

INTRANET EFFECTIVENES IN LARGE CORPORATION (AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE)

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Abstract

The research reported in this paper looks at satisfaction with the intranet and the importance of information sources in a large corporation in Australia. 1251 subscribers to the intranet took part in the survey. This research has revealed that intranet is a major provider of information in this particular corporation. The participants of the survey indicated that the intranet should be able to make it easier to find and use information to its subscriber, as well as to satisfy its users with the quality of information provided, and its design. On the other hand the research has also revealed that the most important information sources include e-mail, local (C:) or network (G, H), the intranet, personal connections/network, document management or storage system, briefing from the manager, etc. Finally, this research has indicated that there is a significant relationship between the intranet on one hand and the importance of access to information; the ease of finding and using information; the satisfaction with the quality of information it provides; etc., on the other.

Keywords: Intranet, Satisfaction, Effectiveness, Australia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Technology presents many opportunities to improve the quality and the accurate delivery of information products, processes and or services. A part of that technology, the intranet, can be viewed as an information utility for the enterprise, where users can find what they need, from documents to e-mail to data to audio and video. Using the standards of the Internet (SMTGP, WWW, FTP, etc.) users can access corporate and department information (Perry, 1998).

The intranet, as “an information space that supports exclusive sharing of information among a prescribed community of users - typically members of an organization – (Karlsbjerg et.al., 2003.), is being deployed more and more every year, with features and functions growing dramatically but not as fast as vendors might have hoped (Kaplan, 2002). This indicates that many firms who are intranet enabled do have further requirements from intranet implementations, as well as are not happy with its effectiveness.

One of the most important characteristics for the intranet is to be effective and easy to use. Although the artistic appreciation is a subjective interpretation, the internet and its vast capacity for high quality

images allow the developer to add features to suit the application. The graphical content, for example, is aimed at improving the aesthetic qualities of the program and ultimately increasing the satisfaction of the user (Ngo, 2001). Although the interpretation of the artistic perspective of the web site is individual, aesthetic improvements to the web site the question is whether this influences effectiveness or simply enhances usability.

Bruno, Tam and Thom (2005) are of the opinion that “Usability is affected by the type of task and its complexity, the interaction style used to perform the actions and the design of the interface. All these characteristics directly affect the learnability, efficiency of use and subject satisfaction.”

The exploration of effectiveness within the intranet space includes the ways of how to create a medium where an interpretation for corporate and individuals is realized and all possibilities of improvement is investigated.

A “creative usable Site” according to Begbie and Chudry (2002) is a combination of usability control and knowledge management control. Therefore a balance of creativity along with rigidity of design principles is required in creating an effective and usable web site/intranet. This leads to the question: is usability and effectiveness interchangeable? Anecdotal evidence to date indicates that usability and effectiveness are mutually interchangeable in the instance of interface design. Where a system such as the intranet is explored the context is altered and usability and effectiveness are different.

Usability is exclusively concerned with system interface design, and its attributes “the user, the task, the technology and context of use” (Bruno, V., and Al- Qaimari, 2004). These usability attributes are prevalent in any system irrespective of the development platform. Furthermore, the intranet with its ability to revolutionize organizations and how tasks and systems are accessed is gaining in the way important information is being disseminated within organisations.

Several researches have studied intranets and their impacts on organizations within the dialogue of intranet effectiveness, and developed their check lists or methods for intranet evaluation (Pitt, 2003, Eckerson, 1999). Pitt (2003), for example, emphasizes the collaborative nature of the intranet and dedicates the framework to establishing how collaborative the intranet is and its aspects of knowledge sharing. Jacoby (2002), on the other hand highlights the business aspects such as agility, better decisions, more creativity, new opportunity and loyalty value. He also adds metrics such as satisfaction measures and content, as well as the ease of navigation.

In the next section we outline the methodology of the research, followed by section 3 Analysis. The findings of the research are discussed in section 4, followed by sections 5 and 6 that present conclusion, and limitations and further research, respectively.

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research has been to investigate the effectiveness of the intranet of a large corporation in Australia. After researching through the current literature covering the effectiveness of the internet, several in depth interviews were held with the leader of the knowledge management department in an Australian corporation. The finding from interviews regarding the importance of the sources of information, and satisfaction with the company intranet; together with the findings from the literature formed a base for a survey questionnaire. The participants were asked to answer the questions using a five point Likert scale, or text responses.

The incumbent organization is a large Australian Publicly listed company that has approximately 45,960 subscribers to an intranet. The company operates in several countries and is aggressive with its growth targets. The number of respondents was randomly selected from the population where N = 6000, all duplicates removed which reduced the sample size to 5,394. The mail application program is limited to dispatch of 4,999 surveys. The survey commenced on the 3rd of February 2006 and 4,688 emails were successfully sent. The survey concluded on the 10th of February at Close of Business.

The part of the research reported in this paper is focused on participants' satisfaction with the intranet, as well as on and the importance of information sources in the corporation. These two main questions were comprised of sets of sub questions as follows:

1. How satisfied are you with the intranet
 - a. For your work overall, how important is access to information?
 - b. When you need to find and use information, does the intranet make it easier?
 - c. How satisfied are you with the quality of the information on the intranet?
 - d. How satisfied are you with the amount of time it takes you to find the information on the intranet?
 - e. How satisfied are you with the design ('look and fell') of the intranet?
 - f. Overall, do you think the intranet has improved over the last twelve months?

