

How to Know if

YOUR COMPANY NEEDS AN INTRANET

A Guide to Achieving Greater Freedom
in the Way You Work

by Tim Eisenhauer



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In recent years, workplace culture and technology have become practically inseparable. Any decision affecting the one affects the other.

Research shows that social intranet software can significantly improve employee engagement, productivity, and communication.

When this happens, businesses save money and thrive culturally.

In this eBook, I invite you to actively participate while exploring how to achieve greater freedom in the way you work.

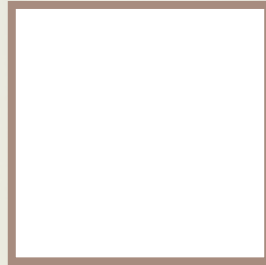


the **Box**

*Space that has been seized upon by the imagination
cannot remain indifferent space...*

- G. BACHELARD

This is a box.



The size of the box is not important. The box's lines are of secondary importance. More important, the box, by virtue of its existence, distinguishes between two spaces:

- everything *inside* the box, and
- everything that is *outside*.

For a moment, ignore the space outside of the box. Focus instead on the space inside.

Now think about your business, your career, your goals, and the tasks you must perform to achieve them. How much of your success depends upon communication, interaction, collaboration, and engagement? A little? A lot? Even most?

Now suppose that you could fill the space inside the box with any technology that would help you to more easily, efficiently, and effectively achieve your goals.

Which tools would you select?

Go ahead: List them.

- A way to efficiently communicate with your colleagues?
- A platform to inspire your team and to support your customers?
- A medium to compellingly convey your mission and vision?

What else?

- A streamlined flow of updates, questions, and ideas from your teammates?
- A method for sharing information and collaborating on documents?
- How about the ability to interact with your coworkers in real time?

What else would help you to better communicate, interact, collaborate, and engage?

Imagine that all of the tools you need are in one place, this distinct location, inside a single space.

How would you arrange your space?

Now imagine that you could take everything you need and nothing you don't, and organize it in a way that is intuitive and makes sense to you. Everything is in its proper place now. It feels natural. It looks good. You sense this organization will simplify how you perform your tasks and make you more productive.

Think about what you use today to complete the tasks that enable your goals that are dependent upon your success, which is in no small way impacted by communication, interaction, collaboration, and engagement. Is the experience anything like the single, simple, perfect space you just imagined?

If not, then keep reading. We wrote this eBook for you.



the cases of
FRED AND JUDY

Consider Fred and Judy – two employees, undertaking similar tasks,
in two very different organizations.



Fred works for a company that uses traditional office productivity tools, like email, shared network drives, and USB sticks.



Judy works for a modern, visionary company that uses a newer and more hip technology called social intranet software.

Let's follow Fred and Judy through a slice of their workday,
one *with* and one *without* intranet software.



Fred's Experience

Fred arrives at work at 6 a.m. on Tuesday to complete a few pressing tasks. He fell behind on Monday because, **like many workers, he spent about 28% of his time managing email** ^[1] and **another 37% in meetings** ^[2]. Normally, he would have worked Monday evening to make up for lost productivity during “normal” business hours, but his son had a sporting event.

This early in the morning, he settles with minimal distractions. Before beginning productive work, he checks email. Many of the emails in his inbox are teammates' responses to one message, but Fred must open and read each one to ensure he does not miss important information. So, Fred **spends several minutes reading the same email several times**. He sees a note from one of his teammates, Barney, which requires a quick response.

It is 6:15 a.m. now, and with email done, Fred begins productive work. He opens several documents that are located across his laptop's hard drive, shared network drives, and email attachments. About five minutes in, just as he is fully immersing himself productively, his computer 'dings.' A small window fades in and then fades out of the bottom right-hand corner of his computer screen. The window appears long enough for him to see that it is Barney's reply to the email he sent just seven minutes before.

Hoping simply to confirm information, Fred finds his email application and opens the message. **Like 70% of workers, Fred usually reacts to receiving**

an email within six seconds ^[3]. Rather than confirmation, however, Barney has asked for clarification on an issue. This requires Fred to retrieve a USB drive, insert it into his laptop in order to open a document, refer to page 54 (or was it 57?), and then to reply to Barney. This process is part of **the 17 hours each week on average that workers spend clarifying communications** ^[4]. **For companies with 100 employees, this translates into an annual cost of \$528,443 in lost productivity** ^[4].

