

LM01_KDD004 - Gmail Labels migration

Status	DECIDED
Owner	Gautier Todeschini, Dawn Lai
Stakeholders	James Kyndt, Frank Bolata, Boris Foiselle



Decision: Option 1: All labels to folder

Decision made by: Business Reps. (GBU/GBS/BSA)

Date: 03 Feb 2026

Online Meeting: Regular updates / Microsoft Transformation Program - GBU/GBS/BSA connection

Issue

Gmail uses a label-based system that supports multiple nested sublabels, while Microsoft 365 relies on a traditional folder hierarchy with different technical constraints.

The migration path is not a 1:1 and a choice has to be made on if/how to replicate this email categorization.

Recommendation

Adopt the **Option 2** "No Labels" approach for the migration which will not create duplicates.

Users should be informed that their Gmail labels will not be preserved.

Background & Context

- Do not consider existing Gmail labels, and migrate all emails in the Outlook Mailbox.
- Consider Gmail labels and duplicate emails to store them in folders and subfolders of Outlook. Ex: if 3 different labels are applied on a Gmail email, 3 copies of this email will be done and each copy will be stored in a different Outlook folder corresponding to each original label.
- In Gmail, labels are tags applied to emails rather than physical boxes.
- Exchange Online use traditional folders, Gmail stores all your mail in one big bucket ("All Mail") and uses labels to filter what you see.

Key Differences

Feature	Labels (Gmail)	Folders (M365)
Location	One email stays in "All Mail".	Email moves to a specific folder.
Quantity	One email can have multiple labels .	One email resides in only one folder .
Archiving	Removes the "Inbox" label; the email remains in "All Mail".	Often moves the email to a separate Archive folder.
Visibility	Email is visible under every label applied to it.	Email is only visible in its designated folder.

Assumptions

- Users will receive guidance and training on the new Outlook folder-based structure.
- Migration tools will successfully move all messages without data loss.

Constraints

- Outlook's folder model cannot fully replicate Gmail labels and hierarchy.
- Migration must fit within defined timelines, limiting extensive pre-migration adjustments.
- Not technically possible in Microsoft FastTrack to limit the number of labels, or to consider only the first label in the email duplication (asked to the MS product team)
- Not technically possible to list all existing labels by mailbox to further assess impacts

Impacts

Users will see changes in how their mail is organized after moving from labels to folders. This can cause confusion, slowdown in daily work and increase in support requests. Mailbox sizes may also increase, creating additional management overhead if storage limits are reached. Clear communication and guidance will be needed to ease the transition.

Options considered

Option 1 “All labels to folder”

For each label applied to an email in Gmail, one copy of the same email is created and stored in a corresponding folder in Outlook. The labels are all converted to Folders/subfolders and the mail is saved in all folder representing all labels. This means every mail will be duplicated by the number of labels attached.

Option 2 “No labels”

Emails are migrated without creating any folder in Outlook, and will all be in the inbox. Labels aren’t migrated at all. All mail lands in a simplified folder structure Inbox. Users lose their Gmail organization, but avoid duplication and hierarchy issues.

Option 3: Migrate labels to Categories **(The technical team has determined that this option is not viable).**

Some 3rd party tools try to transform labels to categories, but the functionality of categories is different from google labels. Categories are mainly a color coding system on items and do not provide a hierarchy as with google labels.

Evaluation

	Option 1 “All labels to folder”	Option 2 “No labels”	Option 3: "Migrate labels to Categories"
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ 124 mailboxes would reach the maximum storage capacity requiring cleaning and specific actions from their owners ➖ More difficult to revert due to duplicates & hierarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ Easy to implement and easy to revert. ➖ 54 mailboxes would reach the maximum storage capacity requiring cleaning and specific actions from their owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ The mobile app has limitations compared to desktop and web versions in terms of Categories. ➖ Users can assign but cannot create, rename or delete categories in the mobile app.
User Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ The “organization” of the mailbox is preserved: employees will find folders ➖ Outlook Folder hierarchy may conflict with the way Gmail labels are structured, resulting in a different folder structure than the initial label structure Degraded search experience (multiple results) Risk to create an “email multiverse” if “variations” of the same email loops are created by following-up on different copies of the same loop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ Clean search experience (single emails, all in the inbox) ➕ Rules can be applied by the users after migration to restructure their mailboxes, in a way that is native to Outlook ➖ All mails will be in inbox and need to be restructured again in the new folder structure Users will be educated to use rules to automate as much as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ To search or filter on categories you need to create a search folder which is not portable so needs to be created on all devices and is not available on mobile app.
Operational Complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ Estimated overall growth of mailbox sized: +30-35% resulting in more recurrent cleaning activities required and more upcoming mailbox size issues to manage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ Leaner approach as data will not be duplicated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ Categories are mostly color coding and not transformed to a folder structure and colors are limited to 25 colors. ➖ No tool can convert nested label hierarchy
GBU /BSA /GBS Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ 7/11 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ 4/11 votes (November 25th "GBU connection" call) 	
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➖ Storage costs could arise on the long term (on top of the operational complexity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➕ Lower Cost and lower environmental impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❓ Cost of the tool needs to be considered, ❓ Implementation time and governance needs to be considered

Champions and IT Pioneers were consulted and both groups voted in majority for Scenario 2, which is also the project's recommendation (leaner and less confusing).

← M365 Champions & Super Champions ▾ 🔍 📄
309 members • Private

in the Outlook inbox, or should they be duplicated and stored in folders?

Scenario 1: for each label applied to an email in Gmail, one copy of the same email is created and stored in a corresponding folder in Outlook

PROs

- The "organization" of the mailbox is preserved; employees will find folders

CONs

- Mailboxes size growth of approximately 30-35% (estimation)
- Degraded search experience (multiple results)
- Risk to create an "email multiverse" if "copies" of the same email copies are created by following-up on different copies of the same topic
- 54 mailboxes would reach the maximum storage capacity requiring cleaning and specific actions from their owners

Decision details

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Scenario 2: emails are migrated without creating any folder in Outlook, and will all be in the inbox

Project orientation

- Leaner approach as data will not be duplicated
- Clean search experience (single emails, all in the inbox)
- Labels can be applied by the users after migration to restructure their mailboxes
- More easily reversible, simpler technical migration

- Existing label structure will not be replicated in Outlook
- 54 mailboxes would reach the maximum storage capacity requiring cleaning and specific actions from their owners

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← IT Pioneers ▾ 🔍 📄
290 members • All of Syensqo

committee makes a final decision in January, we would like to gather your input. To " use either of the two emojis available

Thank you for your collaboration.

Gmail labels are not migrated: should emails stay unique and be all stored in the Outlook inbox, or should they be duplicated and stored in folders?

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See also

The following section describes relevant documentation:

Description	Repository
Workshop presentation	1.3 Teams & Collaboration Design
Workshop meeting minutes	Workshop meeting minutes
HLD: 6.Collaboration, page 99, 6.6Onedrive Sync page 103	1. SYEN SQO-Microsoft365 High-Level Design v1.docx

Version	Published	Changed By	Comment
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CURRENT (v. 18)	Feb 19, 2026 11:50	CHUDZIAK-ext, Aleksander	
v. 17	Feb 18, 2026 12:43	CHUDZIAK-ext, Aleksander	
v. 16	Feb 18, 2026 09:18	CHUDZIAK-ext, Aleksander	Reverted from v. 14
v. 15	Feb 17, 2026 14:06	CHUDZIAK-ext, Aleksander	
v. 14	Feb 13, 2026 15:00	CHUDZIAK-ext, Aleksander	

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