Intranets have now grown to be core tools for most organisations, tools they cannot do without.

Despite this, it is still a struggle for intranet teams to gain the resources and support they need to sustain and grow their sites.

In general, it is not hard to describe what the 'perfect intranet' looks like, and each intranet team can generally paint a clear picture of their desired future site.

What is needed, however, is a roadmap that helps intranet teams to get from 'here' to 'there' within current resource limits and other constraints.

The *6x2 methodology* provides a powerful new way of planning that gives intranet teams a concrete and constructive way of tackling the growth of their sites.

Taking a very different approach to the planning process, the 6x2 methodology focuses on the coming six months, asking the question: what are we going to *deliver* by the end of this six-month period?

By focusing on criteria (why would we pick a given activity?) and constraints (what is restricting potential activities?), this approach identifies activities that are both doable and worth doing.

Beyond intranets, the 6x2 methodology is also being applied to information management planning, and other similar domains.

This article will provide an overview of the 6x2 methodology, including a summary of each of the steps and examples of criteria and constraints.

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What are we going to deliver in the coming six months?

Common intranet challenges

Most intranets suffer from one or more common problems, regardless of whether their organisations are large or small. While every organisation has at least a few unique challenges, the same problems are seen in many organisations.

- *The intranet is just a collection of unconnected sub-sites*, with little overall management or structure.

- *Information is unstructured, out of date and duplicated*, with content problems affecting most of the site.

- *Publishing processes are fragmentary and ineffective*, with a mix of inexperienced authors and limited publishing policies.

- *There is little executive sponsorship,* and the intranet is not recognised as a key business tool.

- *Resources are very limited*, with the intranet teams operating on a very small budgets.

- *Insufficient technology underpins the intranet*, with no site-wide content management system or effective search.

- *The role of the intranet is unclear*, with competing technologies, platforms and business interests.

- *No overall information management strategy exists*, which would determine future directions and platform choices.

- *There are too few intranet team members*, making it hard to tackle new projects.

These problems are significant barriers that reduce an intranet team's ability to deliver an effective and successful site. At the end of the day, they all boil down to: *there is much to be done, but few easy options and too few resources*.

Introducing the 6x2 methodology

The 6x2 methodology works within the constraints listed in the previous section to provide a practical approach for intranet planning that delivers additional intranet functionality while building support for the intranet team.

At the heart of the 6x2 methodology is a focus on the coming six months. Rather than just steadily working on longer-term activities, this approach asks: what can be *delivered* in the next six months?

The focus is placed on identifying concrete deliverables that benefit the organisation, rather than activities that only prepare for future improvements, or address behind-the-scenes issues.

In this way, activities are identified that will have the greatest impact on the intranet, and on the intranet team.

Detailed project planning is used to ensure that the selected items are actually achievable, as well as giving a clear sequence of activities. The possible activities are then sketched out for the following six months (thus the '6x2' name), giving the intranet team a roadmap for the coming year.
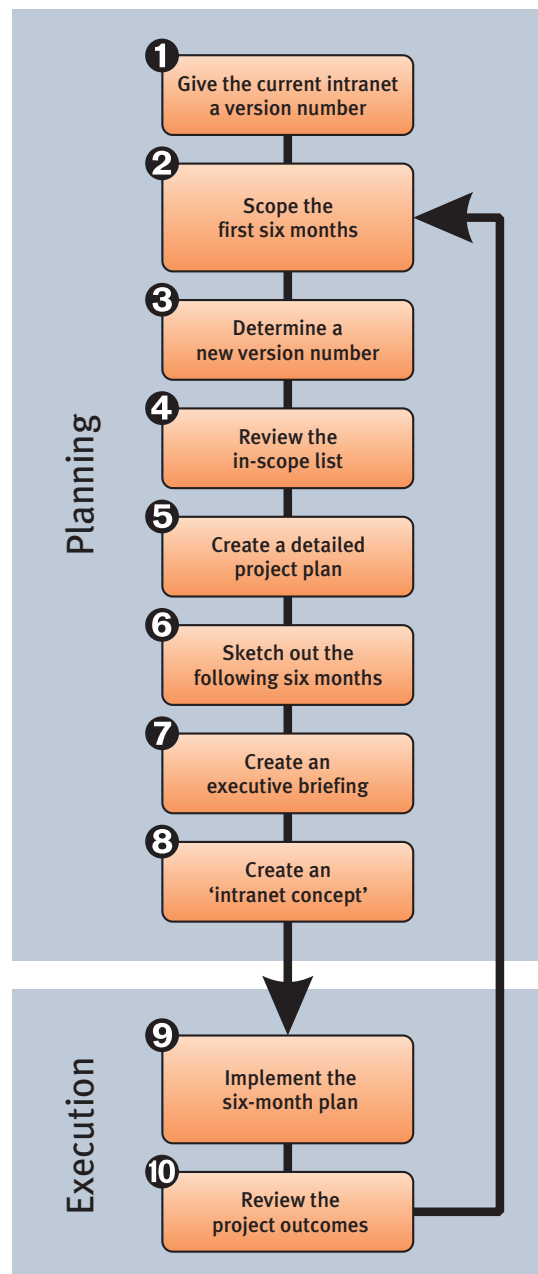
All of this is then used to create a compelling briefing for senior management, as well as a communications message for the wider organisation.

