

# Intranet: A medium of internal communication and training

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**Abstract.** In addition to knowledge, the flow of information or efficient organisational communication is an essential condition for the successfulness of every organisation. Although the ideal vertical and horizontal communication is difficult to achieve, training-informational centres and special libraries should also strive to achieve this goal. Advantages of available communication technology, especially the Intranet, should be taken for this purpose as much as possible. The control of the field of management or knowledge transfer is a complex problem, which is practically unmanageable without the tool for knowledge dissemination. This is the reason why portals are used more and more. It is common to them that these are starting pages, where basic information is gathered in a condensed form; portals are starting points for more detailed information. They function on the basis of the technology supported by browsers. The topic of this paper is the development of an organisation in the process of learning, especially the need analysis of an organisation and setting up of a training portal as a tool for Intranet training, submission and flow of information.

Keywords: Intranet, organisational communication, training, training portal, library

## 1. Introduction

We live in the economy of knowledge, where human capital is essentially more important than physical capital. Generating, submitting, storing and efficient integration of knowledge represent an important source of value added in company's internal organisation and mainly at productivity of an individual employee, who in this way becomes an information catalyst. Organisations provide for the sufficient level of information "availability" with the use of different methods and media. This paper focuses on the Intranet, which has reached a high level of development in the last decade.

Why is it important to set up the Intranet platform in a modern organisation? Already at the beginning we can emphasize two advantages at least, which cannot be found at traditional libraries nor the Internet.

First, the Intranet permits focusing of knowledge on a specific field, with which the organisation mostly deals with. In this case the Intranet is close to traditional libraries because with the restricted access, which is not provided by the Internet, employees can get all materials, which they need for work. It is possible to define selectively the type of materials, which will be available to employees, with different levels of protection. Such centralisation of knowledge eliminates well-known problems connected with the Internet, e.g., too many resources, loss of time at searching for information, etc.

Secondly, the Intranet has a big advantage over traditional libraries because the access is not restricted in time and space. Information is centralised, but available only at the working place of an individual employee.

At the same time employees have a similar role as the Intranet itself – they become generators of knowledge, which they actively include into the Intranet and use it. The Intranet becomes “an independent organism”, which will be organised by a skilled manager so that it won’t depend only on knowledge existing in the organisation, but at permanent import of external sources it will also “grow” proportionally to the perceived usefulness and its efficiency (which will be rotationally determined by the level of use and satisfaction of employees).

## **2. Internal communication**

Every organisation has several various forms of the public, which influence its success or failure. But there is one, which can be found in every organisation irrespective of the size or object of business activities, i.e. the internal public, employees. This is the closest to the management due to its position, the easiest to identify, to discover its interests and to acquire feedback from it. The success of the organisation largely depends on this type of the public. It happens frequently that this type of public in particular is among the most neglected because the management doesn’t recognize its true importance. Today the satisfaction of employees gradually becomes a category, which is equal to the satisfaction of customers and shareholders and at the same time it is an important element of the strategic mission of organisations. Organised preparation and execution of a special program, which is largely based on the internal communication in particular, is necessary to achieve the satisfaction of employees. The treatment of employees as the property and not as the expense is the starting point of a new paradigm of internal communication, which exceeds former one-way informing of employees: it is transferred from simple informing to one-way informing and then more and more also to two-way communication, from training and education to motivation and eventually to the participation of employees in the management with the sharing of responsibilities.

The permanent competitive advantage is based on the willingness of employees to achieve objectives, strategy, mission and vision of the organisation. People will more and more devote their efforts and knowledge to organisations, which will be truly aware that today the required knowledge is so complex and changes so quick that the management cannot cope with these processes alone and contributions of all employees are necessary for the success.

Purposes of organisations in the field of internal communication more and more frequently include also the following objectives [9, pp. 211–213]:

- to improve information flows (who, what, when, to whom, how, with what),
- to put two-way forms of communication into effect (reverse loop),
- to put team work into effect (composition, structure, rules, remuneration),
- to raise the level of participation of employees in the management in accordance with organisation’s policy, and legislative provisions (agreement),
- to define the required conduct, profiles of heads and employees, communication styles of individuals and organisations (standards, examples),
- to define (required) values of the organisation and to build them into the base of the business policy and conduct of individuals, groups and organisation,
- to define criteria for the satisfaction of employees, methods for establishing, measuring and reporting,
- to improve motivation, responsibility, initiative, affiliation, innovative capability (management of organisation culture and creating of stimulating microclimate),

- to put an appropriate management style into effect (criteria, training),
- to improve interpersonal communication and communication with customers, mainly at those employees, who directly contact with them,
- to build communication into the business policy of the organisation and to provide adequate training (knowledge, know-how, skills) and connection between communication and policy of promotion, remuneration and personal and professional development,
- to improve acquaintance and identification of employees with basic strategic documents (vision, strategy, business plans, etc.),
- to raise the capability of solving of interest and interaction conflicts and disputes.

