

## How to increase employee engagement and improve collaboration

“How do I engage employees and improve collaboration?” is the type of question I hear frequently. It’s being asked by intranet professional, CIOs, senior business operations managers and even a few CEOs. It’s important that it is answered clearly and fully. The alternative of ignoring it is to risk a repeat of what happened to knowledge management in the late 1990s when it was ‘the thing’ to talk about and be seen to be doing but sadly, in many cases, never able to meet its full potential helping businesses.

There is more than one way to address this question. It is a deep and complex subject which needs covering for this question to be answered fully.

Based on my knowledge and experience as an intranet practitioner and consultant with intranet governance, social media, engagement and digital workplace I will show how you can engage people in your organisation; encourage better collaboration; improve the culture; adapt to changing ways of working; and make an impact on the bottom line for your business.

The best way to show this is to use as an example an employee called Tom, from day 1, through to when he leaves the organisation. Tom takes advantage of the opportunities presented to become a more engaged employee and collaborate to his, other employees and the organisation’s benefit.

## Make a newbie more welcome and engaged

I want to start at the beginning, when Tom, a newbie, joins a new business, because if you can start on the right footing the rest can be easy. If you get off on the wrong footing then it will take more time and effort to overcome poor first impressions and may not ever recover with the newbie, Tom, leaving after a short time.

When someone is thinking of applying for a job with your business you want to give them as much information about your business as you can to help them make an informed decision. Applying online for a job for example shows you have a digital workplace.

When the successful applicant is informed of your decision, you also want to start building up their knowledge of their new role so they can hit the ground running from their first day. So here are a few tips that can help boost Tom’s engagement and value to the business from day 1.

### A nice surprise

Tom is pleasantly surprised by the secure access given to HR policies, information about his role, team and the part of the business he will be working in. Tom is also pleased to continue using the internet tools he has grown up with and which a lot of his personal life revolves around like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Tom is amazed to be able to use a forum with other newbies and HR, to ask and share experiences and pick up tips on how to do things, who are the key people on any topic, etc. This helps Tom gain a warm feeling for his new employer and appreciate the effort made to make him feel welcome before joining.

### **Time to prepare**

Tom's manager, Carol, is also aware of who the person is joining. Carol uses the digital workplace to make sure all the equipment is ordered ready for use on day 1 including a laptop, smartphone, email account, access to collaborative tools, applications, remote access to the digital workplace and a desk and chair or booking a place for the first few days because Tom can work flexibly anywhere.

Communications about Tom are sent by Carol to other team members, handover arranged if it is an existing job by the person moving on, and key business partners are also made aware of the changes so they can accept a different voice, face and email sign-off for the work they continue to do with whoever does this role.

### **Everything in place**

On day 1 Tom arrives. Everyone is aware Tom is joining and is able to welcome him, knowing why he is joining and how Tom fits with the work the team does. An induction programme involves a lot of self-help because a lot of online training, guidance and help in on the digital workplace. All the tools Tom needs are available and working with passwords set up – even a welcome message on his personal portal and email.

Tom's manager, Carol, and team members won't be bombarded all the time by questions because Tom has access to discussion forums, FAQs and micro blogging tools to ask the simple repetitive questions and find the answers on the digital workplace.

That leaves the more complex and questions related to Tom's role and expectations to be answered by Carol, team members or HR.

### **Accelerated productivity**

Tom has all the tools to start adding value from day 1. More importantly, because of the way the business has prepared things for Tom, he is very keen to show these efforts are appreciated and wants to make that extra effort to show that.

The business sees accelerated productivity from Tom because he is engaged and committed from day 1.

### **Integrating and engaging a newbie**

Your organisation needs to build over the first few weeks on what has been achieved so far with Tom. You want Tom to be as engaged to the business as quickly and fully as possible. You want Tom to be very productive.

You also want Tom to adopt the company values, ways of working and standards. This will include accepting he may work from different locations depending on what he needs to do. You want Tom to find out from your digital workplace most of the standard information he needs.

### **Induction training**

Tom will meet some key people face to face but more likely it will mainly involve emails, calls, video calls and conferencing to quickly build up the level of understanding needing for strong business relationships.

Mark Morrell: Intranet Pioneer

Having a good digital workplace means online training in corporate values, health and safety, security, business processes, etc., can be completed wherever and whenever it fits with Tom's business commitments.

Regular catch ups with Carol help to check Tom's progress and feedback using the performance management system.

### Networking

Tom will be able to exploit his experience with internet collaborative tools like Facebook and Twitter to use the internal collaboration tools your business has in its digital workplace.

