The
INTRANET
MANAGEMENT
HANDBOOK

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Managing intranets: opportunities and challenges

Life in a workflow world

Our working day is an array of processes, procedures and workflows. It might start as soon as we swipe a security card through the door to the office, continue with completing an application for a corporate training course and end up with submitting a form to claim travel expenses. Some of these processes are automated. Whenever we send an e-mail a disclaimer appears at the end without any need to write it out every time. Most of the procedures are in place because of a need to satisfy compliance and regulatory requirements, especially with regard to any financial or personnel decision. Even quite a small organization will have a number of information technology (IT) systems, all of which are based around workflows and databases. Business analysts and developers may well have interviewed us and spent many months working out every possible workflow variation so that these applications can be successfully designed and implemented.

All these procedures and workflows capture data that somewhere along the line may be used to make a business decision. Often this decision is based on aggregated data, perhaps about employee costs or the number of calls to a Help Desk. In aggregating the data and placing it in context, information has been created. Hopefully, there are also processes in place to archive the information, completing an information life cycle that could be made up of many individual processes.

No matter how many systems are in place, and how many procedures are developed, they will never cover every eventuality. Most systems in organizations are designed to collect information, not to distribute it around the organization. When working for an organization with operations in even one other country the systems complexity is substantially increased. We may find an Excel spreadsheet of revenues by customer but is it in euros or sterling? Are they US dollars or Canadian dollars? Is the spreadsheet the latest version? Who can we call to check on the data in one of the cells?

The result is that there are a very large number of informal processes that are not supported by an IT system or even subject to compliance and regulatory oversight. An office may have moved its location, there is a new managing director at a subsidiary company, and the date of the office party has been changed. In any organization, every day there are changes and additions to the information that people depend on to carry out their work in a way that is both satisfying and contributes to the organization.

The answer, in any organization that has an intranet, is to publish all this information on the intranet, where it joins thousands of other items of information for which there is often no defined workflow, or process, but which could be important in some way to the effective operation of the organization. That is how intranets usually start and how, in most organizations, they continue to operate – just a very large notice board on which people place information notes in a range of formats, but never get around to taking them down when the information is no longer current or accurate. Someone gets the task of just keeping an eye on the intranet until the day comes that a senior manager relies on information on the intranet to make an important decision, and finds that the information is inaccurate. The call goes out to Human Resources (HR) to find an intranet manager.

The intranet opportunity

What is the value of an intranet to an organization? The first intranet management challenge is that it is all things to all people. To some it is a communications channel, to others a place to work with members of a team. It might offer employee self-service applications or ensure that the organization is compliant with industry and government regulations. The diversity of use is as wide as the diversity of users, and yet all are using the same intranet application.[1]

NetJMC's report *Global Intranet Trends 2009*[2] highlighted five features that were common to high-performance intranets. As a way of opening up discussions with senior directors and intranet managers about the value of an intranet, I adapted this approach and added a sixth feature, to come up with the schematic in Figure 1.1 of how an intranet adds value to an organization.
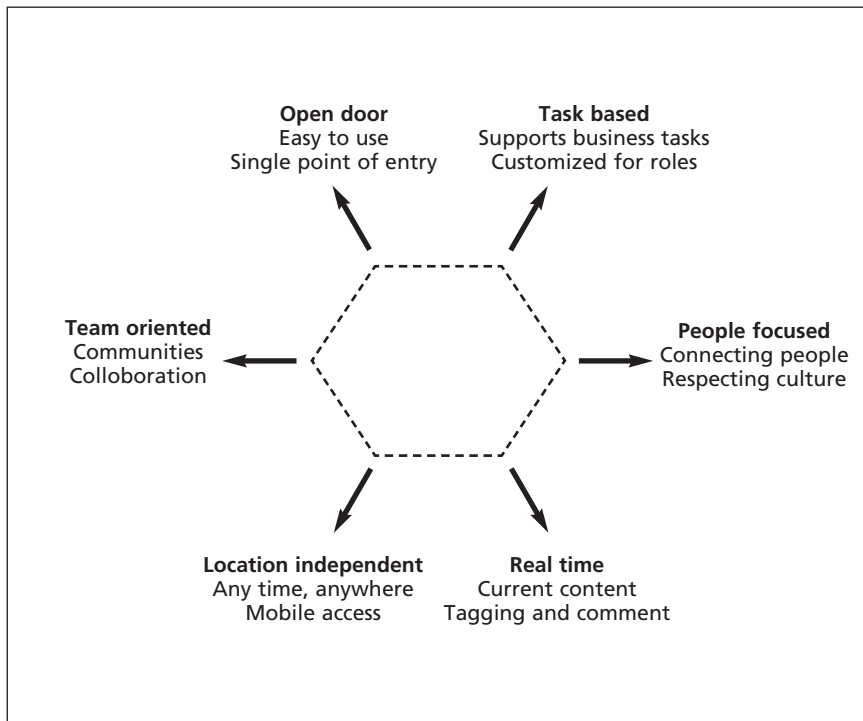

