KNOWLEDGE BASE ARTICLE

Discussions vs. the Classic SharePoint Discussion Board vs. Viva Engage vs. Teams Channels: Which to Choose

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Overview

"Where do we put the forum?" is a question every intranet owner asks sooner or later: a place where employees ask, colleagues answer, and the answer can still be found a year later. Microsoft 365 offers several candidates, and they are not interchangeable. This article compares the four that come up in practice — the **classic SharePoint Discussion Board**, **Viva Engage** communities, **Microsoft Teams** channels and the Vitextra Discussions web part — on the criteria that decide the choice: where the forum lives, who may read and post, how replies are organized, how people are notified, and what it costs.

Note

The statements about Microsoft features reflect Microsoft's documentation and Message Center announcements as of October 2026. Microsoft changes Viva Engage and Teams regularly; check the current documentation for details.

The options in brief

The classic SharePoint Discussion Board. The list template that SharePoint has shipped since the 2000s: a discussion is a folder, replies are items inside it, with threaded and flat views, a *Question* flag and a *Best reply*. It exists only in the classic experience.

Viva Engage. The enterprise social network of Microsoft 365. A community is a Microsoft 365 group with a feed of conversations, questions with a marked best answer, and — in the paid **Answers** experience — a company-wide question hub. A SharePoint page can show a community feed through the Viva Engage web parts.

Microsoft Teams channels. Channel posts with replies, since October 2025 also with threads. Conversations live in the team, where the day-to-day chat happens.

Vitextra Discussions. An SPFx web part that puts a forum on a modern SharePoint page or into a Teams tab: boards with categories, topics and questions, threaded replies, best answer, follow subscriptions, moderation and an importer for classic boards. Everything is stored in lists on the site itself.

Where the classic Discussion Board stands

A lot of advice on the web says that Microsoft has "removed" the Discussion Board.

That is not accurate, and it matters for planning. As of October 2026, Microsoft has **not formally retired** the Discussion Board list template. Its actual status is this:

- The template is **hidden** from the modern *New* menu and is created only through the classic experience (or PowerShell). On communication sites it appears only after the *Team Collaboration Lists* feature is activated.
- It is **classic-only**: there is no modern web part for it, it cannot be placed on a modern page, and it does not open in Microsoft Teams.
- It is **not developed**: the user interface, views and forms have not changed in years, and Microsoft's own page-modernization guidance lists the Discussion Board as a web part that "could not be mapped".

Two dated changes around it are what you should plan for:

Change	Date	Effect on a classic board
Retirement of SharePoint Alerts (MC1072889)	Creation of new alerts switched off gradually from January 2026; the ability to use alerts removed from July 2026	The only built-in notification mechanism of the classic board — *Alert me* on a discussion or a list — stops working
Classic user-created pages become read-only (MC1464926)	1 October 2028	The classic pages that host discussion boards can no longer be edited. Microsoft states that classic **list views and list forms are not in the scope** of this change and "might be addressed on a separate timeline"

Warning

A classic board keeps working for now, but without alerts, without a modern or Teams experience and without a roadmap. If a forum is part of your intranet plans, treat the classic board as content to migrate rather than a platform to build on.

Side-by-side comparison

Criterion	Classic Discussion Board	Viva Engage	Teams channel	Discussions
Lives on a modern SharePoint page	No (classic pages or an iframe)	A feed of a community through the Viva Engage web parts; a specific conversation cannot be chosen	No web part embeds a live channel	Yes — any modern page, full-page app, Teams tab and personal app
Who may read and post	Site permissions	Members of the community (a Microsoft 365 group); a public community grants its site access to *Everyone except external users*	Members of the team	Site permissions: readers read, members post, users with *Manage Lists* moderate
Guests	By site permissions	The *External users* feature was retired on 1 October 2024	Guests of the team	By site permissions, no extra setup
Reply hierarchy	Threaded (folder + items)	Two levels in questions and conversations	Replies; threads since October 2025	Unlimited nesting with reply-to-reply
Question, best answer, unanswered list	*Question* flag and *Best reply*; *Unanswered* view cannot be set as default	Questions with a best answer; **Answers** requires the Viva Suite	No (Q&A exists only in meetings)	Question topics, **Mark as answer** by the author or a moderator, *Unanswered*

