Knowledge Sharing in a Changing World

A review of the barriers and opportunities to improve information access, resilience, and cost savings in hybrid work environments

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Today's organizations are faced with a massive volume of communication and content generated in the course of daily work. But surfacing and revealing this knowledge to the right employees at the right time is an ongoing challenge—made even worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, ensuring that remote workers have fast, secure access to actionable insights is driving many organizations to make knowledge sharing tools a priority over the next 12 to 24 months.

Spiceworks Ziff Davis' research into knowledge sharing trends found that:

Organizations can potentially **save employees five to eight weeks of productivity a year,** if employees can efficiently find and use the knowledge available to them.

Knowledge sharing tools empower users to find information faster, access a single source of truth, and avoid the hassles of recreating information that already exists—saving time and money for the organization at large.

The security, searchability, and integration of knowledge is a vital concern for organizations worldwide, especially as more employees work remotely.

Microsoft offers integrated productivity solutions through its Microsoft 365 cloud. Microsoft Viva is an integrated, insights-driven employee experience platform that brings together communications, knowledge, learning and workplace insights. Viva Topics frees up time by making it easy for people to find information and put knowledge to work. And SharePoint Syntex uses advanced AI and machine teaching to amplify human expertise, automate content processing, and transform content into knowledge.

Introduction

Every day, organizations are generating vast amounts of information within documents, emails, chat messages, web pages, intranet sites, and more. But finding and sharing the most valuable insights and resources is an uphill battle, especially for new hires or employees switching roles. The knowledge exists, but the hours required to find it—or to find internal experts to help—can create a costly drain in productivity. Based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor, $8.57 million could be saved in the U.S. annually by reducing time for new-hire effectiveness by a week (for companies with $1 billion or more in revenue).[1]

Now, a global health crisis has changed the way we work, with fewer in-person opportunities for impromptu meetings and hallway conversations. There's a new urgency for getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, wherever they work. In fact, although IT spending is expected to decline overall in 2020, solutions that support remote work and collaboration are still projected to show positive growth.[2] Many employees may opt to work in a hybrid way, with a mix of on-site and remote work, even after the pandemic ends.

The good news is that the potential for making real productivity gains by improving knowledge processes is equally significant.

How do organizations plan to tackle their knowledge sharing challenges and opportunities?

Spiceworks Ziff Davis recently conducted a survey of U.S.-based organizations to find the answers to these questions and more. Respondents were from organizations of all sizes and spanned many roles—including IT, business, and C-level decision makers, as well as knowledge workers. A wide range of industries were also represented, from manufacturing and financial services, to healthcare, government, IT services, and retail.
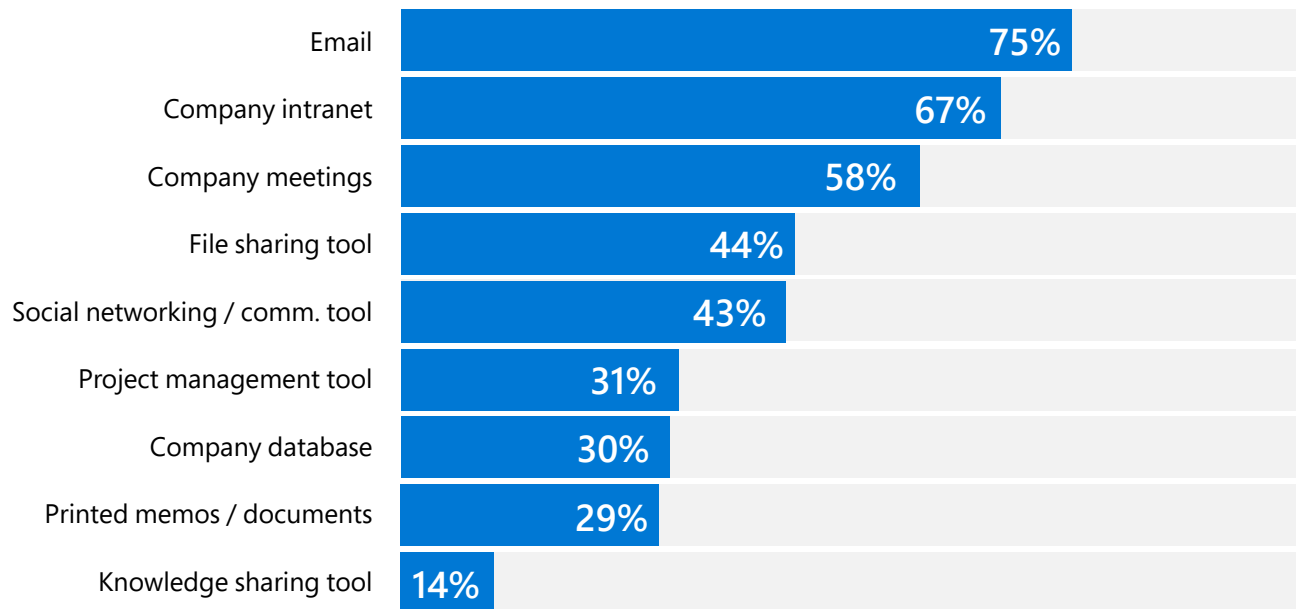
This white paper explores the results of that survey, including deep, revealing insights into the state of knowledge sharing and management, and how it is evolving. You'll also learn why knowledge sharing tools make sense for hybrid work styles, providing employees the information they need to be more productive—and helping your organization be more efficient, resilient, and innovative.