At the formation of the mission, purposes and objectives of internal communication in organisations different models are used, while communication should be understood as a process and not as a kind of non-repeated objective because it is a big illusion that the internal communication is a project, which has its beginning and conclusion.

The Intranet has been used more and more intensively for achieving of objectives, which the management would like to reach through the process of organisational communication.

### **3. The Intranet and internal communication**

What is actually the Intranet? The Intranet is a part of the organisational internal information system, dedicated to the support of group work and mastering of the organisational knowledge. The Intranet uses technologies, introduced by the Internet and world-wide web: TCP/IP protocol, web server, web browser and HTML. The purpose of the Intranet is to increase productivity and quality of work with efficiently arranged data and their filtering and to make information connection for all, including organisational departments located elsewhere.

The Intranet or Intranet portal, properly designed and arranged, can serve to quite different organisation needs. The purpose of the implementation of internet technologies is to raise the efficiency of the organisation with minimum financial and time inputs. Intranet portals can include many different services; the most frequently used services on Intranet portals are explained in this paper [4, pp. 331–332].

*Shared access to documents* is a service where documents are saved in a standard form at a specified location and every person with the right to access a specific document can access this document with a simple click.

*Controlled access* to specific resources can be very useful at the Intranet portal. Limitation of the access can be used also at the personalisation of the access because the Intranet portal can be adjusted to different access levels. Those who don't have specific rights don't have the access to specific information.

*The calendar of events and reminder* is a very useful tool if it is well structured and used correctly. The calendar has to be set up in a way which enables the arrangement of meetings at the level of an organisation, department or even project group. If all rights and protection are arranged, it is possible that individual participants correct and organise their own obligations and adjust meetings and time schedules with others.

*Bulletin boards* enable employees to express their opinions and ideas, which would otherwise stay unexpressed.

*Directories* can be constantly upgraded and corrected. They can be limitlessly large and any data can be found quickly through these directories if they are set up correctly.

*The search engine* is an essential element of every Intranet portal. Irrespective of the fact how well the data are structured, the shortest way goes through a good search engine.

*The list of tasks* can be a very useful tool for the group work. Heads can inform their employees about their tasks through the list of tasks. Employees can report about tasks fulfilled.

*Personalisation and personal settings* are services with extraordinary importance because they enable users to set the Intranet portal in accordance with their own wishes. In this way the Intranet portal replaces the worktable, which can be reached from any computer and any business unit if only there is the access to the Intranet of the organisation.

*The learning menu* is a very useful and handy component of the Intranet portal. This menu remembers, e.g., last 20 connections, which have been used, and builds a concurrent index of connections for the user. This index is built in the form of a drop down menu and it enables the user a quick return to individual websites.

*FAQ-section* is a service of the most frequent questions and their answers. This section can be a foundation for an efficient knowledge base in the organisation.

*The project office* is a service for efficient support to projects. Every project group has its own virtual office, to which only project group members have the access. They leave messages there and also all documents, which are connected with a specific project.

*News groups* are very important due to flows of data because they enable the use of the “push” method for the access to data and information. At the use of this segment it is about ordering of news, which is divided into individual interest fields. When someone publishes news in a specific interest field and the system sends a note to all registered users about the change and the address of the published news with a link to the news. The user is informed in this way, but it’s up to him/her whether he/she reads the news.

*Knowledge base* is highly appropriate mainly for companies with business units located elsewhere. Knowledge base is not a portal’s component, which could emerge immediately. At the setting up of intranet’s portal a framework with a search tool, which will be later filled with subject matters by users, is prepared.

*Surveys* are of large importance for the management of the organisation. A weekly survey can be put on the Intranet portal, with the assistance of which “the atmosphere” in the organisation is measured and employees’ opinions about a specific topic are acquired.

*Categorisation* means automatic elimination of metadata from various sources and preparation of data for joint use via the Intranet portal. Categorisation is also automatic categorisation and filtering of information from internal sources of the company and also from the Internet itself, sorting and classification into meaningful categories. Besides personalisation categorisation serves as the base for distribution of relevant information to portal’s users.

*Integration of applications* is of extreme importance because in the modern world there are fewer and fewer barriers during acquisition of information, decision-making and execution of activities. The portal enables integration of various business applications and with this also the access to various data. The user has access not only to all types of information he/she needs for work with the assistance of the Intranet

portal from one starting point, but he/she can have access and start also various business applications with the assistance of the portal.

*Security* is of such importance that at least the basic security has to be provided with the security wall already before the Intranet portal because information and data have to be protected against unauthorised access and at the same time the access has to be fast and easy. The portal has to be integrated with all existing security schemes. The user should have only one log into the system, while the system of management of information access should provide the connection to all relevant sources, for which the user is authorised.

