

There are two fundamental aspects that must be satisfied if an intranet is to succeed:

- The intranet must meet staff needs.
- Sufficient content and functionality must be created to meet these needs.

These are the ‘two faces’ of the intranet, one looking towards staff and organisational needs, the other at the infrastructure and processes needed to meet it.

All too often, intranet projects have focused entirely on one aspect, and despite considerable resources being expended, have been disappointed to see their intranet fail.

For example, the quality of the content management system and processes is irrelevant if the intranet doesn’t deliver what staff require.

Conversely, no amount of usability testing and information architecture activities will lead to a successful project if the authoring tool is too complex and counter-intuitive for business groups to use.

So, while this model is a very simplistic view of implementing intranets, it does provide a useful way to highlight many overlooked requirements.

### Meeting staff needs

An intranet will only be used if staff see that it will be of use to them. There are a number of techniques and approaches for ensuring this:

- Identify all stakeholders, and involve them throughout the project.
- Use structured methods to identify staff needs, such as stakeholder interviews and knowledge mapping (not focus groups or surveys).
- Identify key business processes, and support those with required information.
- Define a clear and meaningful list of intranet goals, with matching metrics.
- Promote the intranet, to ensure staff are aware of its existence and benefits.
- Provide training to staff.
- Establish non-technological processes to share knowledge in support of the intranet.

Having identified actual needs, the intranet must be designed so that it *can* be used. This involves:

- Conducting usability testing of the intranet to ensure layout, terminology and navigation make sense.
- Using information architecture techniques (such as card sorting) to determine an appropriate structure for the intranet.
- Implementing effective search and navigation aids.

### Supporting content creation

Beyond delivering the right knowledge and functionality, a successful intranet is supported by effective technology and processes. Authors are both encouraged and engaged.

There are a number of ways of achieving this:

- Ensure authoring processes match business processes and environments.
- Implement an appropriate content management system (CMS).
- Ensure the authoring tools are simple, intuitive, non-technical and efficient.
- Deploy a variety of authoring tools to match differing needs.
- Conduct usability testing of the authoring tools and processes.
- Implement automated quality control processes (such as notification of review dates).
- Use appropriate metrics, rewards and recognition to motivate and track authoring efforts.
- Deploy simple workflows to ensure content makes steady progress to publication.
- Establish a ‘community of practice’ to support intranet authors.
- Develop an ‘intranet guide’ for authors, reviewers and administrators.
- Provide training to authors.
- Include intranet authoring responsibilities in job descriptions.