offerings to watch video clips of important parts of the meeting anytime, anywhere—which in turn extends the life of our key messages well beyond the duration of the event itself.

## Using Microsoft productivity tools to capture audience engagement in real time

Promoting employee participation in our live events required redesigning the production process to orient around attendee interactivity. Our top priorities were to give online attendees a voice, opportunities to engage in the event—and the means to see how their input would influence the event in real time.

Here, we introduce the key productivity apps and technologies that we've incorporated into our live events to engage the presenters, production team, and audience in a live feedback loop, highlighting each technology's respective role in delivering a dynamic online event.

### Yammer: Adding the social voice to live events

#### What is it?

Yammer is Microsoft's solution for a social network need. Structured around online conversations called *threads*, Yammer acts as a transparent forum for our events where attendees can comment on virtually any aspect of the meeting. Presenters and other participants can read these comments as they are posted and respond to them in real time.

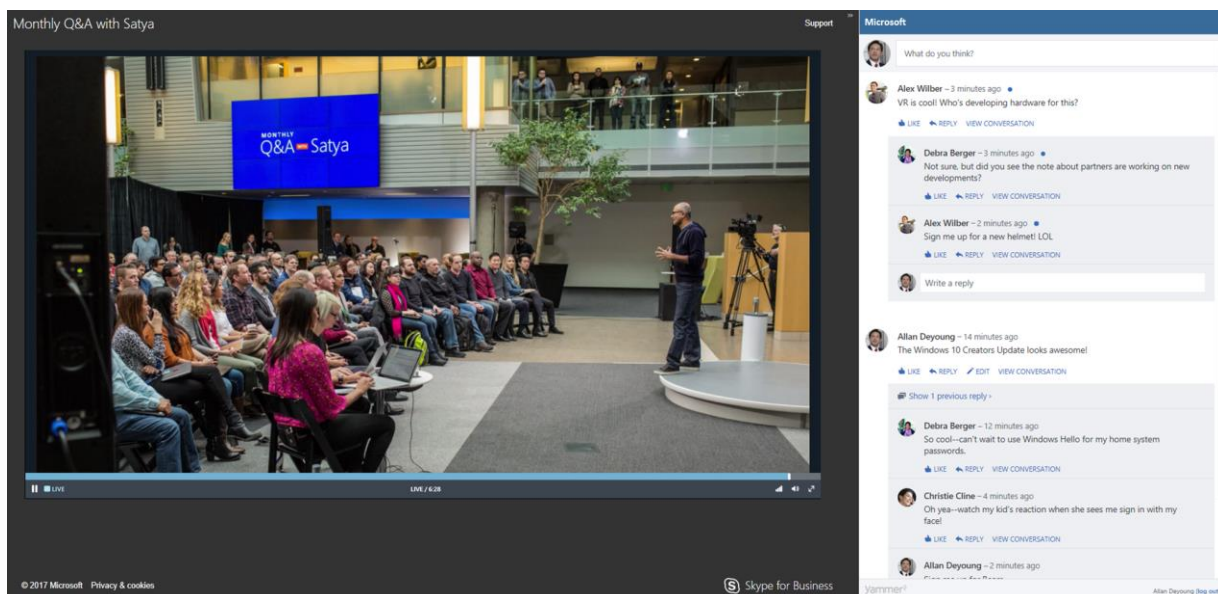


Figure 4. We use Yammer in our live events to gather questions from the audience and to see what people are commenting on in real time.



### How can it help drive employee empowerment?

To help ensure that the topics covered in a meeting reflect what is on the minds of our employees, we use Yammer in advance of an event to solicit employee input, and then leadership can address those curated questions or concerns during the meeting.

Yammer also helps drive a dynamic meeting format by acting as a real-time feedback loop during an event, alerting the presenter that more elaboration or clarification is needed on the current topic before moving on to the next item on the agenda.