By the time Fred responds to Barney, he has lost focus on his other task. He tries to **refocus on productive work, a process that takes him, like the average worker, about 64 seconds** ^[3]. Fred finally resumes, but then his computer 'dings' again. The window fades in and fades out. A response from Barney. Fred sees that the email's first line is merely "ok," but he does not know if Barney wrote anything else, perhaps additional questions. Now that Fred is distracted anyway, he might as well open the email. Nothing else from Barney.

Frustrated, Fred walks to the break room for a cup of coffee before resuming. On the way, he encounters Patti. He smiles, nods, and just when he thinks he is clear, Patti calls him back. Fred stops, turns slowly, and smiles pleasantly at Patti.

Patti asks Fred if he saw yesterday's announcement about the change to the timesheet submission process. Fred acknowledges that he did. Unsolicited, Patti expresses her irritation about why things have to change. **Clearly, like 71% of workers, Patti feels that management has not adequately communicated and explained the reasons, plan, and goals for the change** ^[4]. "I don't know," says Fred, as he walks back to his desk frustrated.

Coffee in hand, just steps from home base (that is, cubical 73), Fred encounters Wade. Wade, **like 70% of workers, is a disengaged employee** ^[5]. He arrives early not to work longer, but so that he can leave sooner. Wade, like most actively disengaged employees, has turned the process of wasting an 8-hour workday into an art form. This art form **costs employers an estimated \$450 billion to \$550 billion in lost productivity every year** ^[5]. Without even a good morning, Wade asks Fred if he saw the memo about the timesheets. Wade then

leans toward Fred, and in a slight whisper with a tinge of bitterness, confides that this is the *last* straw. If they change timesheets, he will *quit!*

Fred duly expresses concern over this news, which Wade has threatened continuously for the past two years. If Wade finally did resign in frustration, he would become **one of the 23% of disengaged employees who turn over each year, which could cost the company 213% of Wade's salary** ^[4].

Fred excuses himself from Wade. He has 45 minutes of the two hours left now before the *unproductive* part of the workday begins. Studying the spreadsheets intently, he sees a column of numbers that appears to be incorrect. In fact, he knows something is off, because he built a similar financial model just 6 months before. Someone used the wrong formula, but he cannot remember the correct one off the top of his head. Fine, he will simply find the old document to reference. The folder for the old project is located on Fred's computer hard drive and consists of hundreds of documents, including 17 different versions of the spreadsheet he needs. He does not know whether these are all of the versions created for the project or which ones were and still are correct.

He remembers that the version he needs was created by... that guy in finance, short guy, red hair... what was his name? None of the document authors' names ring a bell, although he thinks Jim is the right guy. **He should find Jim's contact information, but Fred's company has no efficient way to do this.** There is no company directory. There is no internal web page for finance. He could use the company's email directory, but he winces when estimating that it could take just as long, if not longer, than asking Wade. Hesitantly, Fred walks to Wade's cubical. Wade is a disengaged employee, so he is never in his cubical. Fred finally finds Wade in the copy room, shredding fax spam. He asks if Wade remembers Jim's contact information. Wade remembers hardly anything at all about the project, since he barely worked on it.

Defeated, Fred walks to the finance department on the second floor. He finally finds Jim, gets the information he needs, and returns to his cubical to find a voicemail. He listens to the voicemail, which is from a new customer, and

forwards it to the appropriate person.

Just as he opens Jim's reference spreadsheet that he spent 30 minutes locating so that he can fix a simple error, his computer 'dings.' A pop-up window reminds him that the team meeting to clarify the timesheet process will begin in 15 minutes.



Judy's Experience

Judy arrives at work at 9 a.m., organic carrot juice in hand. She boots her laptop and settles into the workday. Her first task is to review the day's agenda and check on any updates to each of her three projects. **Her company eliminated email a year ago and replaced it with social collaboration software.** So rather than opening two or three different applications, she simply signs in to one via a web browser.

Judy's home page on the intranet is customized to her preferences. In addition to an activity stream, she can view her calendar, events, and contacts. Her task list and files are just a click away. All updates from each of her three workgroups are displayed on a single page that looks like an uncluttered Facebook activity feed.

Rather than seeing five emails in her inbox on a schedule change for one group, she sees a top-level post announcing the change and then four responses from teammates nested neatly beneath it. **She knows she has not missed any critical information around this update.** To acknowledge the change, Judy simply clicks the "Like" button, which signifies to the entire team that she has seen the updated schedule and has no issues. She answers a question from one of her teammates by typing a sentence inside a blank box and then hitting "Enter" on her keyboard. Now everyone in the workgroup can see her answer in their activity feed, when they next check it.