This is a cyclic process, with each six-month period of activity leading into the next. Underlying this is a steady buildup of momentum for the intranet, giving an 'upwards spiral' that allows more to be done in each six-month period.

In this way, the intranet team can steadily work on ever-larger needs and issues, even when the starting point is extremely constrained. They no longer need to wait for the 'right conditions' to arise — instead the intranet team can act constructively and proactively to build an increasingly effective intranet.

This methodology provides a simple and pragmatic approach that can be used by intranet teams of any size (from one person to a dozen or more). It is equally applicable in private and public organisations, and the more complex and difficult the intranet, the better the approach works.

A diagram listing the steps in the 6x2 methodology is shown to the right, and this will be explored step-by-step in later sections.

Planning

1. Give the current intranet a version number
2. Scope the first six months
3. Determine a new version number
4. Review the in-scope list
5. Create a detailed project plan
6. Sketch out the following six months
7. Create an executive briefing
8. Create an 'intranet concept'

Execution

9. Implement the six-month plan
10. Review the project outcomes

Beyond intranets

The first application of the 6x2 methodology has been to help intranet teams improve their sites, and this is the basis of the examples used throughout this article.

Before exploring the 6x2 methodology in detail, it is worth highlighting that this methodology can also be applied to information management (IM) planning very successfully, as well as other similar areas.

The 6x2 methodology should be considered a general planning approach, to be used wherever useful and appropriate. Readers are also encouraged to take elements they find useful from the methodology, and adapt them as required.

Exploring the 6x2 methodology

As shown in the diagram on the previous page, there are ten steps in the 6x2 methodology:

1. Give the current intranet a version number
2. Scope the first six months
3. Determine a new version number
4. Review the in-scope list
5. Create a detailed project plan
6. Sketch out the following six months
7. Create an executive briefing
8. Create an 'intranet concept'
9. Implement the six month plan
10. Review the project outcomes

Each of these steps is discussed in the following sections.

Start by giving the intranet a version number

1. Give the current intranet a version number

One of the key principles behind this approach to intranet planning is to focus on delivering new functionality and content. One very practical way of ensuring that the intranet is steadily moving forward in its capabilities is to give the site a *version number*.

Start by giving the current intranet a version number. While necessarily somewhat arbitrary, a version number defines a starting point from which to measure future improvements.

For example, the following version numbers could be used:

- *Version 1.0*, if the intranet has been recently launched
- *Version 2.0* or *3.0*, if the intranet is well-established
- *Version 4.0* (or higher), if the intranet is mature and moving towards the next stage of its evolution

2. Scope the first six months

The core of the 6x2 methodology is determining what functionality or content will be delivered in the coming six months. These activities will be chosen through the use of a simple but powerful scoping technique.