The State of Knowledge Sharing

For decades, organizations have relied primarily on email and intranet sites to share information among workers. According to the Spiceworks Ziff Davis survey, not much has changed. Three out of four organizations (75%) use email to distribute information, while 67% rely on company intranets. Many respondents also say they share information via company meetings, file sharing tools, and social networking/communications tools.

Current Practices for Sharing Information

| Practice	Percentage
Email	75%
Company intranet	67%
Company meetings	58%
File sharing tool	44%
Social networking / comm. tool	43%
Project management tool	31%
Company database	30%
Printed memos / documents	29%
Knowledge sharing tool	14%

In fact, organizations with 10,000+ employees are more likely to rely on company intranets and email for sharing information. Respondents in the IT sector (IT services, managed services, or software) are among the few that are more likely to share information via knowledge sharing tools (that is, tools that combine an organizational knowledge base with robust search and collaboration features).

What's driving these practices? Most organizations (65%) don't have knowledge sharing tools or practices heavily integrated into their processes. Larger organizations rely on complex IT infrastructures, increasing the security/compliance issues and challenges of siloed data. What's more, while the complexities of many legacy knowledge tools can inhibit user adoption, training is often minimal. Nearly half of respondents (49%) say they had none or just a few hours of training.
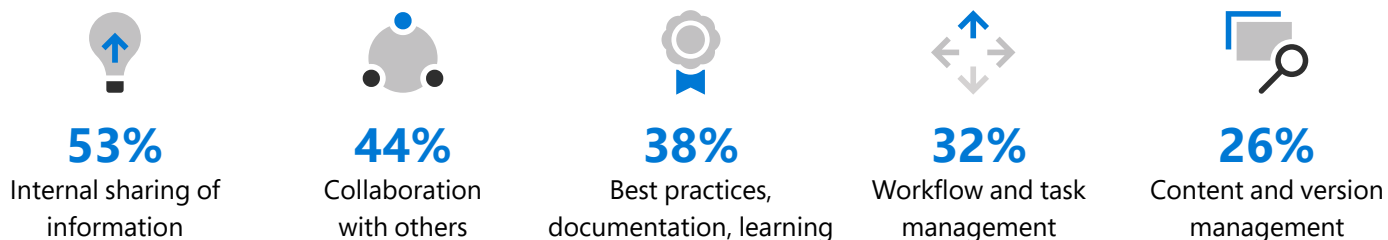
Training Time Invested in Knowledge Sharing Tools

20% A lot

21% None

31% A fair amount

28% A little
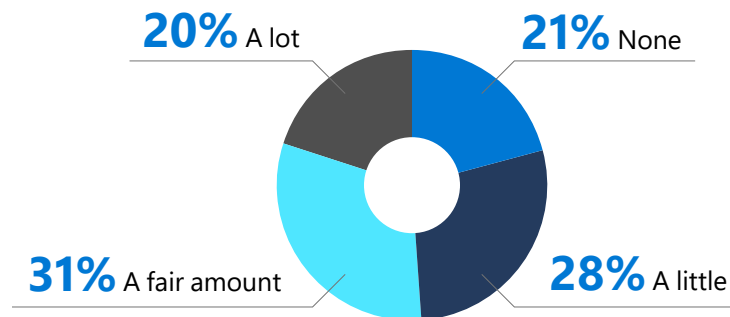
Respondents say their current knowledge sharing tools are used the most for internal sharing of information and team collaboration. Still, organizations seem to understand the value in helping employees to access, share, and manage knowledge.