She also notices a new corporate announcement on a change to the timesheet

process. She opens the announcement, reads it, and can see some employees found parts of the announcement vague or confusing. So they replied directly to the announcement, like you would respond to someone's status update on LinkedIn. The department manager and a corporate communications specialist then replied directly to each employee's questions in the same thread. Now other employees who have the same questions can see the answers. Someone suggested a slight tweak to the process, which will make it even more efficient. The manager replied that the recommendation will be considered.

In just a few minutes and using only one application, Judy is fully updated on each workgroup, informed about the timesheet process, and has efficiently communicated to everyone in one of her workgroups.

She is ready to start productive work. Her first task is to review a financial model in a spreadsheet. She goes to the workgroup's page on the intranet. The most recent version of the spreadsheet, like all of the team's collaborative documents, is posted there. She opens the spreadsheet and begins reviewing. She notices that numbers in one of the columns are not right and realizes that this is due to an incorrect formula. She encountered a similar problem on a different project 13 months ago.

So she goes back to the old project's site to reference the spreadsheet. **The old project site is easy for her find**, as are all 17 versions of the spreadsheet associated with it. She cannot remember which version was correct, but she remembers that a guy from finance created the correct version. She cannot remember his name. No worries: She easily identifies all teammates from finance using the workgroup's team member list. Ah, yes, James, the brown haired, blue eyed guy. She identifies him first by his picture and then gets his contact information from right below his avatar.

Judy calls James on the phone and asks which version of the spreadsheet is correct. James cannot remember off the top of his head, but **he knows he can find the answer quickly**. So he stays on the phone with Judy as he navigates to the workgroup site and finds the three versions he posted. He tells Judy that

it appears to be version 12. Judy opens version 12 on her computer, confirms the correct formula is there, and then hangs up with James. She corrects the formula, completing her review, and posts an updated version to the workgroup site. **Immediately, every other team member in the workgroup can see that Judy has completed the task.**

The next task on Judy's list is to prepare a tutorial for a new employee starting tomorrow. The team has created a site that consists of useful documentation for all new hires. Such a site saves everyone time. However, Judy forgets exactly which tasks she needs to update. She glances at her contacts list on her home page and sees that Caroline is signed on to instant messenger, but she is in a meeting. So Judy pings Caroline to ask for clarification. Caroline sees Judy's question immediately. Several minutes later, when the call digresses off topic in response to a question, Caroline replies to Judy via IM, and Judy is back to work.

After Judy finishes and posts the tutorial to the new hire site, she returns to her home page. She sees that one of her new customers posted a question while she was working on the tutorial. **The customer signed in to the company's intranet from outside of the organization and posted the question in a customer workgroup.** One of Judy's teammates saw the question while checking his activity feed and posted an answer. Judy adds a concise comment under her teammate's reply, inviting the customer to contact them with any additional questions.

It is 10:30 a.m., and Judy is on to her fourth task of the day.

how an

INTRANET

fits within your
organization

As highlighted in the narratives above, there are several use cases for an intranet in your organization. This section explores a couple of these in more depth.

Internal Use Cases

Prior to 2008, many organizations were still adapting to a set of newer workplace trends, such as increasingly global teams and a faster rate of organizational change. Businesses were also still deciding the best uses of digital technologies, especially in light of evolving organizational structures ^[6].

Since 2008, when businesses began to widely adopt so-called Web 2.0 technologies such as social media, **there have been many new challenges to arise for internal communication**. This occurred just as a new generation of workers – the so-called Millennials, who possess nontraditional values and expectations around careers – started entering the workplace. This prompted businesses to review factors such as organizational culture and communication.

What has become clear in recent years is that workplace technology and culture are practically inseparable. Any decision affecting the one affects the other. Today's methods of internal communication must account for both.



Use Case 1: Executive to Employee Communications

Challenges

Executives face many challenges in effectively communicating within their organizations. Some of these challenges are perennial and date back to the beginning of modern businesses. Others are newer, partly shaped by emerging workplace trends. Some of these old and new challenges include the following:

- **Conveying mission and vision** – This is perhaps the quintessential goal of executive communication. Yet too often executives fail to convey mission and value in a manner that translates into effective action throughout the organization.
- **Communicating plans and goals** – The 1990s and first decade of the 2000s saw the pace of organizational change accelerate ^[6], driven by new technologies, innovative business processes, mergers & acquisitions, or outsourcing and offshoring. Rapid change is now the norm. An executive's ability to clearly communicate plans and goals during periods of change is perhaps more important than during any other time.
- **Understanding and connecting with audience** – With diverse perspectives stemming from factors such as international and multigenerational workforces, understanding and connecting with audience in even small and medium businesses can be challenging.
- **Engaging employees** – The narratives on Fred and Judy highlighted some of the business costs of disengaged employees. If an executive's mission and vision, plans and goals, are to be achieved, then it depends upon engaged employees throughout the organization acting mindful of the big picture.