2. How important are the following as sources of information for you to do your work?
 - a. Briefing from your manager
 - b. Document management storage systems
 - c. E-mail
 - d. External sources
 - e. Hard-copy/printed
 - f. The intranet
 - g. Your local (C:) or network (G, H)
 - h. Your personal connections/network
 - i. Other

The collated data was analysed using SPSS software. The analyses performed included computing ranking order, using median as primary and mean as secondary measure; and the Correlation Analysis. As the acquired data was non parametric the computation of median as primary measure and mean

only as secondary measure was appropriate. For the same reason the non parametric correlation analysis was performed.

3 ANALYSIS

In order to establish the rank order of the responses to question 1, median and mean of the acquired data was computed. The rank order is presented in Table 1.

Rank	Question	Median	Mean
1	For your work overall, how important is access to information?	5.0000	4.4604
2	When you need to find and use information, does the intranet make it easier?	5.0000	4.3805
3	How satisfied are you with the quality of the information on the intranet?	4.0000	4.1047
4	How satisfied are you with the 'look and fell' of the intranet?	4.0000	3.9033
5	Overall, do you think the intranet has improved over the last twelve months?	4.0000	3.8042
6	How satisfied are you with the amount of time it takes you to find the information on the intranet?	4.0000	3.5604

Table 1. Rank order of participants' satisfaction with the intranet.

In order to establish the rank order of the responses to question 2, median and mean of the acquired data was computed. The rank order is presented in Table 2.

Rank	Question	Median	Mean
1	E-mail	5.0000	4.8257
2	Your local (C:) or network (G, H)	5.0000	4.5500
3	The intranet	5.0000	4.5292
4	Your personal connections/network	5.0000	4.3693
5	Document management or storage system	4.0000	4.1343
6	Briefing from your manager	4.0000	4.1103
7	External sources	4.0000	3.8122
8	Hard-copy/printed	4.0000	3.6147
9	Other	4.0000	3.6133

Table 2. Rank order of participants' importance of information sources.

In order to find out if there is any relationship between the responses to questions 1 and 2, the correlation analysis was performed. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 3.

Satisfaction with the intranet	Importance of the sources of information	Correlation coefficient	P - value
For your work overall, how important is access to information?	The intranet	.353	.000
When you need to find and use information, does the intranet make it easier?	The intranet	.319	.000
How satisfied are you with the quality of the information on the intranet?	The intranet	.241	.000
How satisfied are you with the design ('look and feel') of the intranet?	The intranet	.200	.000

Table 3. *The results of Correlation Analysis.*

4 FINDINGS

Out of 4,999 survey questionnaires distributed to the participants, 1,251 valid responses were received. The response rate of 26.7% was seen as satisfactory.

The analysis of the acquired data regarding the satisfaction with the intranet shows that the access to information to the corporation employees is the most important. The respondents have ranked the ability of the intranet to make it easier to find and use information, very high as well. The analysis also shows that the satisfaction with the quality of information on the intranet, and satisfaction with the design ('look and feel') of the intranet scored very well, earning them 3rd and 4th place in ranking order respectively. The improvement of the intranet over the last 12 months, and the satisfaction with the amount of time it takes to find information on the intranet, have scored 5th and 6th place respectively.

The analysis of the acquired data regarding the importance of information sources shows that e-mail is the most important information source for the participants. The second most important source is employees' local and network drives. The intranet and personal connections/network have scored third and fourth place respectively. It is followed with document management or storage systems, and briefing from the manager at 5th and 6th position respectively. The last three positions on the rank order are reserved for the external source, hard-copy/printed sources, and other information sources.

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that there is relationship between the importance of the intranet as the source of information, and the level of satisfaction with the intranet. More particularly, there is a moderate correlation between the importance of accessing information and the intranet. There is also a moderate correlation between the intranet and easier way of finding and using information.

On the other hand there is a weak, but nevertheless statistically significant, correlation between the intranet and the level of satisfaction with the quality of the information on the intranet. Very similar

correlation exists between the intranet and the level of satisfaction with the design ('look and feel') of the intranet.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this paper was conducted within a large corporation employing more than 45,000 employees. The useable responses from 1,251 participants make this research significant.

The major findings from this research suggest that corporations should be more aware of the internet's ability to make it easier to find and use information to its subscribers, thus proving its ability to be a major provider of information to their employees. The findings of this research also show that intranet has the ability to satisfy its users with the quality of information provided, and with its design ('look and feel'), etc.

On the other hand, the research has shown that the most important information sources include e-mail, local(C:) or network (G, H), the intranet; followed by personal connections/network, document management or storage system, and briefing from the manager manager, etc.

The research has also shown that significant relationships exist between the intranet on one hand and the importance of access to information, the ease of finding and using information, and the satisfaction with the quality of information it provides, on the other.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitation of this research is the fact that it was conducted within one corporation in Australia, therefore its findings could not be generalised. Nevertheless, it has surveyed more than 12 hundred internet subscribers, which makes findings significant, regardless of the fact that they all are from the same corporation.

It is our plan to conduct similar research in a few large corporations in Australia, as well as in corporations overseas.

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