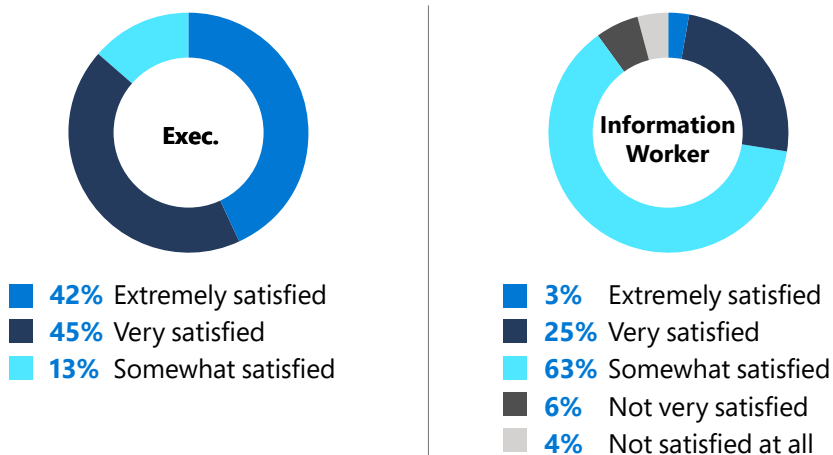## Top Five Features Used in Knowledge Sharing Tools

53%
Internal sharing of information

44%
Collaboration with others

38%
Best practices, documentation, learning

32%
Workflow and task management

26%
Content and version management

Given the features that are used more than others, how satisfied are respondents with their current knowledge sharing tools? Turns out, satisfaction varies greatly between audiences. Executives are extremely or very satisfied (87%) with their current tools, which may be a result of their involvement in the decision-making process and their level of use. Most IT decision makers (ITDMs) and business decision makers (BDMs) are also highly satisfied (68% and 47%, respectively). But information workers—that is, those workers likely to use the tools the most— are also the most dissatisfied.

When digging into the data more deeply, it shows satisfaction is *higher* among those respondents with greater integration of knowledge sharing tools and processes. Organizations in the IT sector also have higher rates of satisfaction.

Satisfaction with Current Knowledge Sharing Tools

Exec.

42% Extremely satisfied
45% Very satisfied
13% Somewhat satisfied

Information Worker

3% Extremely satisfied
25% Very satisfied
63% Somewhat satisfied
6% Not very satisfied
4% Not satisfied at all

Knowledge Sharing Barriers and Opportunities

The impact of COVID-19

"Most employees work from home, so we need to centralize the knowledge base to minimize lost time."

—*ITDM, Insurance*

Like the old adage says, "knowledge is power." It's particularly true in those industries that rely on intellectual property to drive revenue. But how hard is it really for today's employees to find the content, answers, or experts they need? What's it like out in the trenches?

When it comes to knowledge sharing, most organizations—from execs to BDMs and ITDMs—believe their employees are experiencing challenges. While respondents were split 50/50 regarding the prevalence of this issue, nearly all of them agreed that there are employees who experience knowledge sharing challenges.
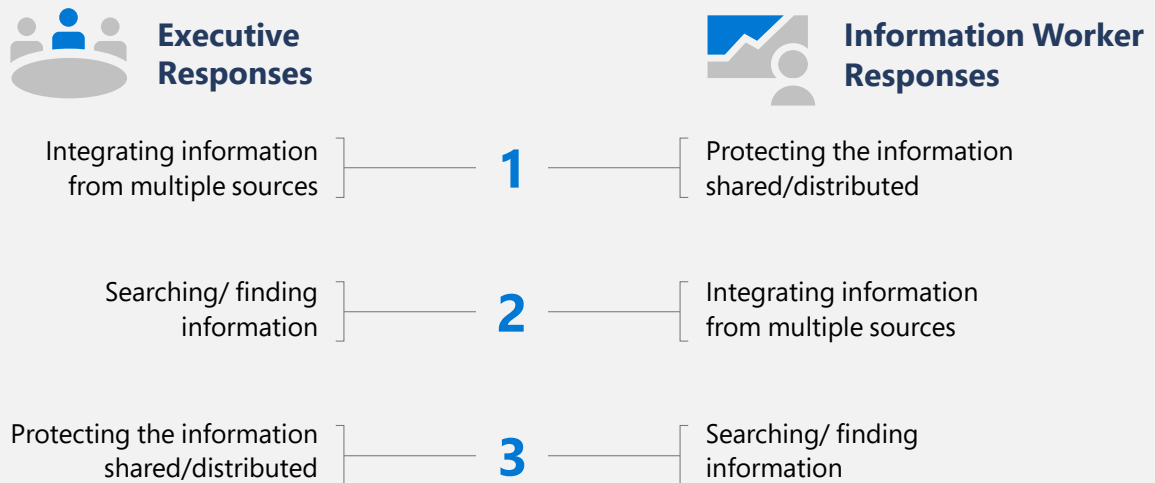
How Many Employees Have Knowledge Sharing Challenges?

