Chapter XI

A Taxonomy of Intranet Implementation Strategies:
To Make or To Buy?

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ABSTRACT

The mid-1990s marked the widespread adoption of intranets by organizations to facilitate communication between geographically dispersed organizational units. Since then the knowledge barriers to adoption have been lowered by the emergence of advanced development tools and later the availability of ready-made "intranet-in-a-box" packages as well as an elevation of the general awareness and knowledge of Internet/intranet technologies among users. Based on an explorative study of intranet implementations in nine Danish and two South African organizations, this article presents a taxonomy of four archetypes of intranet implementation processes. The dimensions of the framework are sourcing (in-house vs. outsourced implementation) and technology (development tools or packaged intranet products). Using the taxonomy, we classify the strategic choices of the case organizations and make recommendations for organizations using or producing intranet technology products.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations continue to face the communication challenges associated with geographic dispersion. Many have turned towards Internet technologies as a promising

avenue to interlink geographically dispersed units with a uniform and rich communication channel.

Organizations with a global presence have been among the first to implement intranets—small versions of the Internet, used purely for communication within the organization itself or even within a subset of its departments (Lyytinen, Rose et al., 1998; Damsgaard and Scheepers, 1999; Newell, Swan et al., 1999). Historically, in-house personnel have developed these intranets using quite basic development tools. Correspondingly, large organizations with plenty of in-house IT and development resources were the first to implement advanced intranets (Jarvenpaa and Ives, 1996; Moeller, 1996; Bhattacherjee, 1997).

Despite the popularity of intranets, the choice of sourcing strategy remains a complex decision. The ubiquity of intranet technology renders implementation decisions (especially those with large-scale implications), a painful and risky area that frequently produces expensive and poor IT systems in organizations worldwide (George, 2000).

During the early 1990s the intranet phenomenon was in its infancy and intranets were developed from scratch as the basic knowledge about the technology had to be "reinvented" (Attewell, 1992) by each organization. Since these humble beginnings, much innovative activity has occurred on the supply side of the technology (Zmud, 1984; Perez and Soete, 1988). First, tools for intranet development and maintenance have increased in availability, diversity, functionality and usability. This has put intranet implementation well within the reach of even small and medium-sized organizations. Second, ready-made "intranet-in-a-box" packages have emerged, enabling—in principle—any organization to implement an intranet without much in-house technical expertise at all. Third, the rise in the use of the World Wide Web has raised awareness and knowledge about Internet/intranet technologies with rank and file employees in most corporations. As such, the question most corporations are confronting is no longer "should we implement an intranet?" but rather "which kind of intranet should we implement?" We would like to suggest that an additional question be asked, namely "How should we implement an intranet?" We shall argue that the latter consideration is especially crucial in the context of globally dispersed organizations.

Similar to corporate Web sites that are routinely re-launched with new designs and functionality, existing intranets are redesigned, multiple efforts are consolidated into a single intranet, or intranets are scrapped in their entirety as organizations roll out new versions of the corporate intranet (Orenstein, 1998; Sliwa, 2000). Our analysis of implementation processes may be of use to both first-time implementers and to organizations with experience from one or several previous versions of intranets in the organization.

In this paper, we propose a framework describing four different intranet implementation strategies based on the choice of implementation process (in-house vs. outsourced) and the intranet architecture (tailor-made using development tools or ready-made using packaged intranet products). We suggest this taxonomy to help implementers contemplate different strategies and we extend recommendations for the implementation of an organizational intranet based on the resources, core competences, and capabilities of the organization.

In the following section, we outline a number of characteristics of intranet technology that are pertinent to conceptualizing the technology's organizational implementa-

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