The scoping process is built around four key elements:

- *criteria* for what to include in the coming six months
- *constraints* that will limit intranet activities
- *possible activities* to include
- *final list* of in-scope activities

By the end of this step, there will be a clear list of activities that will be conducted in the coming six months.

Why would we choose a particular intranet activity?

As listed above, the starting point for the scoping session is to identify the *criteria* for choosing activities to conduct in the coming six months. Brainstorm a list of possible criteria, using the following questions to guide the discussions:

- *Why would we choose something for inclusion in the next six months?*
- *What would make us choose one item instead of another?*

These criteria will be chosen based on the current state of the intranet, the overall strategic direction of the organisation, and broader cultural issues.

Sample criteria:
- Demonstrates the value of the intranet
- Builds momentum for the intranet (and intranet team)
- Useful for staff
- High impact improvement
- Builds trust (and confidence) in intranet team
- Tangible and visible
- Strategically important
- Generates interest and enthusiasm

Once the criteria have been captured, the intranet team needs to identify the *constraints* that are restricting the team's ability to deliver an improved intranet.

These should not be hard to list, as intranet teams are keenly aware of the limitations and organisational issues that hold back their long-term intranet plans.

Sample constraints:
- Staff resources
- Budget ($)
- No executive sponsorship
- No content management system (CMS)
- Limited IT support
- Business silos
- Lack of content ownership
- Lack of overall intranet strategy

A list of all possible intranet activities should then be gathered together. These can be drawn from a number of sources, including requests already made to the intranet team, issues and needs identified by user research, or ideas brainstormed by participants at the scoping session.

Working down the list of ideas, take one item at a time and evaluate it based on the important criteria and constraints. Ask the workshop participants the following two key questions:

- Does this idea match the key criteria?
- Is the idea achievable within the key constraints?

An idea doesn't have to match all of the criteria, but it must fulfil at least a few. Any ideas that don't match any of the criteria are automatically eliminated, without assessing the constraints. When assessing against the constraints, the idea or activity must be achievable in light of all of the constraints.

Once a draft list has been created, assess the whole list against the criteria and constraints to ensure that it is achievable.

By the end of this process, the team will have a list of activities that will be conducted in the coming six months. These activities will be both achievable and of direct value to the organisation (and the intranet team).

Activities must match both criteria and constraints

3. Determine a new version number

At the conclusion to the scoping process, determine a version number for what will be delivered.

Use the results of the scoping process to help guide the version number for the next intranet 'release'. For example, if the current version number is 3.0, the next version could be:

- *Version 3.01*, if minor 'bug fixes' are made to the site, as part of ongoing incremental improvements.
- *Version 3.1*, if some improvements are made to the intranet but the overall site is not significantly changed or enhanced.
- *Version 3.5*, if key issues are addressed, or significant functionality is added to the site.
- *Version 4.0*, if there is a major rework of the site, such as developing and implementing a new information architecture.

Use this version number to communicate the size of what is being done, and to set expectations for how much will be delivered.

Review the planned activities with key stakeholders

4. Review the in-scope list

Once the intranet team has determined the list of activities that will be conducted over the next six months, the next step is to review this list with key stakeholders, including the overall intranet sponsor or owner.

The review should be held immediately after the scoping session to:

- explain the approach taken
- provide an opportunity for further strategic input
- revise the scope as required
- finalise the list

This gives the intranet sponsor a chance to provide input into the process, and to ensures that the outcomes match broader organisational priorities.

By the end of this review, the intranet team should have a near-final list of activities for the coming six months.

5. Create a detailed project plan

Now that there is a bullet-point list of activities for the coming six months, it needs to be fleshed out into a detailed project plan.

This project planning should focus on determining that the identified activities are actually achievable within the six months. It should also identify any additional resources required in enough detail to present a compelling case to the intranet sponsor or other manager.

In practice, the detailed project plan should cover:

- specific activities
- actual resources required
- project plan, including sequence and timing
- other implementation details

Identify what might be possible in the second six months

6. Sketch out the following six months

Once the first six months have been fully planned, explore the possible activities that might be conducted in the following six months.