3% None   **9%** All

45% Small portion or less   **43%** Half of more
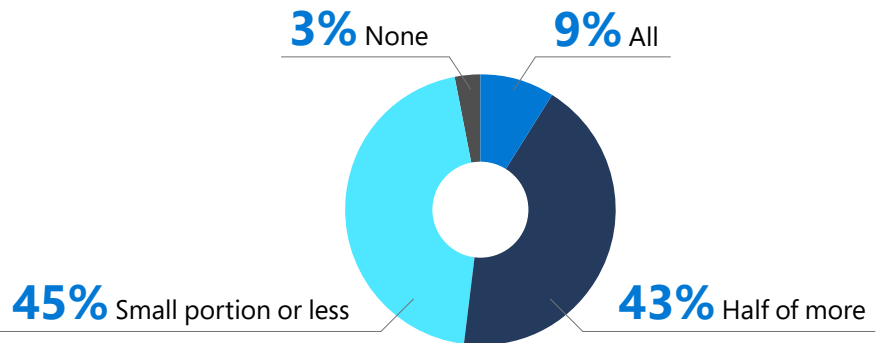
Opinions also vary on how well organizations are meeting individuals' needs in key knowledge sharing areas (such as sharing of lessons learned, collaboration with others, and robust search experiences). On the whole, executives give the most positive ratings and information workers are the least positive.

Most executives and information workers do agree that their organizations are doing a good job of securing information, with 71% ranking their organization's performance as "excellent" or "good." But while executives view the integration of information and search capabilities as areas where the organization is doing well, more than half of information workers disagree.

The Top Values of Knowledge Sharing

Executive Responses

Information Worker Responses

Executive Responses		Information Worker Responses
Integrating information from multiple sources	**1**	Protecting the information shared/distributed
Searching/ finding information	**2**	Integrating information from multiple sources
Protecting the information shared/distributed	**3**	Searching/ finding information

All the survey respondents (executives, ITDMs, BDMs, and information workers) agree that the security of information shared is critical for the organization's success—as well as for individuals to be able to do their jobs. Capturing institutional knowledge and sharing a team member's skillsets were identified as areas with the most room for improvement.

What's the single biggest challenge with sharing information across an organization? Respondents named a wide range of issues, including:

- Security and confidentiality concerns

- Cumbersome integration and disorganization of information

- Tools that are difficult to use / technology limitations

- Outdated information

- Knowledge drain

- Lack of adoption and training

Executives (43%) and BDMs (42%) say their top knowledge sharing challenges are related to onboarding employees and upskilling new team members. In contrast, ITDMs (38%) and information workers (33%) are much more concerned about the knowledge drain of people leaving their team or organization. It may be even more of a concern during the COVID-19 crisis, with some staff being reassigned or being otherwise unavailable.

Furthermore, as employees find themselves working remotely or siloed in global organizations, there are fewer opportunities to connect informally with colleagues to get the answers they need. In fact, when employees can't find the right content, they often end up recreating it. This can lead to multiple versions floating around the organization, with no one being sure which version is correct.

1/3 of all respondents say they experience knowledge drain from people leaving their team "often."

The survey found that, on average, employees could potentially save **between four to six hours each week** if they didn't have to search for information—or spend time recreating it. In other words, they could potentially get back 11 to 14% in daily productivity, rather than downloading the same file multiple times, digging through endless document folders, searching email archives, etc.