Criterion	Classic Discussion Board	Viva Engage	Teams channel	Discussions
				and *Answered* views, default view configurable
Notifications	SharePoint Alerts (retired July 2026)	In-app, e-mail and Teams notifications	Teams activity	Follow a board or a topic (*Immediately*, *Daily digest*, *Weekly digest*) and @mentions; e-mail delivery through a Power Automate flow built on the subscriptions list
Moderation	No pre-approval; editing others' replies needs the *Design* level	Community admins, reporting	Team owners	*Require approval of new posts* per board, moderation queue, **Report**, pin, feature, lock
Categories and views	Categories on community sites; views cannot be edited in the browser	Topics (tags)	Channels	Categories per board; *Recent*, *Unanswered*, *Answered*, *Featured*, *My topics*; search by title

Criterion	Classic Discussion Board	Viva Engage	Teams channel	Discussions
Where the content is stored	A list on the site	The Viva Engage service (Microsoft 365 group)	A hidden folder of the group mailbox, files in the team's site	Five lists on the site: boards, topics, posts, subscriptions and an assets library
Microsoft Purview	Everything the site has	eDiscovery and retention; sensitivity labels and DLP not supported for content (container labels for communities since 2026)	Teams retention policies	Everything the site has: retention labels, eDiscovery of list items, audit, site sensitivity label
Availability	Wherever classic SharePoint Online is available	Not available in GCC High and DoD; Engage in Teams not available for EDU tenants	Included in Microsoft 365	Wherever SharePoint Online modern pages and SPFx are available; no Viva or Teams license needed
Migration of an existing classic board	—	No importer	No importer	Built-in importer: topics, reply hierarchy, best answers, likes and attachments
Price	Included	Core features	Included	Flat per tenant,

Criterion	Classic Discussion Board	Viva Engage	Teams channel	Discussions
		in enterprise plans; Answers with the Viva Suite		Standard and Plus plans, 30-day trial

When to choose which

Choose Viva Engage when you want a company-wide social network: storylines, campaigns, leadership Q&A, open communities that anyone in the organization can join. It is the right tool when the audience is "everyone" and the content is conversation rather than a structured knowledge base — provided it is enabled in your tenant and available in your cloud.

Choose a Teams channel when the discussion belongs to a working team and its daily chat: a project, a shift, a class team that already meets in Teams. Threads keep a conversation together, but there is no list of topics, no categories and no best answer, and the content stays in the team rather than on the intranet.

Keep the classic Discussion Board only as a temporary measure for an existing board whose readers still use classic pages. New boards should not be created on it: alerts are gone, modern pages and Teams are out of reach, and the classic pages that host it are on a published retirement timeline.

Choose Discussions when the forum belongs to a **site** — a department, a project, an extranet with guests, a course — and should look and behave like the rest of the modern intranet: on the page, in the site's permissions, in the site's Purview scope, and with a structured list of topics that remains searchable years later. It is also the practical option for tenants where Viva Engage is not available (EDU, GCC High, DoD) or is switched off by policy, and for organizations with live classic boards that need to be carried over without losing the reply threads.

Moving from the classic board

Discussions includes an importer for classic Discussion Boards (list template 108) on the same site or on another site of the tenant. A site owner opens the page in edit mode, chooses **Import classic board**, picks the source and runs an analysis first: the wizard reports how many topics and replies it found, how many replies lost their

parent on a flattened board (they become top-level replies), how many items carry attachments and how many topics were imported earlier. The import then copies topics, replies with their hierarchy, best answers, likes and attachments; original authors and dates are restored when the account may set system fields. Imported items carry the id of the classic item, so the import can be re-run without duplicates.

Tip

The step-by-step procedure is in KB10417. How to Import a Classic SharePoint Discussion Board into Discussions, and the field mapping in KB10418. What the Importer Copies and How It Rebuilds Reply Threads. Boards still on SharePoint Server are covered by KB10419. Migrating Discussion Boards from SharePoint Server to SharePoint Online with Discussions.

What Discussions does not try to be

Discussions is not a social network and not a chat. There are no storylines, no company-wide feed, no reputation points and no instant messaging. If you need those, Viva Engage and Teams remain the right tools — and a Discussions board can sit next to them, holding the structured, site-scoped knowledge that a feed tends to bury.