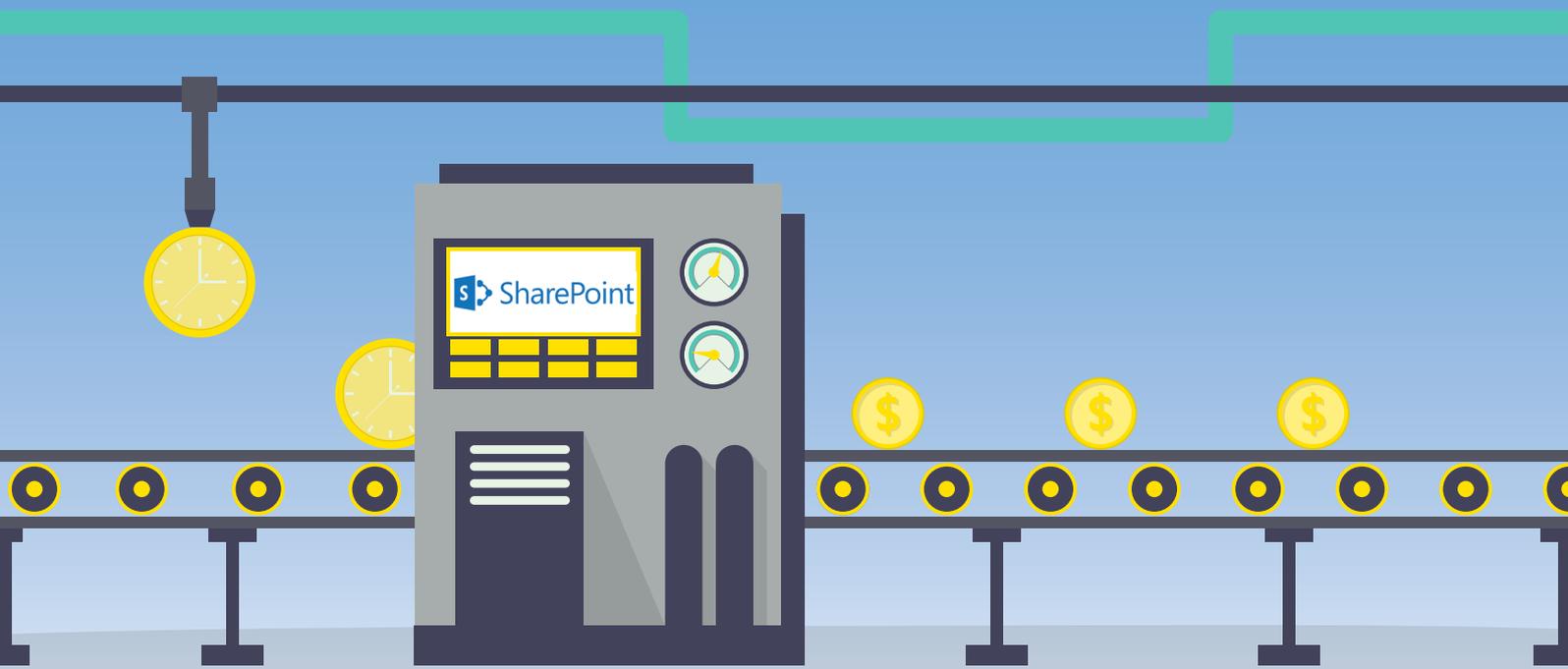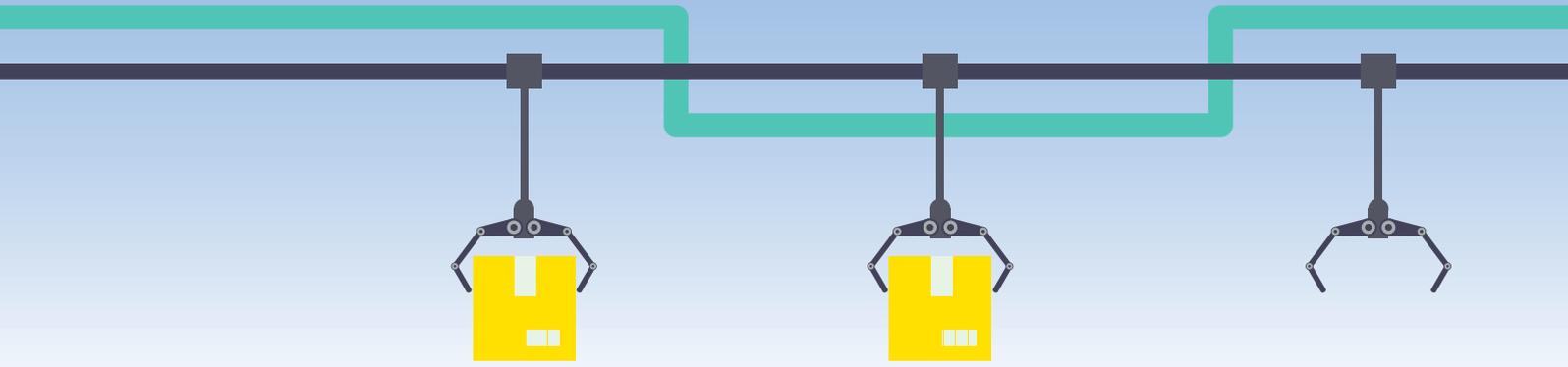# Time is Money:
Improving project management in Sharepoint

Why better information management is
crucial to better projects

The importance of information in project management

In the modern enterprise, projects can vary greatly in complexity, scale, cost, and location. There are plenty of project management tools to match the scale and purpose of every type of project. Small businesses may opt for using basic spreadsheets to manage project resources. Project management offices (PMOs) may choose a robust, dedicated project management solution to manage a collection of remote teams. Then there's the middle ground: small to medium sized companies frequently choose a platform like SharePoint for project management to capitalize on their investment in Office 365.