*Reachability of the Intranet or Intranet portal* is also a possibility to use the Intranet portal from both sides of organisation's security wall. It enables employees, who can be inside or outside of the company, including customers, distributors, suppliers, various branch offices and other partners, the access to information sources of the organisation or company. It goes into the reverse direction, too – the organisation can have the access also to information of its business partners via the portal. Such access to business information may be also a key element of company's e-commerce. It is valid for the majority of the above-mentioned services that all of them have to be connected to the user and not to the computer, which means that users can use their data from anywhere and from any computer. The Intranet portal should enable easy access via the browser with the assistance of a username and password.

#### **4. Training via the Intranet**

Researches in the field of organisational learning point out the meaning of comprehensive and systematic approach to formation of such working environment, which will strengthen the development of people, process of learning and learning infrastructure. Sengeja [7], a popular work about a learning organisation, has had a catalyst effect in this field. Researches in the field of organisational learning deal with strategies, with the assistance of which the organisation changes into the learning organisation [10], with organisational learning models [5], models and instruments for measuring of team learning [2,3], with reports about the implementation of the learning organisation [1] and instruments for evaluation of organisational learning [6].

Obviously problems of organisational learning are relevant for knowledge management. If learning is the catalyst of knowledge, then a task of knowledge management is to facilitate the acquiring of knowledge; then the integration of both fields is understandable itself. Despite this experts have noticed that the integration is not such as it would be expected [8]. One of the reasons states that the topic of organisational learning has been dealt with in a pretty abstract and conceptual way and that it is difficult to use it in practice, where specific business objectives have to be realised. Also the fact has to be taken into consideration that in the sphere of organisational learning the structured knowledge and the use of IT are not emphasised enough, as it is the case in the field of knowledge management.

Despite this the organisational learning has become one of major concepts at the management of a modern organisation because the organisational learning is not only the learning of an individual, but also learning of a group and the organisation as a whole.

All three above-mentioned fields don't have only historic meaning for the development of knowledge management, but they are still connected with it in a dynamic way and they define multi-discipline nature of this field.

#### 4.1. Training portal

Training departments in organisations have discovered quickly what the advantages of communication technology are in the training process. The Intranet has helped that the principle of a learning organisation has been efficiently asserted also as a training model, mainly due to the possibility of knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is only one of key accelerators of technology use at training. Global trends require accelerated introduction of e-training because organisations have also other motives (Melcrum Research Report, 2002):

*Time of employees:* organisations want to offer their managers and employees a possibility to choose time for learning; they want to prolong effects of learning in the class – classroom training, also after the end of instructions in classrooms.

*Speed of implementation:* companies would like to distribute the process of learning in the organisation faster, mainly in the time of large organisational or technological changes.

*Distribution:* the possibility of spreading subject matters of the same type, implemented at the same time on the same level all over the organisation independently and irrespective of its geographical expansion, is a big advantage of the technology.

*Reducing of logistical costs:* reducing of costs for travelling and accommodation of employees at the location of training.

*Granularity:* the possibility of repeated implementation of small modules.

Technological and implementation aspects of e-training are best shown in the setting up of the training portal, which includes elementary horizontal services, which are responsible for various tasks, e.g., checking and integration of external services. The training portal, as a safe starting point for interactive acquisition and submission of various types of information, puts the training process into a new context in every organisation.

Organisations, which cover specialised fields, need specialised knowledge, which is mainly generated in organisations themselves. In this way the formal qualifications are upgraded with good practice of other states and the parent organisation.

Training departments of these organisations try to encourage experts from specific fields and to retrain them into trainers. It's about the changing role of employees, who appear in three roles in specific circumstances, i.e. as employees, as attendees in the training process and as periodical trainers. In such an arrangement of relations and roles of employees in an organisation the training portal could be an interface between providers and users of training. A well-organised training portal could facilitate training in the virtual environment in such a way and could join the subject matter, technology and services at one place in the most efficient manner.

In relation to the Intranet structure of a specific organisation the training portal could act independently or within presentation of departments for training on the Intranet. The functioning of the training portal would probably cover the following activities:

- Basic functions of the integrated e-environment (log in, mailing list, exchange of documents),
- Communication tools (exchange of files, e-mail, forum),
- Tools for efficient work (calendars, favourites, search engines),
- Administrative tools (IP restriction, coded log in, authorisation and integrated registration),

