

The Impact of Intranets on Employee Engagement

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In one of my previous columns I explored [how to engage employees as contributors and users of the intranet](#). Increasingly discussions with non-information managers in organisations show they are more interested in using the potential of intranets to engage staff with each other and with the ethos of the organisation.

This is important in the day-to-day life of an organisation, when intranet tools can enhance the collaboration experience and excite staff to find ways of making the mission of their organisation a reality in face-to-face as well as virtual environments. But it becomes even more transformative when the organisation's strategy is for change, and change managers hope to use the intranet as a lever for that change.

This angle on intranets is one that suppliers are taking increasingly seriously, although with my cynical hat on I wonder if they will all soon be willy-nilly promising features that will ensure engagement, in the way some of them did with collaboration! With justification to an extent of course: 4th generation intranets are very suited to collaboration, and equally, once employees are using intranets there are already many features in modern intranets to help them engage with each other and the ethos of the organisation.

It's clear that staff engagement in organisations can be eroded by change and uncertainty: trust can drop off as people see their roles changed, structural redundancies occurring and a bewildering change in leadership signals as the organisation tries to redefine itself in real time.

A 2013 [Gallup report on the global workplace](#) suggests that lack of employee engagement costs the UK economy £53 - £72 billion per year. There is no suggestion of course that intranet-inspired improvements in engagement can recoup such vast figures but they give a clear indication of the environment in which a contribution can be made. The slide deck from an excellent presentation by [Stephan Schillerwein](#) at last year's Congress Intranet gives many more interesting figures than I have the space to repeat here.

Intranet benefits

So what are the benefits of intranets that can be used to encourage employees to "get with" the mission of their organisations, act as valuable team members and contribute in the committed and creative ways that are necessary for the modern economy to thrive?

Communication

For those without frequent meetings to attend or who are nervous about speaking in front of their peers, discussion forums and the comment fields in blogs provide a safe (ish)

environment in which their voices can be heard, and their sense of powerlessness reduced. The boost to self-esteem of having a comment responded to, in the more controlled digital environment can result in a very much increased sense of belonging in the real organisation.

Celebration

Real time, or near real time, decentralised editing of intranets can provide a news channel for work successes that doesn't have to have the heavy branding of central departments which tended to predominate in the early days of intranets. It can be an inclusive influence, providing an easy flow of encouraging stories and celebrations which can inspire employees to feel part of the common effort without the need to be a branded "company man/woman"

Problem sharing

Just as intranets can encourage the sharing of successes, they can enable and normalise the sharing of problems, replacing a "succeed or fail" environment with one of "experiment, share and learn" which is more conducive to creativity and thinking outside the box. This in turn helps to break down the silos in the workplace that can do so much to stifle innovation and stultify the more inquisitive minds, which can feel discouraged and disengaged in anything resembling a "command and control" environment.

Gamification

Facilities on your intranet, which encourage employees to treat work more playfully, with associated competitive and accelerated learning behaviours, can increase a feeling of regard for the organisation and engagement with its goals and activities. If I was writing this in 2010 I would replace "can" with "surely does", but recent reports including one by Gartner in 2014 cast doubt on the idea that gamification always works. Indeed Gartner predicted that by the end of 2014 80 percent of all gamification investments would fall short of the returns predicted for them. Whether this was because of inflated optimism in the early days, or a miscalculation of the applicability of gamification in particular circumstances it is hard to say, but it is still a useful arrow in the quiver of those tasked with increasing engagement.

Flexible working

It is well understood how intranets, along with mobile technology and social media make it much easier for employees to effectively work away from the physical office. Despite the doubts of many traditional managers in the 1990s, staff can generally be trusted to be as committed to delivery against objectives at home as they are in open plan office environments. Here's what Wayne Clarke of [Best Companies](#) says about flexible working:

"We did some specific work looking at the effect of flexible benefits on employee engagement. We looked at everything from health club memberships to profit-related pay to crèche schemes for kids. The only benefit we found that seemed to affect engagement scores was flexible working... if you have a flexible working culture, it means you've probably got a culture of trust... a culture where your managers get on and believe that people can work under their own steam".

A final word on a germane topic that has been mentioned before in these columns and seems relevant to intranets' role in successful employee encouragement. Intranets as distinct features of the digital landscape at work seem to be becoming less visible: I have seen many instances of employees doubting their organisation runs an intranet while they are actually using it! This is explained mostly by the growth of the digital workplace, coupled with the increased fluency with which employees use and adapt to digital facilities. This increasing ease makes it more possible for staff to treat digital features as just "part of the way we do things" and to adopt and flourish in the collaborative benefits they offer - and this in turn helps build engagement in anything those facilities, including the intranet, exemplify.