From this, identify a list of activities that may be initiated once the current six months has been completed. With this in hand, the intranet team will have an overall project plan that covers the coming twelve months, six months in detail, six months at a high level.

This is the basis for the naming of the 6x2 methodology, and it gives a clear roadmap (or 'strategy') for the coming year.

7. Create an executive briefing

With the core of the methodology completed, it becomes quite straightforward to create an executive briefing that clearly outlines the approach that will be taken to improve the intranet.

This executive briefing is vital to building executive support for the intranet, and it is specifically designed to increase momentum for ongoing intranet improvements.

Aspects covered by the briefing should include:

- current state of the intranet
- overall direction (derived from the criteria)
- deliverables for the coming six months
- business benefits delivered
- following steps

The briefing should be created in a format that matches the standard practices and culture of the organisation. This may mean writing a document, or giving a presentation.

8. Create an 'intranet concept'

As well as the executive briefing, the team needs to communicate with the wider organisation, outlining the scope and direction of the intranet activities.

This message should be written as an 'intranet concept', as outlined in the previous article *Creating an 'intranet concept'*.

This single-page intranet concept presents a complete picture of where the intranet is, where it is going, and what this will mean in practice. Written in the right way, this is a compelling story that can be used in many different situations.

Use 6x2 to communicate clearly to the whole organisation

9. Implement the six-month plan

With the planning complete, the next step is to initiate the project. While there will be challenges to overcome, this is the phase that the intranet team is most likely to be most comfortable with. Psychologically, teams are always at their happiest when they are getting stuck into doing the 'actual work'.

If the detailed project planning has been done correctly, implementation should be relatively straightforward, with resources allocated and staff members assigned.

10. Review the project outcomes

Once the six months of activities have been completed, the intranet team should conduct a quick review. This is designed to build the ongoing effectiveness of the intranet team and to provide an input into the next round of the 6x2 methodology.

The process then starts again from the beginning. This includes conducting a full scoping exercise that creates a new set of criteria and constraints, evaluating the list of possible activities, all the way through to implementing the next six months.

In this way, intranet teams are provided with an ongoing approach to managing and growing their intranets.

Benefits of the 6x2 methodology

The 6x2 methodology is designed to be very practical and pragmatic, and can be used by any intranet team, no matter how difficult their current position. Used effectively, the methodology:

- creates a clear roadmap for the intranet team, both for the next six months and into the future

- provides a simple project management approach for the intranet

- works within constraints that exist for the intranet and intranet team

- makes assumptions explicit, allowing the intranet team to adapt to changes in resources or other constraints

- builds momentum for the intranet and intranet team, by focusing on improvements that will generate additional support and resources

- builds credibility of the intranet team, by creating a clear project plan

- helps to communicate intranet activities, by providing an overall roadmap

- sets senior management expectations, by identifying short-term activities and constraints

- matches the rate of change within many organisations, by making it easier to adapt to new technologies or platforms

Conclusion

While there are challenges and roadblocks confronting intranet teams, these are not insurmountable. Great progress has already been made, and intranets are now recognised as a key parts of most organisations.

The 6x2 methodology outlined in this article is designed to help intranet teams take their intranets forward into the future, and to position their intranets not just as platforms for information or communication, but as a strategic 'business tools'.

The 6x2 approach is very pragmatic and practical, and scales from the smallest organisations to multinationals. In all cases, it should help intranet teams to focus on what they can deliver, and to guide the selection of activities that will have the greatest impact.

Use this methodology to simplify and improve planning activities, and to put in place a sustainable and ongoing process for enhancing your intranet.

For more information
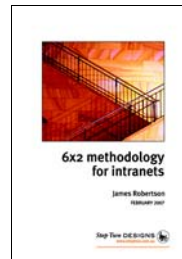
The 95-page *6x2 methodology for intranets* report provides detailed information on this approach. Included in the report is a step-by-step breakdown of the methodology, with extensive examples and reference materials.

This report captures the latest thinking of the Step Two team on how to sustain and grow intranets, including key principles for successful intranets.