Open door
Easy to use
Single point of entry

Task based
Supports business tasks
Customized for roles

Team oriented
Communities
Colloboration

People focused
Connecting people
Respecting culture

Location independent
Any time, anywhere
Mobile access

Real time
Current content
Tagging and comment

Figure 1.1 How an intranet adds value to an organization

In one global IT company I was working for, the corporate strategy had the following core elements:

- Empower people
- Work smart
- Innovate
- Customer first
- Create value.

Superimposing these values on the hexagon model resulted in Figure 1.2. This diagram immediately showed how the intranet was core to the achievement of corporate objectives and how investment in the intranet would have a substantial impact on the company.
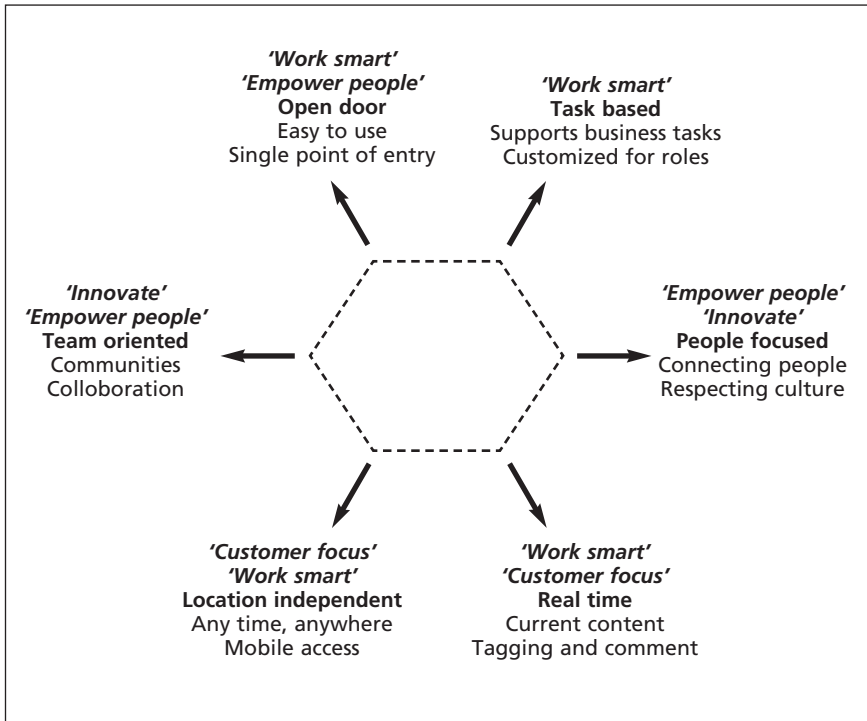

Figure 1.2 Corporate objectives for an intranet

Life as an intranet manager

I doubt that there will be a single reader of this book who set out on their career path determined to be an intranet manager. Intranet managers have a very diverse range of backgrounds, starting in IT, web design, librarianship, communications or marketing. Somewhere along the road they become involved in some way with the organization's intranet, perhaps as a content contributor for a department or subsidiary. Then the day arrives when the opportunity comes to take on the role of managing the intranet. Probably no other position gives someone the chance to be directly involved in all the business activities of the organization, providing an application that everyone with a desktop PC will probably see at the start of every working day and make use of throughout the day and throughout their career in the organization.