Amid the diversity, there is an underlying constant: project managers are aiming to complete projects on time and on budget. Information is central to this and is the driving force behind all projects. Project efficiency hinges on the speed at which content can be found, created, edited, shared, and delivered. Whether internal or external, this information resides predominantly in email and business documents. It's therefore practical to manage it where it is primarily stored and organized: SharePoint.

The problem with information being integral to project efficiency is that when you can't find it, projects inevitably suffer. Research from IDC shows that knowledge workers spend roughly **30%** of their workday searching for information[1]. In project management, where time really does cost money, reducing the time spent searching for information could revolutionize the efficiency of project delivery.

But does out-of-the-box SharePoint have the capabilities to change information management, and therefore how projects are completed?

This eBook will discuss how you can enhance SharePoint's information management capabilities to improve project management.

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[1] Cottrill Research. 2013. Various survey statistics: workers spend too much time searching for information. Online source: http://www.cottrillresearch.com/various-survey-statistics-workers-spend-too-much-time-searching-for-information/
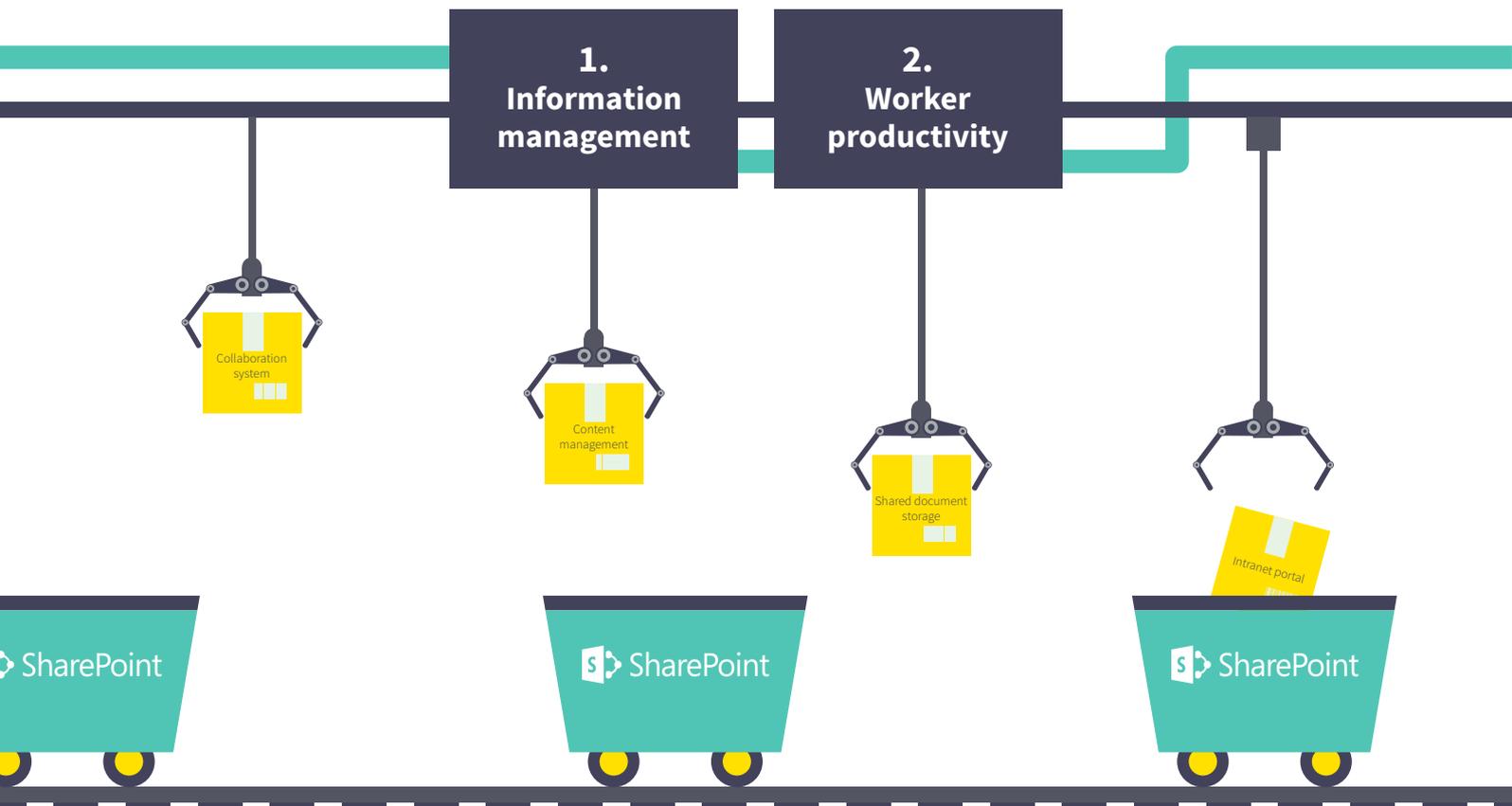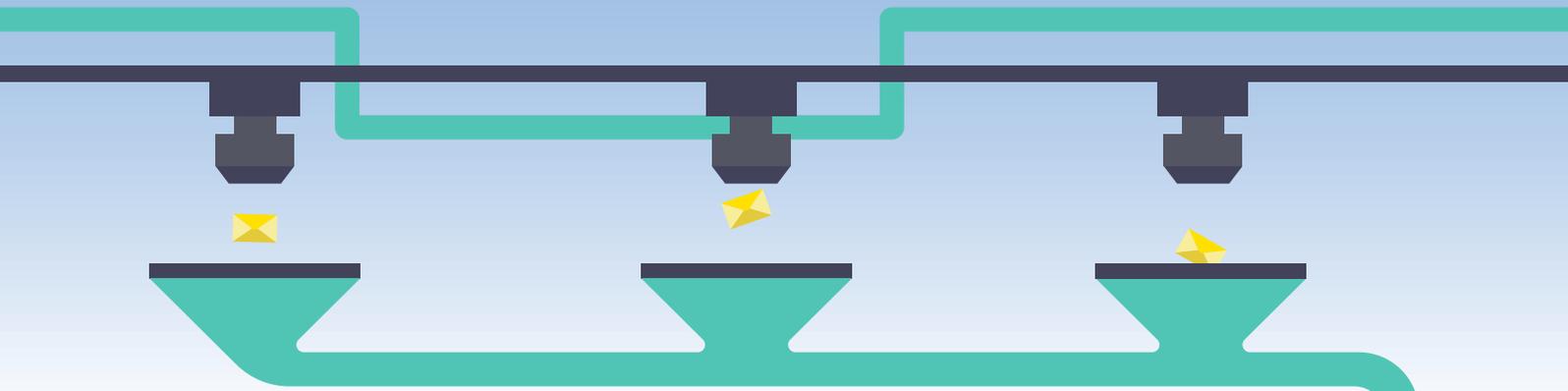
The current state of SharePoint project management