The report can be purchased online, and delivered electronically:

www.steptwo.com.au/products/6x2/

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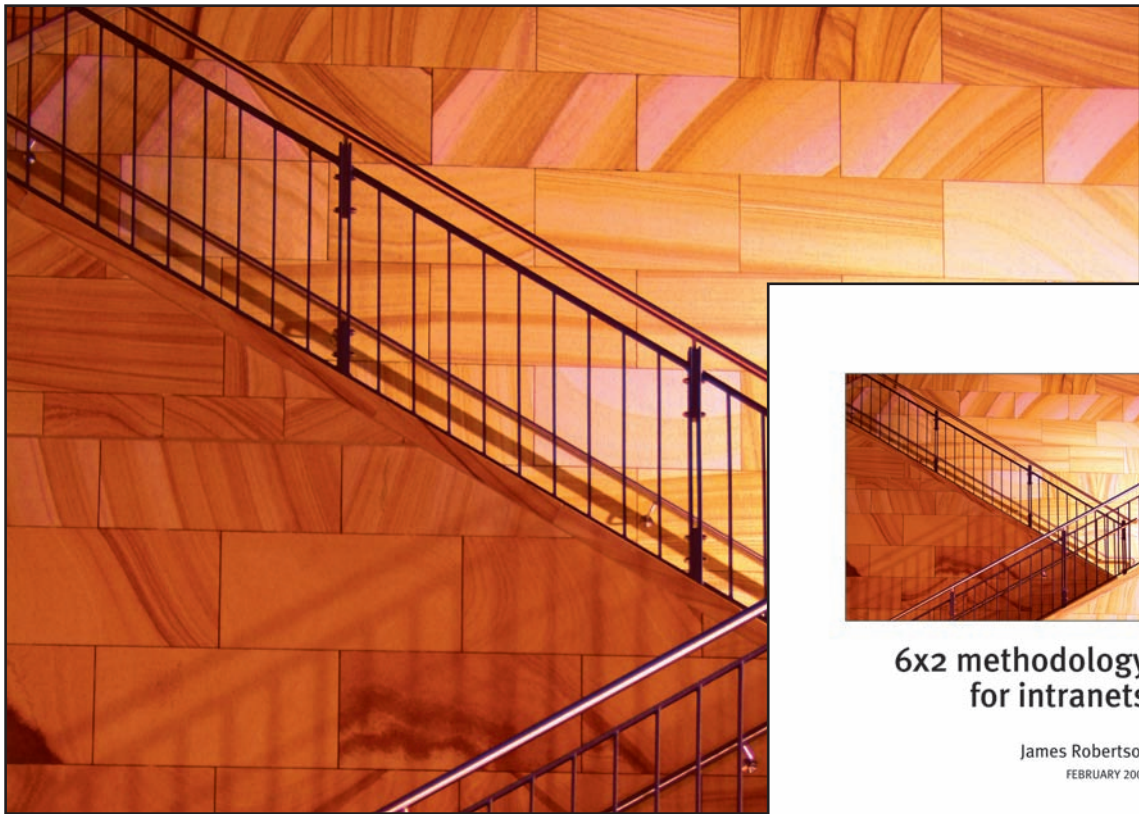**www.steptwo.com.au/papers/subscribe**

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6x2 methodology for intranets

Intranets must succeed. The organisational need to improve business processes, share knowledge and support staff in their daily work is constantly growing. Most organisations have already realised that they cannot operate without an intranet (whatever it might be called).

Yet the real challenge is for intranet teams to gain the support and resources to meet these business needs and demands. The net result is that intranet teams work hard from month to month, but may make little apparent progress on the longer-term objectives for the site.

The 6x2 methodology provides a unique and innovative approach to overcoming these challenges, and growing corporate intranets. Recognising that the list of potential improvements always exceeds the resources of the intranet team, this methodology provides a practical way of choosing the activities that will have the greatest impact on the organisation, and on the team.

This methodology provides a simple and pragmatic approach that can be used by intranet teams of any size (from one person to a dozen or more). It is equally applicable in private and public organisations, and the more complex and difficult the intranet, the better the approach works.

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