Official UK government statistics (Office for National Statistics) indicate that there were at least 50,000 intranets in businesses at the end of 2008[3] – and that would exclude many public sector organizations. So that means there are least 50,000 intranet managers, though few will have that title or have the intranet as their only responsibility. Many intranet managers are also responsible for other activities in their department, and find it difficult to prioritize their work when departmental work has to take precedence over the enterprise-wide responsibility for the intranet. It is likely that they will have seen the intranets of only a few other organizations, and will have only a limited idea of what can be achieved with an intranet, and what is regarded as good practice.

In most organizations the intranet is accessible to all employees working at a desk, and perhaps also to many employees working in manufacturing and customer-facing roles, through specialized terminals and kiosks. Other than e-mail and office productivity applications such as MS Office, it is probably the only application that is open to all employees, and so is a very 'high touch' application. The intranet home page may well be automatically loaded when the PC is switched on, so that there is not even the need to add a password or to click on an icon to open it. It is a pervasive application, and yet often receives minimal support, investment or governance.

There are two reasons for this benign attitude to the intranet. The first is that the organization does not appreciate that information is an asset. The other assets are all the responsibility of senior managers. HR looks after staff as an asset and Finance looks after the money, and may well take the lead on managing buildings and other physical facilities. IT may have a view that it is managing information, but the reality is that it is managing the technology infrastructure and not the content infrastructure. Not only is no one directly responsible for managing information as an asset, but this asset does not appear on the balance sheet.

The second reason is that the intranet is a stealth application. In the course of a working day perhaps 50% of employees may use the intranet to locate information or another employee. They have perhaps been online for only a few seconds, a period of time which would cause great anxiety to a web manager. In that few seconds on a well-designed and managed intranet the employee has found the information they need to move on in their task. They may then send an e-mail to someone they have identified in the staff directory, but it will almost certainly not start with 'I found you using the intranet'. In a large company perhaps tens of thousands of pieces of information are found each day using the intranet, and yet there is no visible trace of all this activity.

A key task for an intranet manager is to make the invisible transactions visible, and that is why Chapter 15, on measuring user satisfaction, is one of the longest chapters in this book.

The challenges of intranet management

In theory, intranet management should be very straightforward. It is about keeping information, technology and governance in balance (Figure 1.3):
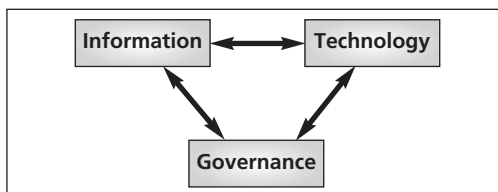

Figure 1.3 Keeping information, technology and governance in balance

Information

This needs to be of the highest possible quality and relevance to the business requirements of the organization. This requires a very clear view of what these requirements are. The moment the intranet becomes a dumping ground for anything that does not have a home in another enterprise system, and there are no quality standards, users will lose trust in the intranet and use other connections.

Governance

This should set out the objectives, standards, operational processes, resources and plans for the intranet. The issue here is keeping a balance between the mandatory (e.g. each page to have the name of the content contributor) and the advisory (e.g. in general, lists should be ordered in an alphabetical sequence). However, a mandatory requirement for which there is no 'penalty' for non-conformance just becomes advisory.

Technology

This sets out the way in which the technology will support access to the information, according to the principles set out in the governance framework. In practice, intranets are often technology driven, and here SharePoint is a good example of where the technology may not be appropriate to all intranet requirements. If, in the wider interests of the organization, SharePoint (or an IBM Web Sphere portal) is the default platform, then the governance processes have to take this into account, and the way in which information is published may have to be reviewed.

