

Redesigning a well-established intranet involves major cultural change. For anything beyond the smallest of tweaks or incremental changes, re-shaping the intranet will have an impact on business areas, content owners, authors, and end users (staff).

One of the most common mistakes made by intranet teams is to push forward on site redesigns without gaining the necessary support. Worse, some teams fail to even recognise the scale of support needed, and are brought sharply to a halt by unmanaged stakeholder and staff issues.

Even when the organisation as a whole recognises that the current intranet is broken, considerable on-the-ground support will be required to make the necessary changes. Without this, the redesign project will proceed slowly and fitfully.

At the outset of any major project, intranet teams must spend time and effort building support for the work ahead.

### Impact of change

A major redesign project will impact every aspect of an intranet, including:

- overall site structure and design
- content ownership and management
- authoring and publishing processes
- resources and responsibilities
- technology and infrastructure
- day-to-day use by staff

These changes will be disruptive for many, and may reduce productivity and familiarity in the short term. Migrating content to the new site, with new publishing models, will also require considerable effort and time.

Although it may be widely recognised within an organisation that the current intranet is not working well, it is a mistake for an intranet team to assume that this will guarantee support or resources for change.

In practice, intranet redesigns are often just one of a number of major projects across an organisation, competing for time, money and attention.

Intranets also reflect the structure and behaviours of the organisations they serve, growing organically over time.

Unpicking the many ad-hoc decisions made over time to create a more consistent and effective site may require new ways of thinking and working from business units.

### Leading change

Perhaps the best book on change management is *Leading Change* by John Kotter. This outlines a simple methodology that is entirely relevant for intranet redesigns.

The first step in the methodology is to ‘create a sense of urgency’. This involves building a clear case why the current situation cannot continue, and why change is necessary.

This is particularly important when building support among senior management, who will need to back up the intranet team throughout the project. It is not enough to simply highlight usability and design problems; intranet teams must find the business reasons that justify committing resources to the redesign project.

The second step of the methodology is to ‘create a guiding coalition’. In the context of intranets, this includes business areas, key stakeholders (such as HR, comms and IT), content owners, and authors. This group must be engaged at the outset of the project, both to build their support, and to fully prepare them for the effort that will be asked of them later in the project.

### Have a clear message

When building support, ensure there is a clear message that encompasses all aspects of the project:

- current problems and reasons for change
- benefits that will be delivered
- what will change and when
- why the specific changes are necessary
- what will be required in terms of money, resources and time
- how working practices will be different

It is practically impossible to spend too much time building support, and efforts early on will generate huge benefits at every stage of the redesign project.