Finally, Yammer transforms the way our employees collaborate by breaking down the barriers that location and role historically have presented. Yammer's conversations have no such boundaries. People, groups, and teams who wouldn't normally be able to engage in conversation can connect through Yammer to discuss aspects of the event, as well as to drive conversations around cross-company initiatives, processes, and priorities. These conversations can even exist beyond the duration of the company meeting, giving employees and leaders opportunities to continue to collaborate and share their ideas long after the event has ended.

## Microsoft Pulse: Getting the pulse of the crowd

### What is it?

Microsoft Pulse aggregates all attendee input—from people attending the event in person and from those participating online—and graphs crowd sentiment for all to see, moment-by-moment.



Figure 5. Microsoft Pulse graphs attendee sentiment, indicating employees' responses to the speaker on a moment-by-moment basis.

### How can it help drive employee empowerment?

As CxO, how do you determine how well you're engaging with your employee audience? Are you, in fact, being the digital leader that you expect and need to be? What feedback mechanism do you have in place that provides an indicator of your connection to the crowd?

This is where Microsoft Pulse comes in. Through its real-time voting and polling, Microsoft Pulse helps leadership and the production team understand what the key issues are in the minds of the audience. It collects and analyzes audience input, presenting the results as a sentiment graph. This feedback helps the production team decide whether a topic should be covered in more detail due to the crowd's interest or even shift to a different speaker who is an authority on a topic of interest. In effect, Microsoft Pulse empowers employees by channeling audience sentiment to help determine the flow of the event.

## Skype: Powering and managing live events

### What is it?

Skype Meeting Broadcast is a feature of Skype for Business Online and Office 365 that we use to schedule, produce, and broadcast events to online audiences of up to 10,000 attendees. Skype Meeting Broadcast acts as the “glue” that streams the event along with Yammer and Microsoft Pulse, providing the interactivity and communication bundle that leadership requires to engage our global audience.