SharePoint has long been heralded for its flexibility. The platform can serve as an intranet portal, a shared space to store documents, and a content management and collaboration system. This is even more apparent in Office 365, as SharePoint integrates with the other Microsoft applications: project managers using Excel spreadsheets, for example, can work with SharePoint natively to collaborate with colleagues in real-time.

But trying to cater to so many business applications at once means, in isolation, SharePoint's out-of-the-box capabilities for project management fall short.

There are two areas in particular where this is the case:

**1.
Information
management**

**2.
Worker
productivity**

Collaboration system

Content management

Shared document storage

Intranet portal

SharePoint

SharePoint

SharePoint

Scattered documents equal scattered projects

To illustrate the limitations of information management in SharePoint, let's use an example:

A project manager is managing their company's latest product update when a stakeholder emails them to say the date of release needs to be moved up a week. The project manager must edit project timeframes and resource allocation accordingly and upload the amended excel spreadsheet to the relevant SharePoint Team Site. In both steps of this process, valuable project information is siloed from other team members:

• They aren't aware the deadline has been moved, as this information resides in a private email between the project manager and stakeholder.

• The updated spreadsheet information won't be visible to them until they access the Team Site.

If team members aren't aware of the changes right away, they may continue working to old timeframes, creating confusion and increasing the likelihood of mistakes. Project visibility is inhibited for the entire team, which can potentially limit worker productivity and weaken project efficiency.
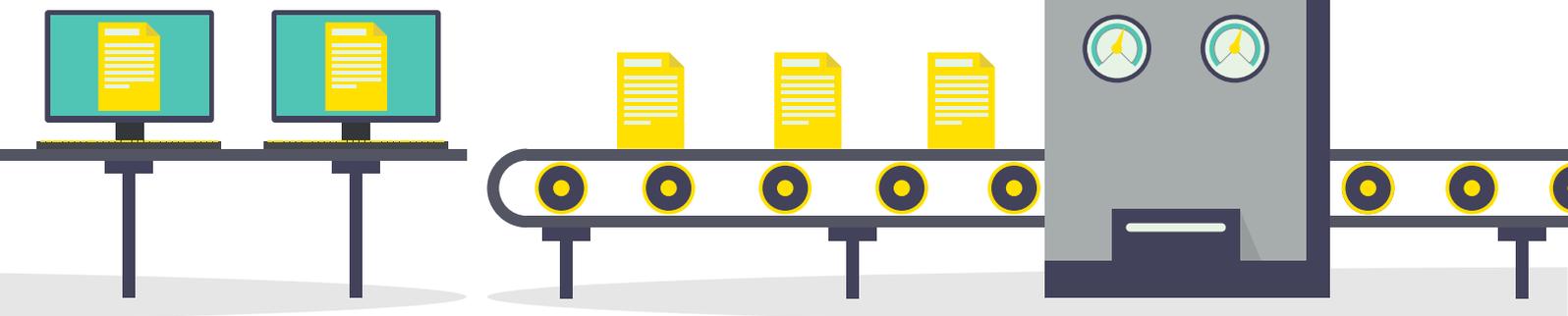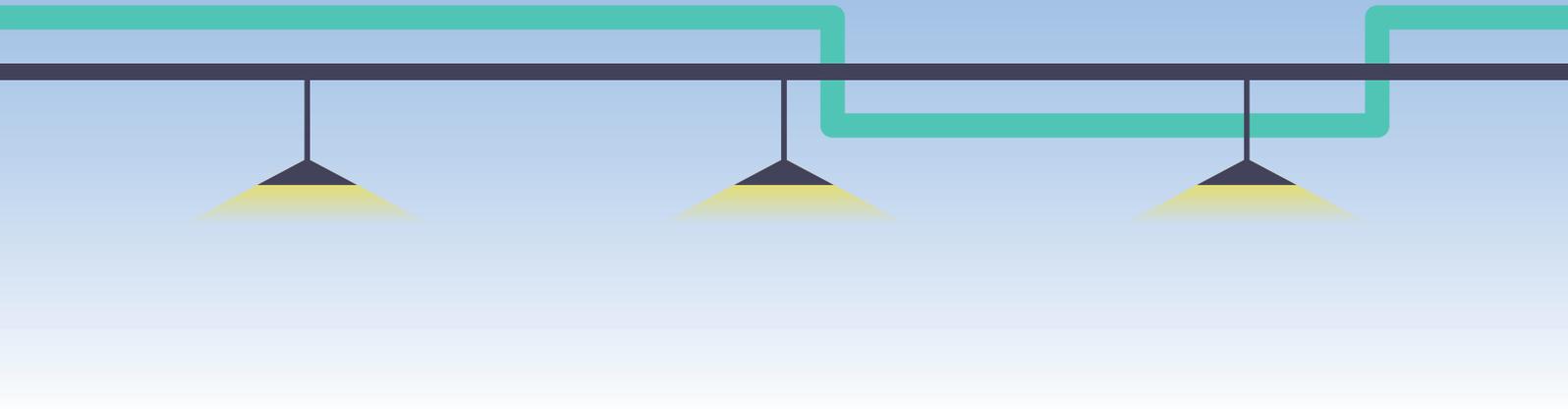
Too many documents and too many interfaces