In practice, the situation is complicated by the range of stakeholders (Figure 1.4).

In the case of an intranet one of the unique challenges is that there are two user communities. There is the community of users who access the intranet to retrieve information, and there is the user community that contributes to the
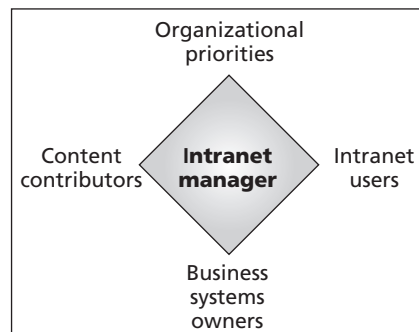

Figure 1.4 Intranet stakeholders

intranet. This is a critically important front-office/back-office relationship. In virtually all other IT-based applications content is added as part of the workflow; for example, submitting a purchase order, or applying for a new computer. This is usually not the case with an intranet, and the scale of content contribution is often invisible to all except the individual content contributors, who are rarely rewarded with even the recognition that their work is additional to all the other tasks they undertake for the organization.

Add in changing organizational priorities and the need to work closely with the IT and business owners of other systems, and it becomes obvious that the core skill of an intranet manager might well be as a negotiator, trying to move the intranet forward while balancing the interests of all the stakeholders.

A framework for intranet management

There is currently no professional certification for intranet managers. There are certainly many events with a workshop format, and a number of larger events that take place around the world each year. There are many intranet communities that seem to be growing rapidly in size and value. However, none of these events supports anything close to a structured course in intranet management. Intranet managers have to learn on the job, and only in very large organizations will there be other intranet managers to guide and mentor someone taking on this role for the first time.

The objective of this book is to provide a framework for the competencies that an intranet manager probably needs to have if they are to be able not just to cope with the challenges of managing the diverse and often divergent needs of stakeholders, but also to positively thrive on the opportunity they now have to make a substantial contribution to the development of the organization.

However, this is not intended to be primarily an academic textbook but a practical handbook for intranet managers at whatever stage of maturity they, or the intranet they are responsible for, have reached.

The book is divided into four parts:

Part 1 Foundations
 1 Managing intranets: opportunities and challenges
 2 Defining user requirements
 3 Making a business case
 4 Developing a content strategy
 5 Enhancing collaboration

Part 2 Technology
 6 Managing rechnology
 7 Specifying and selecting software
 8 Using Microsoft SharePoint for intranets

Part 3 Operational planning
 9 Establishing the intranet team
10 Managing intranet projects
11 Evaluating risks
12 Conforming to compliance requirements
13 Enhancing the user experience
14 Marketing the intranet
15 Measuring user satisfaction

Part 4 Governance and strategy
16 Creating the governance framework
17 Developing an intranet strategy
18 From intranets to information management.

Arguably, intranet design should be part of this management framework, but that topic, as it deserves, now has a book in its own right: *Designing Intranets*, by James Robertson.[4]

Resource lists
At the end of each chapter there is a short list of websites and other resources that provide additional commentary and insight on the topics

that have been covered. These resources can also be found at:

www.intranetfocus.com

where new and revised resources will also be listed.

Resources

1   Nielsen Norman Group: www.nngroup.com. Although perhaps better known for work on web usability, the Nielsen Norman Group has a significant intranet design and usability practice. *Intranet Design Annual* provides ten detailed profiles of intranets.

2   McConnell, J., *Global Intranet Trends*, http://netjmc.com. This report is published annually and provides a baseline into the way in which intranets are having an impact on the organization.

3   Office for National Statistics (2008) *Statistical Bulletin: E-Commerce and information and communication technology (ICT) activity 2008*.

4   Step Two Designs: www.steptwo.com.au. For over a decade James Robertson and his colleagues at Step Two Designs, an intranet consultancy based in Sydney, Australia, have published a wide range of reports on all aspects of intranet management. *Designing Intranets* was published in 2010.