Tom will be able to exploit:

- discussion forums: asking questions to build up understanding quicker without troubling Carol all the time
- micro blogging: building up networks with people across other business functions
- wikis: learning from the knowledge shared and maybe even adding some from his experiences
- blogs: giving views on his experiences since he started for other newbies
- communities of interest: joining groups of people with similar interests and expertise

A good governance framework in place helps encourage confidence in the information available. Make sure the tools are easy to use, clearly identified for their purpose, contact owners are shown for further information and it is a single sign on to make easy to access and share knowledge because there is no anonymity.

Don't forget why you are doing this. Your business wants to accelerate the productivity, engagement and commitment of Tom by providing all these tools to help him do his work better.

### Becoming a top performer

As Tom completes his first year he has become a top performer. Tom is now a fully integrated, high performing employee at his organisation. This hasn't happened by chance or luck. This is because of the way the organisation has provided the right environment to encourage a committed, engaged, productive performance. How has Tom become a top performer?

### Performance management

Tom's performance is measured on outcomes. There are clear, agreed, measurable, objectives with a time line, budget and quality standard to be achieved. They are challenging but not impossible to achieve all or most of. The objectives are regularly reviewed with Leslie's manager, Carol. Progress is recorded and actions agreed to be reviewed at the next formal review or anytime in between if needed. This approach is very successful because it gives Tom freedom to innovate. It encourages decision making and is supportive when they don't always work out. (No decision is the worst decision to make?)

### Collaboration tools

Having the right collaboration tools in place with a good governance framework in place has helped Tom to use:

- discussion forums: Tom has shown a real flair for sharing knowledge with other employees belonging to communities of interest and created a strong reputation across the business
- MyProfile: Tom has used SharePoint 2010's features to good advantage with Tom's skills, experience and current activities showcasing these to help other colleagues
- micro blogging: Tom follows key people with similar interests and has cultivated a growing number of followers across other business functions with similar interests
- wikis: Tom has learnt from the knowledge shared and increasingly contributed his views and experience which other people are valuing more and more
- blogs: Tom's blog is regularly viewed, frequently updated with new posts and has an increasing number of comments that add to the topic posted
- communities of interest: Tom has joined groups with similar interests and contributed to the webinars, and online Q&As

### Digital workplace

Tom, Carol, and business colleagues all work from different locations, in fact some in different time zones and sometimes from more than one location each day. Tom is comfortable not going to a physical workplace. A digital workplace where Tom is connected virtually has proved a great success as he has the tools to connect from a hub, home or while on the move. Being able to keep in touch with everyone though the laptop, tablet and smartphone given by Tom's organisation pleases him and saves unproductive time. The performance management system measures what Tom's output is while Carol is contactable whenever needed.

### Developing your career

Tom is now a top performer and considering the next move for career progression. He reviews what the options are:

#### Performance management

Tom's performance is recorded. He has made the information available to prospective managers who could be interested in his skills and experience. Tom's preferences for his next role can also be seen – just like with LinkedIn.

#### Career development

From day 1 that Tom joined his career development has been recorded, progress reviewed and options updated so it is relevant and accurately reflect Tom's development and future preferences.

#### Networking

This has proven to be the most valuable resource to help Tom's career progression. Through discussion forums, communities of interest, communities of practice and wiki contributions, his expertise is now well known and appreciated.

Tom's blog posts and MyProfile showing his skills, experience and current activities are a showcase that everyone can view.

Carefully cultivated relationships with key people in mutual areas of interest also help Tom. These people are actively considering where he fits in to their team.

## Sharing knowledge easily

Tom has been a top performer for some years as he has moved from one role to another. Tom has agreed to mentor people as part of their career development.

There isn't one standard way to mentoring. From my experience as a mentor and running a mentoring programme, it is the personalities of the mentor and mentee (protégé), the needs of the mentee and the ways and frequency of contact between them which can create a dynamic, enriching and long relationship or quickly fizzle out to nothing.

Tom has the right characteristics to be a mentor. He has broad experience, is a natural collaborator – willing to share ideas and listen to different views, and deep knowledge of many areas of common interest with the mentee to explore.

There are three steps to make it easier for Leslie.

## Digital workplace

A digital workplace helps to give the relationship more opportunities to develop successfully between Tom and his mentee, Mike. Previously Tom and Mike were limited to email, texts, calls or face to face meetings to help nurture and develop a budding relationship into a strong friendship which can last for many years and extend into their personal lives.

