

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO GOOD
GOVERNANCE

...and other cures for digital disasters

Introduction to good governance

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I have been fortunate to view many intranets. There have been many technology features and fads that have come and gone, even though they were aimed at helping people to have a good online experience. However, one common factor has shown consistently throughout the whole time to give an overall consistent user experience. That factor is having a clear strategy and strong governance foundation to support the intranet and help it to meet an organisation's requirements and key priorities.

Any intranet can achieve this. It does not need to be a certain size, be simple or complex, or have a large budget and team of people to succeed. All it requires is for you to follow a set of principles and implement these. This book will guide you through each step to have an intranet that your organisation will value and others will envy.

I have found the best intranets help people to be more productive and effective. A consistently good overall experience helps achieve these benefits. People need this every time they use your intranet. Whatever they want to do, they need to be able to rely on it. It needs to give them confidence that it will always meet their requirements. Without this, people will be less productive and effective with their work.

This benefits their organisation too. People use their intranet more frequently. They are confident they can easily find what they need. They know they can rely on the integrity of the information and applications. Most importantly, it will help them with their work. Organisations recognise their intranets are supporting their business requirements. They are viewed as valuable, even business critical, in achieving their strategic goals.

How do you achieve this consistently good experience? Is it using a publishing technology? Is it the visual design? Is it the access people have to the intranet? It may well be that some or all of these do contribute to this. However, one vital factor applies to all great intranets.

It is having a clear strategy for the intranet aligned with the organisation's strategy, and supported by a strong governance framework.

People dislike having an inconsistent intranet experience. It makes them less productive and effective. When they move from one part to another, they do not want to keep having to stop and think about where they are. This happens if features change, navigation menus change or disappear. With headings in different places, it gives a poor and inconsistent experience.

So if good online governance is important, what is it? Using an intranet as the example, I define it as follows:

'Online governance broadly refers to the mechanisms, processes, roles and responsibilities by which intranets are managed and directed.'

Good governance helps gain the maximum benefit from your intranet for you, your organisation, and employees. How does it help at a practical level though? Let me explain what leads to people being more or less productive and effective. The following points show how a good and bad user experience relates to good governance.

1. How do you know if you can rely on information on your intranet to help you with your work? Is there an owner shown that you can check with about the information? A publishing standard consistently showing the owner's name and contact details on every page will help. Without it, you can be hunting around for the right person for ages! Have a governance hierarchy covering a publisher's role and responsibilities for content.
2. Is there a review date to show if the information is up to date? What about a date showing when it was last updated to reassure you it is active? Features like these give you the right level of confidence in the content. Publishing standards underpinning this are a key part of good governance. Without such features, you will be unsure whether you can rely on the information being correct and helpful.
3. You need to be able to move easily from one area of your intranet to another. How quickly you are able to do this depends on the options you have available. You could use a global navigation bar with your intranet's key sites. Showing it consistently at the top of every page will help people move around the intranet easily. A heading on every page to a list of the most popular sites on your intranet helps too. A search button for you to type a word or phrase in and get relevant results gives a good experience. These features, again covered by publishing standards, help you to find what you need. Imagine if you did not have any of these features to help you. Worse still, they are present but in different places on each page or with confusing names to describe the same feature. That would give you a much poorer and more frustrating experience.
4. Lastly, you are not sure what information is sensitive and shown on your intranet without any authentication. When you see some information you think may be sensitive, you have to check with people before you are willing to use it which can delay your work. This wastes your time and others you contact. With good governance, the publishing standards can embody any business policies e.g. security level classifications. Incorporating these into publishing roles and responsibilities prevents these problems occurring. It helps to give a consistently better experience and improves people's effectiveness.

I will use intranets as the example for this guide to good online governance. I will cover how you develop an intranet strategy as an essential first step to successful governance. The strategy sets the direction you need to move in with a set of aims to be achieved. It needs to align with other related strategies e.g. Internal Communications or Information Technology and the overall strategy for your organisation. Your organisation's culture, purpose, structure and size will all need to be considered when developing your strategy. Its scope will need defining so it is clear: what is to be managed, by whom, and what the strategy covers...and what it does not cover!

I will explain how applying key governance principles to your intranet will have a huge positive impact on the user experience. The alternative can be chaotic anarchy with risks to security and intellectual productivity, not to mention dissatisfied users. Using examples and advice gained from managing intranets, I will help you to apply these principles. This will help you to make sure you manage your intranet content and applications to help people use them productively.

I will explore how in practice you can decide who manages and publishes on your intranet and what they need to do. By covering what a typical governance hierarchy should be, I will show how it can be adapted to the size and complexity of the intranet you need to support. The scope of the strategy is reflected within your governance framework for the roles and responsibilities needed to manage everything. Different publishing models – centralised or decentralised - will show how these responsibilities can be an integral part of a person's job description and objectives.

Publishing standards underpin your governance framework, based on business, legal, user and regulatory requirements. They help people who are publishing content online to comply with the organisation's requirements and obligations. I will cover what publishing standards are, how to apply them, and how to

achieve compliance. There are many benefits from applying a comprehensive set of publishing standards appropriately across your entire intranet.

Lastly, you will be able to show that governance has benefits you can measure. The main reason for a strategy and governance framework is gaining the benefits that come from applying it well. I will show how the benefits can help you to justify future investment.

A consistently good intranet experience, made possible by good governance, is essential to your organisation and ensures that the intranet is a critical business tool that has benefits your stakeholders will appreciate.

From 'Digital success or digital disaster?' by Mark Morrell.

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