When documents are stored in various locations, everything takes longer. An industry workplace survey[2] found that the average worker uses **9.4** apps per day. From content searching to editing, sharing, and archiving—all along the content creation process—'app overload' causes small delays that add up incrementally over time, dampening employee productivity. App overload is one of the main reasons workers spend so much time searching for information and is even more pertinent in Office 365. Some project teams may be organizing content in Microsoft Teams or OneDrive for Business, creating further disparity and confusion.

Meanwhile, email remains a leading source of information sharing—**50%** of users check their email more than five times an hour[3]. While this causes problems to holistic project visibility, as we mentioned, it also creates additional steps for the end-user. The process of moving attachments from their Outlook inbox to the appropriate folder or Team Site in SharePoint involves constantly switching between their Outlook inbox and SharePoint. While eating away at their time, it can also become confusing if they must decide between multiple places to store documents.
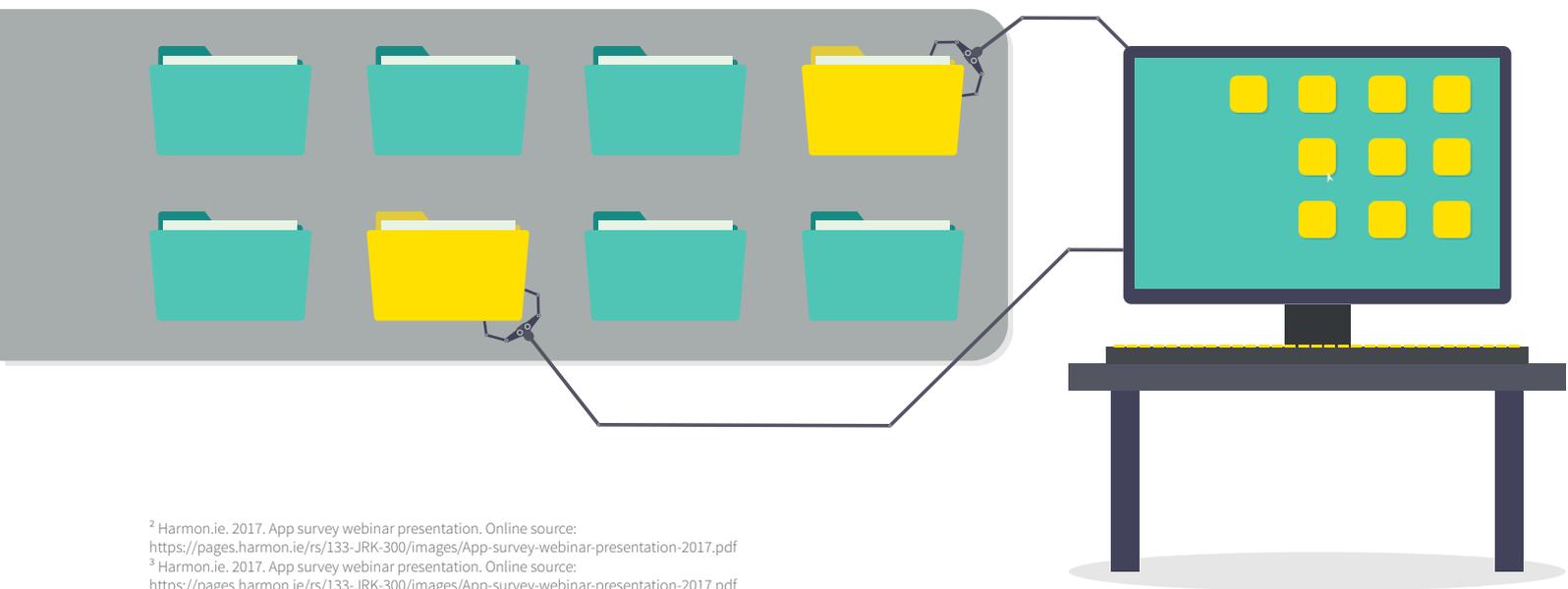
[2] Harmon.ie. 2017. App survey webinar presentation. Online source:
https://pages.harmon.ie/rs/133-JRK-300/images/App-survey-webinar-presentation-2017.pdf
[3] Harmon.ie. 2017. App survey webinar presentation. Online source:
https://pages.harmon.ie/rs/133-JRK-300/images/App-survey-webinar-presentation-2017.pdf
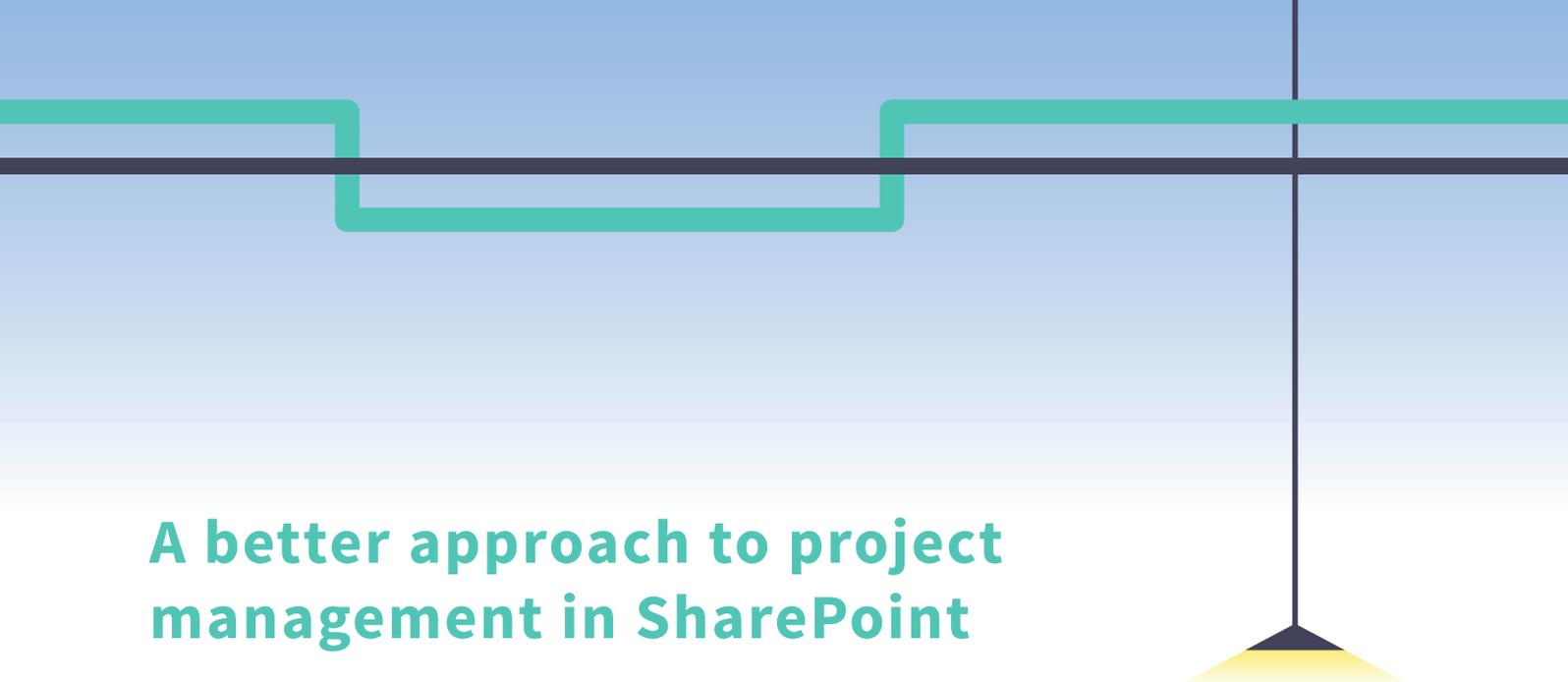
A better approach to project management in SharePoint

With the right solution in hand, project managers can overcome the challenges regarding project visibility and productivity. harmon.ie enriches project management in SharePoint by collating project documents and information in a user's Outlook inbox (where workers already spend the majority of their workday[4]) to help projects run more efficiently.

Let's look at the ways the right solution can improve SharePoint project management.

• User experience

We use more business applications than ever with the belief it is making our working lives easier. In reality, **60%** of workers have too many apps to complete even simple tasks[5]. Project managers and team members that are constantly switching between different applications and interfaces must learn to use multiple user interfaces, and simply cannot complete work as quickly.
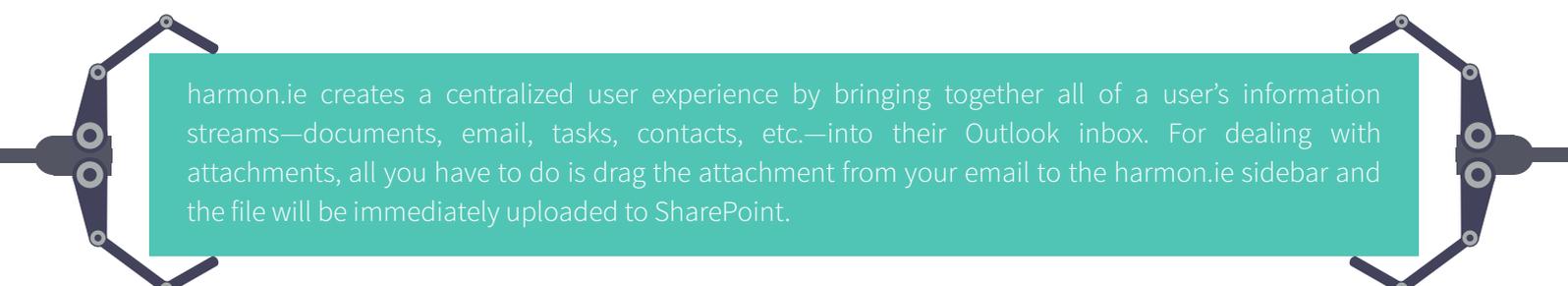
> harmon.ie creates a centralized user experience by bringing together all of a user's information streams—documents, email, tasks, contacts, etc.—into their Outlook inbox. For dealing with attachments, all you have to do is drag the attachment from your email to the harmon.ie sidebar and the file will be immediately uploaded to SharePoint.