Solution

What can executives do to increase the effectiveness of internal communication? The challenges outlined above are primarily *cultural*.

Yet the idea that the technology used to communicate a message is just as important as the message itself has been discussed for decades. For instance, as early as the 1980s, during one of the first major technological leaps toward our current state, the selection of which media to use in communicating a message was beginning to be viewed as an executive skill ^[7]. **Today, technology and medium cannot be separated from message.**

With this in mind, a savvy executive today might consider the use of intranet software. The use of intranet software, particularly with social and collaborative dimensions, conveys contemporary thinking to employees. In addition, and more importantly, the use of intranet software would help to solve many of the challenges outlined above, as follows:

- **Conveying mission and vision** – Executives can connect with internal audiences via customized intranet sites, complete with a branded look and feel to reinforce messaging.
- **Communicating plans and goals** – Intranet solutions provide executives with a better platform for communicating timely messages than email, which can become lost in the clutter of inboxes, or paper, which requires delayed dissemination and cannot be easily modified. Conferencing alone has its downsides, but can be powerful when combined with and reinforced by an intranet platform.
- **Understanding and connecting with audience** – Intranets provide a more efficient, effective way to segment your audience and target your messaging, compared to other formats, especially email.
- **Engaging employees** – Intranet software can be used to facilitate open, two-way communication. Dialogue drives engagement.

Use Case 2: Manager to Employee and Employee to Employee Communications

Challenges

If the major challenges to executive communication can be summarized as primarily *strategic* and *cultural*, then the challenges of front-line business manager and co-worker communication might be contrasted as primarily *tactical* and *technological*.

The greatest executive vision communicated flawlessly cannot become reality if resources are not in place to execute it.

Below are some common challenges that managers and peers face on projects in businesses of all sizes:

- **Geographically dispersed teams** – Most businesses, large or small, must complete projects in which teammates are separated by geographical distance. This introduces challenges in everyday activities, from scheduling meetings to sequencing workflow.
- **Timely communication** – Projects are affected by a myriad of factors and require constant communication. The ability of each team member to efficiently communicate with the group and/or one another is critical.
- **Documentation** – Accurate, updated project documentation that is accessible by every team member keeps everyone informed and focused. Yet it can be challenging to document everything, much less organize and make it accessible for reference.
- **Collaboration** – Projects often require multiple contributors to work on documents and deliverables. Many existing solutions offer clunky, inefficient capabilities for information sharing.

Solution

As in the case of executive communication, managers and employees can solve some of their challenges with intranet software, as summarized below:

- **Geographically dispersed teams** – Intranet software can help to bridge geographical distance, foster cooperation, and facilitate teamwork by providing a common online space to work and interact.
- **Timely communication** – Intranet software emphasizing social and collaboration functionality provides multiple ways to communicate with teammates, both synchronous (i.e. instant message) and asynchronous (e.g. private messages, blog posts, comments, like buttons, announcements, etc.).
- **Documentation** – Intranet software enables teams to organize and make accessible accurate, updated, version-controlled documentation in a single location.
- **Collaboration** – Intranet software provides a single platform for sharing and finding information, as well as collaborative development activities (e.g. writing, coding, etc.).

External Use Cases

The use cases above highlight examples of *internal* communication. An intranet can be used for external, inter-organizational communication as well, such as customer support and business partnerships.

Many of the same challenges arise in these scenarios, with slightly different context-dependent twists. Intranet software can help make these situations more efficient, productive, and engaging for all parties.



the overall
BENEFITS
of intranet
software

As shown, there are several advantages to intranet software, many which derive from specific applications. There are also a set of overarching benefits, regardless of application, which include the following:

- Enhanced communication**
- Enriched collaboration**
- Improved productivity**
- Increased transparency**
- Better employee engagement**

These benefits reflect the findings of a 2012 study conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute. The McKinsey study concluded the following:

- By adding intranet software, organizations can **increase the productivity of knowledge workers** by 20% to 25% ^[1]
- Intranet software could **reduce the time spent searching for information** by 35%, in turn freeing 6% of the workweek for other tasks ^[1]
- Removing email from the work environment would **free between 7% and 8% of workers' time for more productive tasks** ^[1]

Additional research suggests that replacing email alone has widespread benefits, ranging from periods of **prolonged worker focus** to **less overall stress** ^[8].

planning for an

INTRANET SOLUTION

Suppose at this point that the experiences of Fred and Judy, as well as the use cases, have sufficiently illustrated the advantages and potential uses of intranet software in your organization. There are many options that you can and should weigh while considering intranet solutions. The following list presents some questions to consider in evaluating solutions for your organization ^[9].