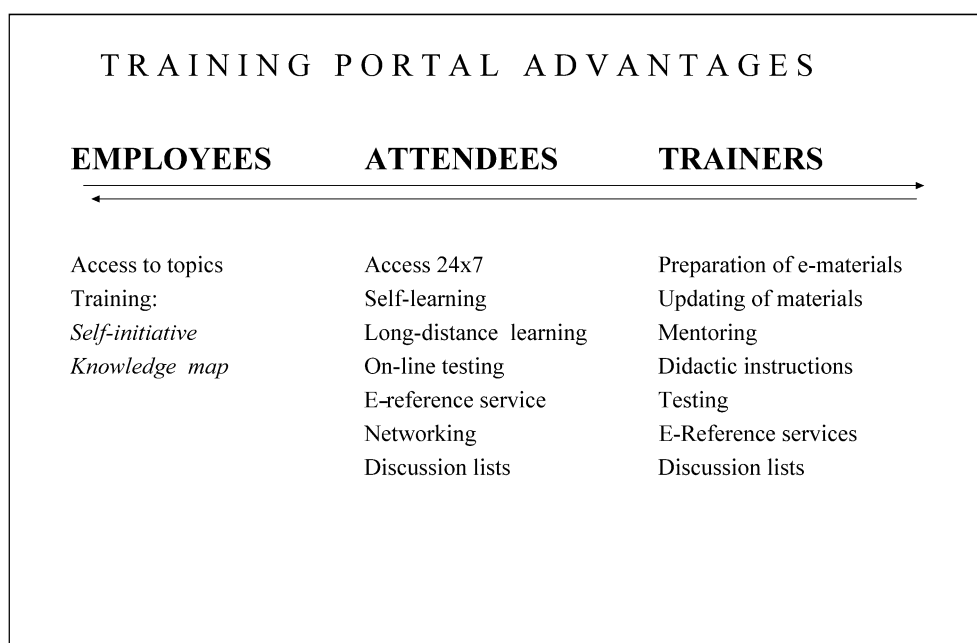


Fig. 1. Example of use of the training portal.

- Tools for management of training programmes (testing, evaluation, help desk for attendees and mentors),
- Formation of the training curriculum (harmonised with standards, descriptions of lectures, sources, connections, dictionaries),
- All other things, which may prove during the execution of training that they need to be published on the training portal.

It is evident that the general function of the training portal is the integration of subject matter and various services for support and execution of the training process. Despite the fact that the harmonisation of opinions exists in connection with integrating of activities and resources of all participants, the question is raised in connection with infrastructure and organisational conditions.

Talking about the infrastructure, it is clear immediately that the support of information-library activities is urgent. Without these activities no training process nor virtual one cannot be executed successfully. The aspect of equality of print and electronic training materials is very important here, which brings up the question again about creation of electronic and other archives of training and scientific topics.

On the basis of the above-mentioned things it is evident that the academic sphere expects a more active role of library “community” in the training strategy.

## 5. The Intranet, librarians and libraries

And what should be the role of librarians or information specialists at the organisation of the Intranet in the parent organisation? In any case librarians should participate in the organisation and structuring of the Intranet, mainly due to the fact that they are most familiar with the organisational information needs, they are the best at evaluation of information sources, which organisations have, and they are

at the same time in constant contact with colleagues from IT departments and suppliers of information sources. Librarians could be important promoters of Intranet use in the organisation as a platform for acquisition and submission of library materials, indexes and news and other activities, performed by the library. The Intranet is probably one of the best possibilities for librarians to start talking with other departments in the organisation, so that the position of the special library strengthens and it becomes a useful and efficient “tool” for submission of information.

The development of the Internet has influenced on big shift at the development of new professions in the information-library field. With the development of the Intranet librarians become Intranet co-ordinators or content managers, where they combine technical knowledge and skills of an information specialist.

The Intranet can be a “different step” in the direction of development of a new proactive librarian contrary to the established comprehension of a dusty librarian with low status and payment.

The Intranet influences on the changing of the role of a librarian and special library, which has to become an active part of the organisation. Otherwise such library will not survive and it may also even be terminated at the end. Many times the work of the special library covers with the work of other organisational units of the parent organisation, e.g., in the fields of training, human resource development, information technology, cost accounting system, analyses and statistics, procurement, investments, public relations, etc., so that it has to find the right place within the organisational structure, which is also under the influence of new communication-technology trends. Communication, co-ordination and management of information processes force the special library to overgrow itself and in the new form becomes an important part of the parent organisation.

## 6. Conclusion

At the information support of business processes, including training, the Intranet becomes an irreplaceable tool and value added at the quality of business activities of every modern organisation.

If the organisation wants that the Intranet is a long-term success, the Intranet mustn't be seen as a single project, but as a process of constant improvements and adjustments.

The library or information centre has to take all advantages of the Intranet for the promotion of its services and to include itself into the structure of the Intranet as a digital library, although it partially functions as a traditional library (hybrid library model). Technology enables integration of traditional, reference and information services, which should become a part of a digital library, included into the information system of the parent organisation and managed by a dynamic research-information specialist.

## Relevant sources

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