A unified user experience is a much easier one for end-users. For project teams, this means information silos are less likely to form, so everyone can be kept updated with the goings-on in the project. For project managers, this makes it much easier to guide and manage projects from start to finish.

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[4] Harmon.ie. 2018. The Office 365 app usage report 2018. Online report: https://pages.harmon.ie/Office365-2018-survey-report-registration.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=blog
[5] Harmon.ie. 2017. App survey webinar presentation. Online source: https://pages.harmon.ie/rs/133-JRK-300/images/App-survey-webinar-presentation-2017.pdf
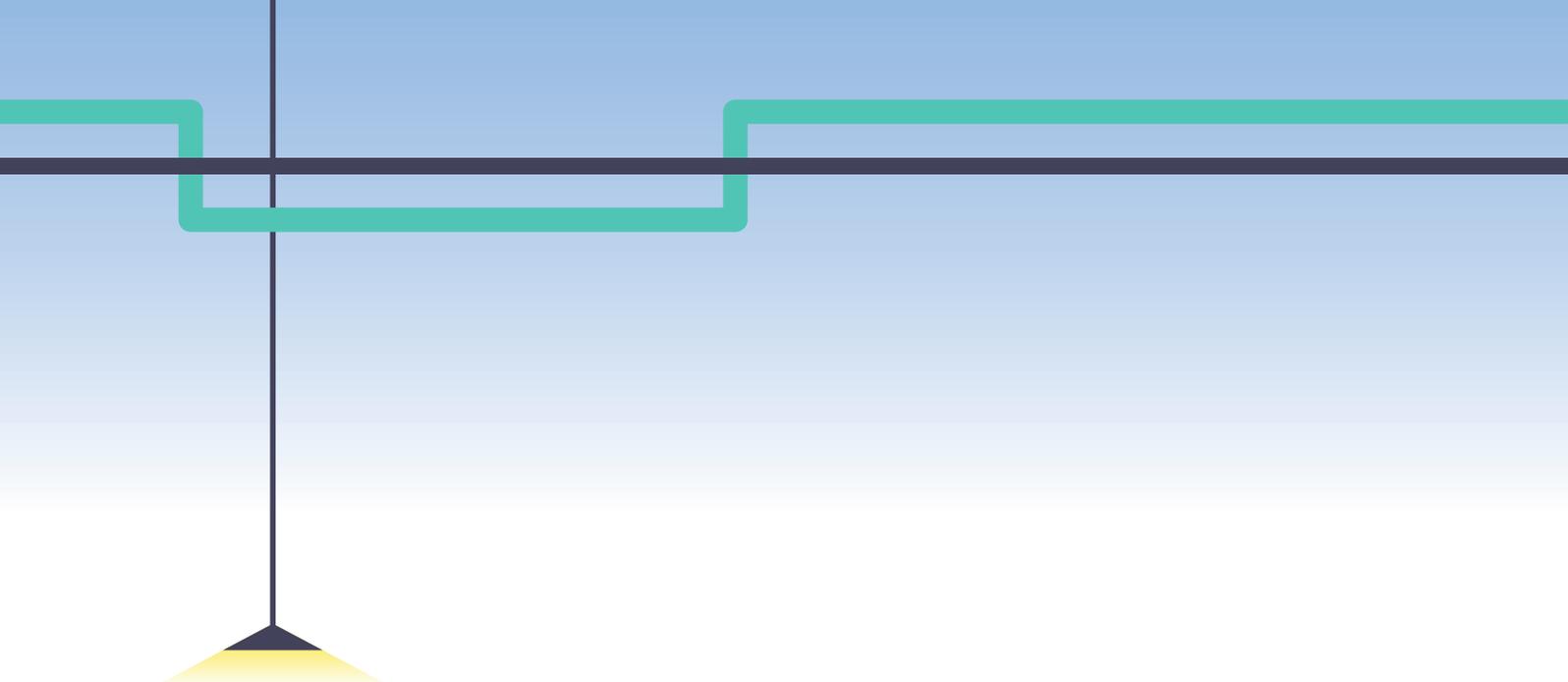
• Information management