➤ **Who are the stakeholders, and what are their objectives?**

Identify all stakeholders and their “pain points.” Make their solution part of the core objectives during evaluation.

➤ **What are your context requirements?**

Context requirements add *who* and *why* dimensions to technical specifications. Context requirements consider both end users and business issues, along with technology. This approach helps to ensure an optimal solution from both cultural and technological perspectives.

➤ **Who should be on the team to evaluate intranet solutions?**

The team may or may not consist of all stakeholders, but each one’s views should be represented. In addition, the team should include end-user advocates.

➤ **What are your business constraints?**

These generally fall into three categories: scope, cost, and schedule. Each influences feasibility.

➤ **Should your organization build or buy?**

The core issue underlying this question is customization. Will a purchased solution provide the flexibility needed to satisfy stakeholder objectives, context requirements, and business constraints? Keep in mind that some intranet platforms require expensive technical expertise to customize (Sharepoint) and that many of the solutions available on the market today are built to fit the lowest common denominator.

➤ **Should you host or contract someone else to host?**

The core issue underlying this question is *control*. How much control does your organization want for ongoing security, maintenance, etc.?

➤ **Should you go with an open or closed source intranet solution?**

On the surface, the core issue here probably appears to be cost. That is not necessarily the case. Open source is not always free, and even if it is, does not always represent the best value. The more critical issue underlying this question is *support*. How much support will your organization want after purchase, on issues ranging from training and deployment to patching security vulnerabilities?

Once the decision has been narrowed to a few choices, ask for a free demo. Request enough time for both stakeholders and end-user advocates to use the product. **Ask evaluators to consider how features such as design, ease of use, degree of customization, and other factors will influence stakeholder pain points, business requirements, and organizational culture.**

this space is
YOURS

Think back now to the box at the beginning of this eBook. We asked you to imagine placing every tool you need for work into the empty space inside of that box. We then asked you to organize those tools in a way that felt most natural to you. We asked you to envision what that space would look like, and how it would affect your work.

We asked you to consider how important communication, interaction, collaboration, and engagement are to achieving your business and career goals.

What did you decide?

Rethinking now the use cases and planning questions, **how important are factors such as timely communication, efficient information sharing, real-time collaboration, and team building?** If these are important or even primary factors for you and your team, then you should learn more about social and collaboration software.

In many ways, social and collaboration software is a box, metaphorically. The space inside consists of a broad range of social, collaboration, and productivity tools that can be selected and arranged in a clean, customized format that feels most natural to you. It provides everything you need, in a single space, arranged just the way you want it. It provides you with more freedom in how you organize your work and perform your tasks. It will help your team to be more engaged and productive. And it will help you to work more like Judy, James, and Caroline and less like Fred, Patti, and Wade.

Curious to learn more? Interested in experiencing social and collaboration software for yourself? We invite you to visit the Communifire website. While there, you can read more about social and collaboration software and the business challenges it helps to solve. You can also sign up for a free trial and try it yourself.

Thanks for reading our eBook.



Tim Eisenhauer
Co-founder & President
Axero



Axero's enterprise collaboration software, Communifire, helps companies collaborate, communicate, and increase employee productivity and engagement. It powers social intranets, customer communities, and knowledge management for businesses of all sizes.



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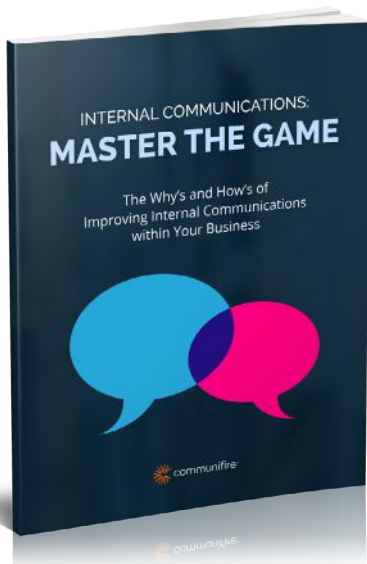




Intranet Solutions: Drive Employee Engagement

How to Improve Employee Engagement with Social Intranet Software

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Internal Communications: Master the Game

The Why's and How's of Improving Internal Communications within Your Business

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