What's more, the productivity gains are about 3x higher than in 2016, when Nucleus Research found that employees spend an average of 4.3% of daily productivity searching for the right or most relevant files.[3] What's changed in four years? In addition to exponential data growth, more employees are now working from home in response to the pandemic.

Time and Productivity Impact of Searching for or Recreating Information

Information Workers lose
5.72 weeks
per year of productivity.

Because **11%** of their time
is spent searching for
or recreating information.

VS

Execs/BDMs/ITDMs lose
7.28 weeks
per year of productivity.

Because **14%** of their time
is spent searching for
or recreating information.

Here's what information workers and decision makers had to say about their productivity, as it relates to knowledge sharing:

"We are very inconsistent on how we share and organize materials."

"It takes time and resources to save files in a searchable database."

"Information is not systematically stored, which makes it difficult to find."

"Our knowledge systems were organized in different ways over time. It reminds me of spaghetti code."

But organizations are not without hope. They see many benefits in knowledge sharing tools that help to surface relevant information, reduce duplicate content, and improve search experiences. Specifically, information workers say the most appealing benefit of knowledge sharing tools is the ability to find information faster— so they can spend more time doing more meaningful work (52%). The other top benefits include limiting the need to recreate information (44%) and having a single source of truth (43%). Ultimately, they all want to be able to work smarter, without any questions about having the right information at the right time to get their jobs done.

Top 3 Benefits of Knowledge Sharing Tools for Information Workers

52%
Finding information faster

44%
Limiting the need to recreate information

43%
Having a single source of truth

Decision makers have a slightly different perspective on the most appealing benefits of knowledge sharing tools. The top benefit for ITDMs and BDMs is the ability to increase employee productivity to save time and money (49%). In contrast, executives prioritize the ability to preserve tacit knowledge (that is, knowledge gained from personal experience) when team members leave the organization or move to a new role (45%). They all agree on the need to enable better and faster decision-making.

Top 3 Benefits of Knowledge Sharing Tools for Decision Makers

Executive Responses

45%
Preserving tacit knowledge/expertise when team members leave

43%
Increasing employee efficiency/productivity, saving time/money

37%
Enabling better/faster decision-making

ITDM / BDM Responses

49%
Increasing employee efficiency/productivity, saving time/money

39%
Effectively managing large volumes of information to improve services

35%
Enabling better/faster decision-making

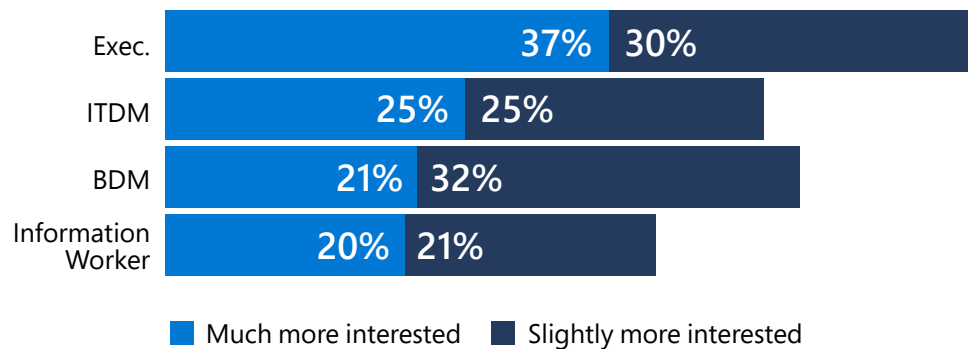# Knowledge Sharing in Times of Rapid Change

Getting vital knowledge to the right people at the right time has been an enduring challenge for organizations of all sizes. But the COVID-19 pandemic has added a whole new layer, as organizations needed to shift to remote workforces almost overnight. Hybrid work styles are expected to be the norm moving forward, with employees sometimes working with colleagues onsite, and other times working remotely.

In the past, workers could lean over a cubicle wall to ask their neighbor for help. But remote and hybrid workers need the right tools to help them find answers to their questions, identify experts within the organization, and avoid having to recreate information that already exists.

How do organizations plan to address knowledge sharing moving forward? The survey found that decision makers are likely to make knowledge sharing tools a priority over the next 12-24 months. Most respondents plan to invest in and/or look for knowledge sharing tools, with 93% of executives saying this is likely, compared to 84% of ITDMs and 79% of BDMs. A large majority also plan to improve the functionality and data integration of their current knowledge management tools (93% of executives, compared to 87% of both ITDMs and BDMs).