Project resources (whether it's money, materials, or worker's time) are expended every time information is exchanged, accessed, or manipulated. Information management regulates this expenditure and is more important than ever as projects increasingly contain more information—all of which must be organized and stored correctly.
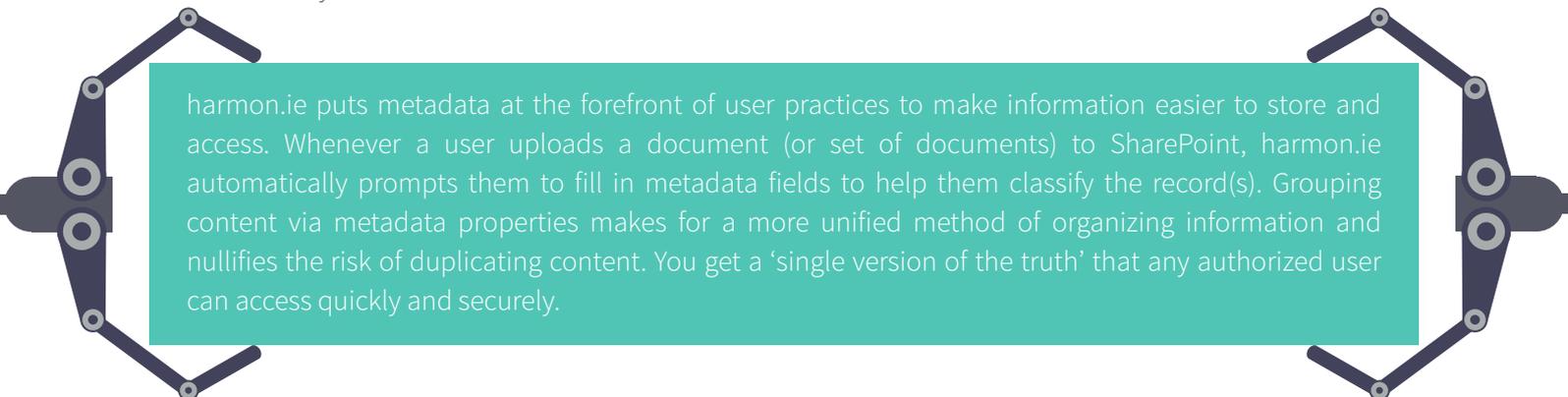
harmon.ie puts metadata at the forefront of user practices to make information easier to store and access. Whenever a user uploads a document (or set of documents) to SharePoint, harmon.ie automatically prompts them to fill in metadata fields to help them classify the record(s). Grouping content via metadata properties makes for a more unified method of organizing information and nullifies the risk of duplicating content. You get a 'single version of the truth' that any authorized user can access quickly and securely.

When searching for project-specific content, time is often of the essence. Metadata-driven search allows users to search for content via the criteria of their choosing, rather than frantically searching for the right document folder or SharePoint site. The more metadata tags you add, the easier your content will be to find. And users are prompted to add tags for every document they upload to ensure the process is performed correctly.
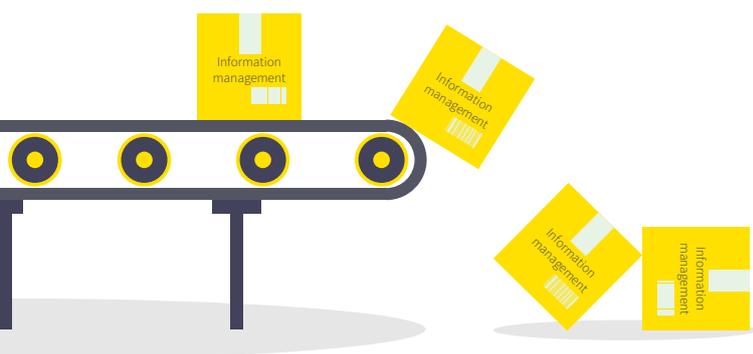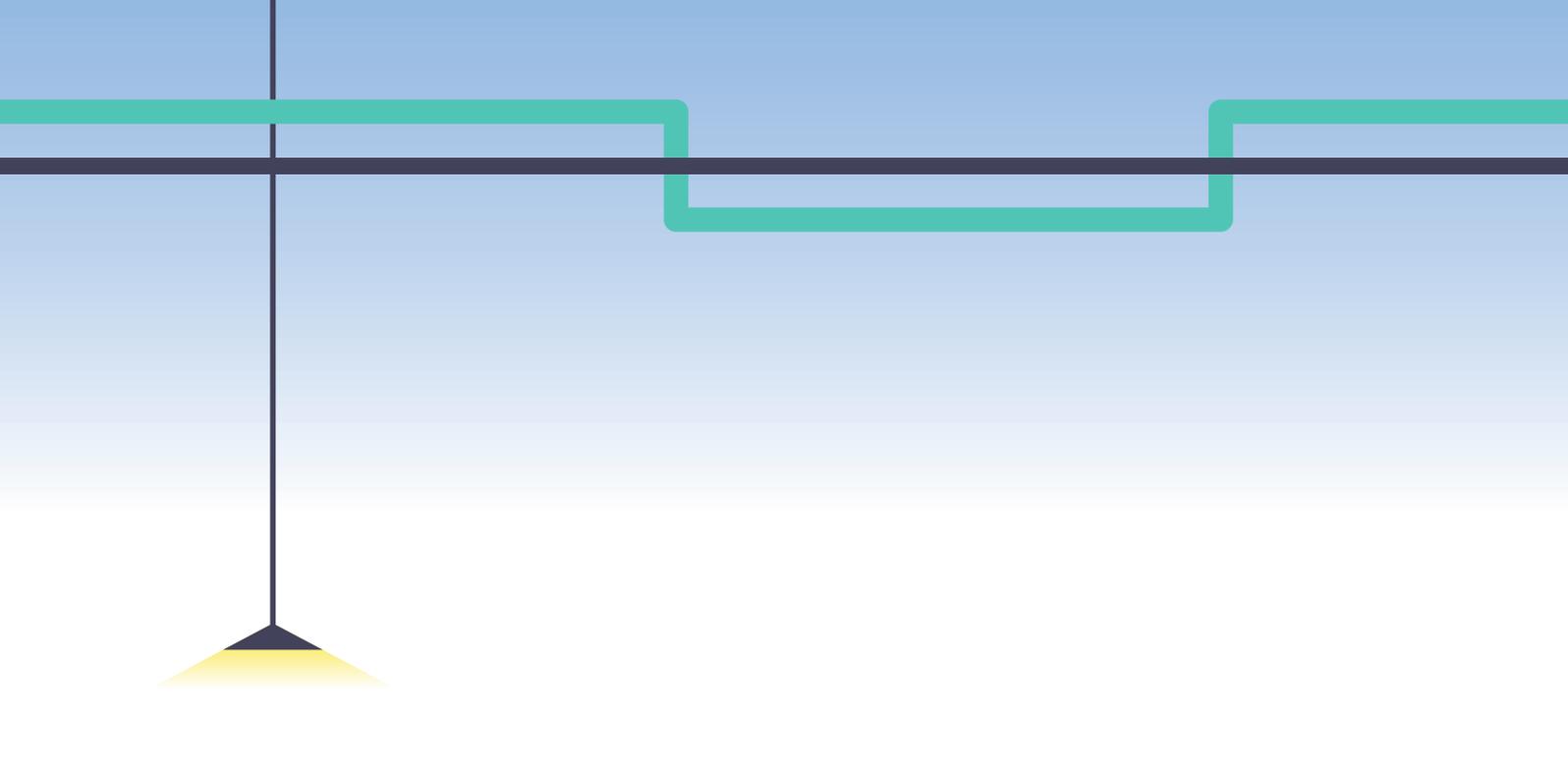
• Contextual working