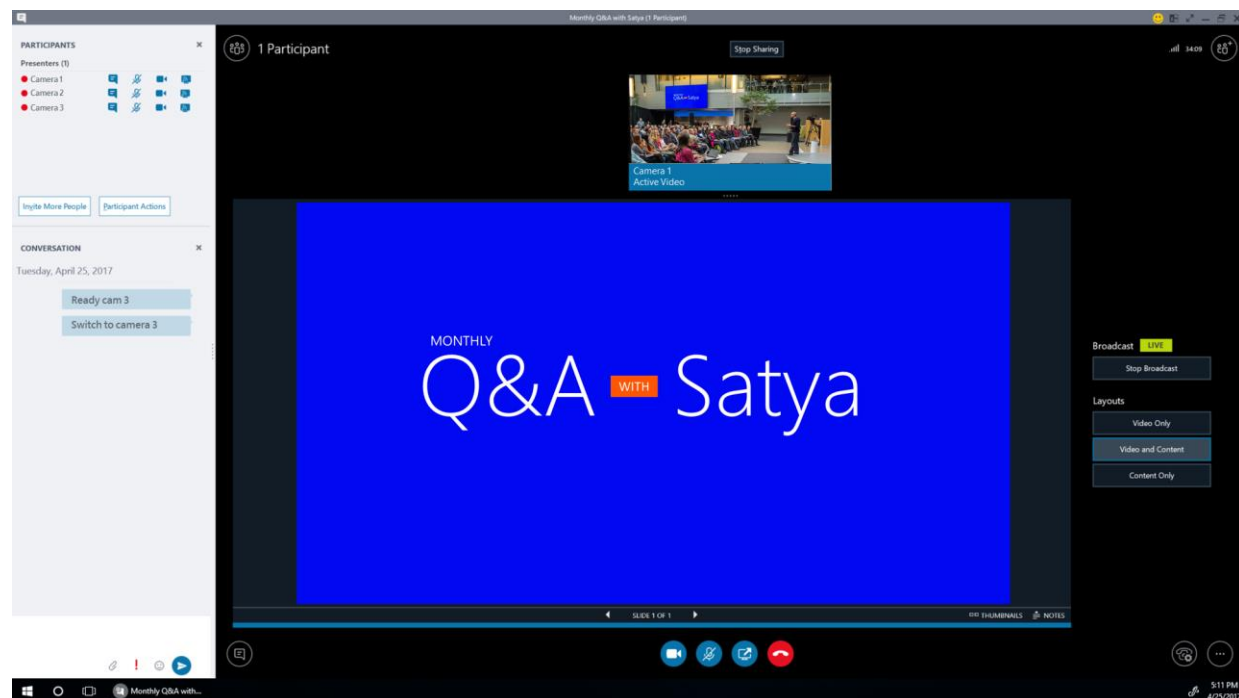


Figure 3. Skype Meeting Broadcast is a feature of Skype for Business that we use to run live events at scale. It ties Yammer and Microsoft Pulse feeds into one unified broadcast.

### How can it help drive employee empowerment?

Skype is at the core of our new format for live events. Its significant cost savings compared to traditional broadcasts, its ability to add in Microsoft Pulse and Yammer, and its use of Microsoft Azure have completely transformed the way we communicate in company meetings. Instead of a single, expensive annual meeting, we now can travel to different locations and hold live, dynamic meetings on a monthly basis.

Skype also enhances employee productivity by streamlining the event scheduling process. Skype integrates seamlessly with Outlook, so employees simply see a new meeting invitation added to their calendars—in the same way and with the same productivity tools they use every day.

Accelerating our speed of business is just one benefit we gain from holding more frequent communications. Running these live events in different regions helps us emphasize our commitment to cultural transformation in a personal way that comes directly from our leadership. We're not just delivering a message about a new product; we're bringing our global community together as One Microsoft.

## Summary

As CxO, you likely have already recognized that your company must undergo an enterprise-wide digital transformation to accelerate your business, to better serve your customers, and to maintain a competitive edge. You might also have discovered that one of the greatest challenges to achieving your digital objectives is changing your siloed corporate culture.

In this situation, showing leadership's dedication to transform is key to success. You need to find opportunities where you can demonstrate directly to your employees the company's commitment to change. You also need to engage and empower your employees so that they in turn can help drive the transformation that the business requires.

One vehicle you might consider restructuring in support of your cultural transformation is your live corporate events. But how? *Can you redesign your live events using familiar productivity tools that support your leadership's commitment to empowering employees?*

At Microsoft, the answer has been a resounding *Yes*. We are leveraging productivity tools available in our Office 365 suite to dramatically improve how we communicate during live events. With Skype Meeting Broadcast, our production team can deliver these events much more frequently, in different locations, at a reduced cost, and in ways that engage a wider variety of people than before. We package key moments of the event and offer them as video-on-demand to allow all employees to benefit from these insights at a time that accommodates their schedules. And using Skype, Yammer, and Microsoft Pulse, our employees engage in an entirely new way, becoming an integral part of the feedback loop that helps drive the course of the event.

Our events are more organic now. They've moved away from a product perspective and realigned to a cultural focus. Speakers shift from presenting on stage to participating in conversations with employees, which promotes a sense of community. By hosting frequent interactive digital events at many locations, and by putting powerful collaboration tools in the hands of our global audience, we are helping foster the employee empowerment that is necessary for our ongoing success in this digital world. We're using this new live event format to cross bridges between employees and leadership and also between the local attendees and a global online audience: it's all one now. This is the core of our One Microsoft concept.

## For more information

This business case study is part of a larger narrative that Microsoft has developed to help CxOs and other digital leaders on their own transformation journeys. See the following resources to explore other parts of the story.

### Microsoft IT Showcase

[microsoft.com/ITShowcase](https://microsoft.com/ITShowcase)

[Skype for Business accelerates modern collaboration at Microsoft](#)

[Planning and supporting meetings in a complex global enterprise](#)

[Transforming the Microsoft boardroom with Windows 10 and Office 365](#)

[Planning and supporting meetings in a complex global enterprise](#)

[CIOs urge companies to embrace digital disruption](#)

[Skype Meeting Broadcast: Reach thousands globally with just one click](#)

[Microsoft Digital Transformation eBook](#)

[Winning with digital: What makes a digital leader?](#)

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