The digital workplace means a blog post of interest can be shared with Tom and Mike for comment. Collaborating in a shared workspace on a subject with Tom and Mike or with other trusted people that can help is easy to do. Using micro-blogging for direct messages as well as re-sending useful comments is great. Having a video call instead of a face to face meeting takes less time, effort and possible delay to fit with other commitments.

Most importantly is the degree of subtlety that a true friendship needs. It means a quick tweet or micro-blog comment helps keep the relationship ticking over when previously no response could chill things for a while and need more time and effort to repair.....or even worse, lead to a terminal decline and end of the mentorship.

Use the full range of options that a digital workplace offers to find out what works best for Tom and Mike.

## Performance management

You need a framework that rewards Tom and Mike for their time and effort. The organisation gains from helping accelerate the career development of a potential future top performer. While some Tom may be happy just to have some informal recognition, maybe meet Mike in his own time, he may also feel some formal reward is needed.

A performance management framework enables this to be given in an appropriate way. For Mike, a personal development plan, reviewed regularly with his line manager, can include the progress with Tom (without breaking any personal confidences). This helps to plan future development and work that maximise Mike's engagement to the organisation.

For Tom it gives a more subtle choice. It may not be a promotion or pay rise but a formal recognition award could motivate Tom and with publicity encourage other top performers to

consider being a mentor. It may help with the future career path of Tom who wants to progress into a new field of work using the skills learnt mentoring.

### **Culture**

None of this will be possible without the right strategy, values and behaviour for the organisation Tom and Mike work in. Creating the right environment for collaborative working; feeling we are all part of one big team; seeing the bigger picture and how everyone contributes to the overall success; being clear what is the direction the organisation is moving in; all of these help mentoring.

Without the right culture a performance framework would focus only on individual performance and what is being done now, not in the future.

A digital workplace wouldn't happen. The old view "if you are out of my sight I don't know what you are doing" would stop it dead in its tracks.

Combining these three key factors will mean you have a very good chance of a strong mentorship helping Mike, Tom and the organisation.

### **Stop knowledge leaving with the person**

What happens to Tom's knowledge when he chooses to leave an organisation? His intellectual and digital assets are critical. Tom's successor needs to quickly, almost seamlessly, continue to provide the same level of service based on information and skills handed over. This is an aspiration for most businesses; the reality is very different.

### **Physical and digital assets**

It is a common problem as I know from personal experience. An organisation will closely track all the physical assets that you hold – computer, phone, car, etc., – and want them returned before you leave.

But your digital assets and your intellectual assets are rarely managed so the knowledge about how your work is carried out – processes, priorities, etc. – and the right contacts are lost to your successor (especially if your replacement is not recruited before you leave), your manager and other people you work with.

### **How organisations can retain knowledge better**

Tom has decided after many years of excellent service that a career move outside the organisation is the next step to take. He has many years' experience working in his organisation on many projects. More importantly there are many nuggets of knowledge Tom has learnt and used to perform so well. Who are the 'right people' to contact when you need help on different subjects? How is the best way to get approval for a project when you are not certain you have all the information to support you? What are the best shortcuts that cut out some of the worse processes? (We can all think of at least one can't we!)

The aim of the organisation is to have Tom's knowledge already stored in its digital workplace and have a governance framework to manage that knowledge so it continues to be available after he has left. This means Tom leaves but not his knowledge. Bingo!

## SharePoint 2010

There are many examples of how this can be done in a practical way. I will use SharePoint 2010 because I am familiar with it.

You need a knowledge management strategy that is aligned to your organisation's values that recognises knowledge is an important asset. The governance framework that SharePoint 2010 fits within helps to separate personal from business information.

MyProfile contains all the personal information about Tom – contact no., home address, manager, reporting lines, personal blog. MySite contains other information that is personal but is available if people need to find out more about Tom to see if he is in fact the best person to ask about a subject or not.

TeamSite has all the business information contained in the various projects, discussion groups, policy sites and functional areas of responsibility Tom is involved with. This is where the rich knowledge is managed.

The governance framework ensures all the TeamSites are clearly owned and the information is reviewed in line with an Information Retention policy. Permissions are set so employees can see or not see the content, perhaps edit some or all the documents or even create new documents. SharePoint 2010 is very flexible in how you can configure it.

## Good knowledge management

When Tom leaves, his MyProfile and MySite will be removed. This has personal information only. But the TeamSites that he has contributed to will remain and continue to meet the needs of the business.

This ensures the knowledge that Tom has does not leave as well but is kept for future use. This helps organisations to continue to grow and be successful.