For the last seven years we've been writing about intranets, and our focus has relentlessly been on how to make the intranet more valuable for staff and the organisation.

Our over-arching statement has always been this:

Staff will use the intranet if it's useful.

The challenge is to uncover and understand staff needs, and to design the intranet to meet them.

While the intranet must be functional and valuable, there is another softer side to the site. It can present a human face to staff, do much to build and reinforce corporate culture, as well as underpinning broad organisational change.

Presenting a human face

In addition to being useful, intranets can and should be enjoyable to use. Maybe even fun. At a minimum, they should always present a 'human face' to staff, one that is engaging and encouraging.

The article *Starting to define the intranet brand* outlines a simple technique for capturing the overall 'brand' of the intranet, beyond look-and-feel.

Use this to define the role of the intranet in the organisation, and its overall character. This will help to shape how the intranet should interact with staff.

Following this process will often highlight words such as 'friendly', 'reassuring' and 'engaging'. These are all people-focused characteristics, and there are many ways of reflecting this on the site:

- including human-interest stories amongst corporate news

- profiling staff on the homepage

- showing people's faces on the site, including in the staff directory

- listing new starters

- showcasing 'buy and swap' areas, and social clubs

Corporate communications and HR areas will often have many other good ideas on ways to incorporate a human element into the site.

Reflecting corporate culture

Every organisation has a corporate culture, sometimes defined as 'the way we do things here'. This evolves over time, and organisations with similar roles and activities can end up with very different cultures.

The intranet should closely reflect the culture of the organisation it serves. More than this, the site should communicate and reinforce the corporate culture.

For example, the design consultancy IDEO is globally renowned as being innovative and creative. This is reflected in their project and people focused intranet, and the edge web 2.0 style design.

By contrast, a very friendly and fun intranet is shown in the case study *Publicising the launch of 'Boris' at City of Casey*.

There is no right or wrong, and no one way of designing an intranet to communicate a corporate culture. Instead, designs are as unique as the organisations themselves.

Draw on an understanding of the corporate culture when developing the visual design, and choosing what functionality to include on the site.

Supporting cultural change

Organisations are rarely content to sit still when it comes to corporate culture, and there are often culture change programmes underway.

The intranet can support and assist these efforts at cultural change. The golden rule, however, is this:

Use the intranet to move the organisation forward half a step.

There is limited value in using the intranet to simply reinforce the current corporate culture. Conversely, if the intranet gets too far ahead of where staff are at, there will be considerable difficulty in getting staff to understand and adopt the new functionality.

In the middle ground, the intranet can help to progressively transform the organisation. Incremental change is often the most effective approach to culture change.