When it comes to the impact of COVID-19, organizations have a heightened appreciation and interest in knowledge sharing tools. It's not only that they need to meet the needs of remote workers for virtual communications and collaboration, but they want to be prepared in case of another pandemic. Executives report the most change in interest for knowledge sharing tools (67%), but at least half of ITDMs and BDMs also have greater interest (50% and 53% respectively).

COVID-19 Impact on Knowledge Sharing Tool Interest

	Much more interested	Slightly more interested
Exec.	37%	30%
ITDM	25%	25%
BDM	21%	32%
Information Worker	20%	21%

Smarter Knowledge Sharing with Microsoft

The impact of COVID-19

"As WFH ends, remote work will not. Knowledge sharing will be even more critical."

—*BDM, Financial Services*

Microsoft describes Microsoft 365 as "the world's productivity cloud." Knowledge sharing tools in Microsoft Viva, the newest addition to Microsoft 365, can help organizations emerge from this time of rapid change to be more resilient, efficient, and productive.

Viva Topics is designed to empower people with knowledge and expertise in the applications they use every day. From finding subject matter experts to discovering insights around a specific item, employees can get the information they need—from within the flow of their work.

SharePoint Syntex uses artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically tag and organize disparate data across the Microsoft 365 ecosystem, as well as third-party repositories and systems. Key topics are more accessible for learning, whether people are working in Office, Outlook, or Microsoft Teams.

Why Microsoft Viva and SharePoint Syntex for knowledge sharing

Efficient search experience

Integration with everyday tools

AI-driven content classification/curation

Accelerated time-to-productivity

Improved security and compliance

With organizations planning to deploy new knowledge sharing tools, as well as make the most of their existing ones, Microsoft Viva is the logical next step. SharePoint content services are already used by 66% of respondents, so it may be possible to consolidate, decommission, or replace other point solutions.

Current Knowledge Sharing Tool Usage

SharePoint	66%
Enterprise search tools	48%
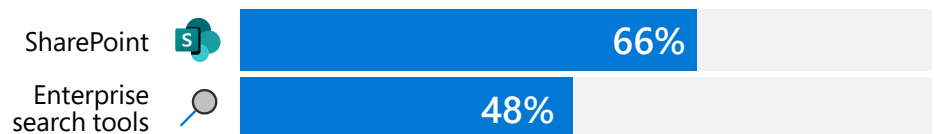
With Viva Topics, organizations have more visibility into the topics and connections that matter most—helping executives better understand the "pulse" of employees. Decision makers can see what topics are popular, which experts have commonly accessed knowledge, and even what topics are no longer used.

Conclusion

By advancing the critical applications that organizations already use every day, Microsoft is empowering people with the knowledge they need to act quickly—while ensuring information is protected and secure. In fact, Microsoft was recognized as a Leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Content Services Platforms and a Leader in Enterprise Information Archiving in 2019. So you can count on Microsoft solutions to deliver new efficiencies and peace of mind in a rapidly changing world.

Ready to transform your knowledge sharing? Learn how Microsoft Viva Topics and SharePoint Syntex can help your organization get the right information to the right people at the right time, wherever they work.

Learn more ›

Microsoft

About the survey
Microsoft commissioned Spiceworks Ziff Davis to conduct an online survey in June 2020. This survey targeted IT, business, and C-level decision makers, as well as knowledge sharing tool users, across a variety of industries. Organizations were required to have at least 500 employees, but 34% of respondents had 10,000 employees or more. The objective of the survey was to understand current challenges, perceptions, and practices around knowledge sharing, including remote workers' needs and the impact on productivity. Survey results reflect responses from 750 participants located in the U.S.

Sources

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2019.

[2] Joe McKendrick, "COVID-19 crisis pushing organizations deeper into digital transformation," ZDNet, April 22, 2020.
https://www.zdnet.com/article/covid-19-crisis-pushing-organizations-into-digital-transformation/

[3] Nucleus Research, "Guidebook: Microsoft SharePoint," June 2016.

[4] Gartner, "Gartner Magic Quadrant for Content Services Platforms," October 2018.

[5] Gartner, "Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Information Archiving," December 2018.