The case for 'too many apps' stems from the notion that work is completed on a contextual basis. We use Outlook because we need to communicate with colleagues; SharePoint for accessing documents; Calendar for organizing meetings. All with the larger aim of completing the task at hand. But currently this involves the employee finding the content, rather than content finding the employee.
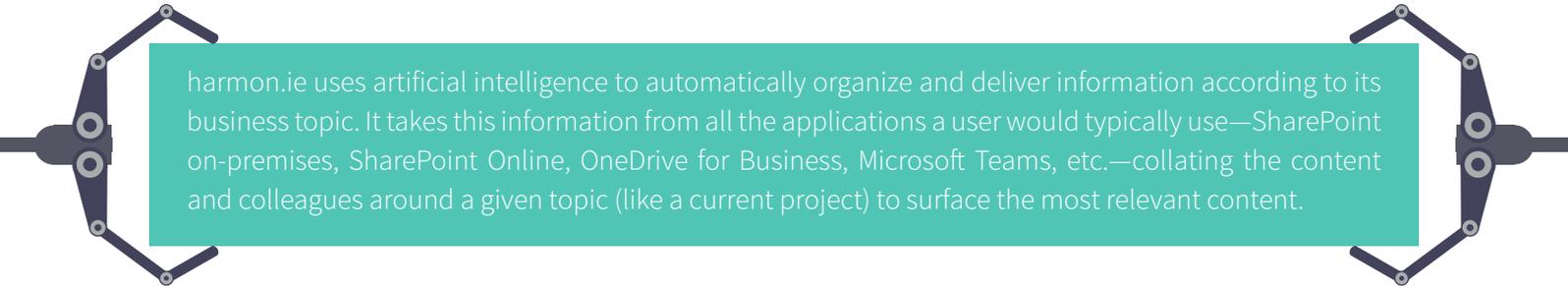
harmon.ie uses artificial intelligence to automatically organize and deliver information according to its business topic. It takes this information from all the applications a user would typically use—SharePoint on-premises, SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business, Microsoft Teams, etc.—collating the content and colleagues around a given topic (like a current project) to surface the most relevant content.

As project managers deal with more projects and team members deal with more specific or complex tasks, context becomes increasingly important. Having the most pressing content and information intelligently pushed to team members empowers them to work on the task at hand. They can also be kept up to date with content around co-workers—like the documents they've most recently been working on—to provide project consistency and keep project teams on the same page.
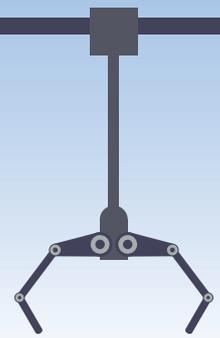
SharePoint, Outlook, harmon.ie

Many project managers choose SharePoint to manage projects, and with good reason. But the platform doesn't have all the necessary collaboration components out-of-the-box, and too often functions as just one of the many parts to the greater 'whole' that is Office 365.

harmon.ie Outlook can greatly improve how content is stored in SharePoint so project teams can access information quicker. harmon.ie is focused on metadata-based search—when metadata has been added, content is easier to find and, because it's layered over the top of a user's Outlook inbox, they don't even have to go to SharePoint to access it.

harmon.ie is the first ever Microsoft Graph application, using natural language processing and sophisticated algorithms within the Microsoft Graph to facilitate contextual working for end-users. harmon.ie gathers relevant apps, content, and information around the task at hand within a user's Outlook window.

When so much time is lost searching for information, project teams that store information intelligently and have relevant information pushed to them can almost eradicate the process of searching for information to save considerable time. Project managers can ensure a centralized space, SharePoint, is maintained for all project-specific information, improving communication, collaboration, and productivity among employees.

To find out more, get in touch with a member of the harmon.ie team today.

www.harmon.ie

+1 800-624-6946 – USA

+49 715 2602 3001 – GER

+44 1494 358340 – UK

+33 1.82.73.07.07 - FR