

# The Impact of an Intranet Platform on Organizational Culture for Medium-Sized Corporations

A Claromentis white paper

When we start developing a new intranet platform for any sized company, we always ensure that we are made aware of the company's organizational culture, as we need to make sure that modern intranets have applications and interfaces that are aligned and will stand the maximum chance of being adopted by the target users.

Ultimately, this ensures that the sponsors (which for medium-sized companies are normally members of a management team that includes the business owners or CEO) are pleased with the intranet platform project outlines, mock ups, applications and functionality, and are willing to proceed with moving the project forward, including handing over implementation responsibility to the designated project team.

However, during recent meetings we have actually asked the interesting question - "*Would you like modern intranets to change the organizational culture - and if so how?*"

This has led to some very interesting and thought-provoking discussions. Based on our recent experience it is clear that a modern intranet platform offers many ways to impact corporate culture and therefore should be one of the primary tools with which to do so.

## **What Factors Determine Organizational Culture?**

It is accepted knowledge that organizational culture is expressed in shared values and practices across a company and can be supported by modern intranets. This is shaped by multiple factors, some of which are external to the business - such as laws, regulations, business climate, industry - or are a part of the legacy - such as history, ownership, and role models.

But many critical cultural factors are internal, and therefore subject to influence and in turn capable of evolution, however difficult this may be to accept or adapt when planning an intranet platform.

Cultural factors to consider when developing modern intranets include: expressed corporate values, technologies the organization uses, whether the company continually looks forwards or to the legacy of the past, freedom of individual expression, how feedback is captured and expressed, how responsibilities are allocated, participation in the decision making process, what's condoned, what's discouraged, and how complaints are handled.

## **Difficulty of Changing Organizational Culture**

The difficulties of changing organizational culture are well documented, extremely important and should be considered when developing modern intranets. Changing the cultural aspects of an organization is highly important whenever the competitive landscape changes and the old way of working and attitudes are no longer generating the lasting returns that the company has historically enjoyed.

Therefore, a new intranet platform should, in our view, be considered as one of the most practical ways to influence and change corporate culture, since an intranet is so centered on branding, communications, freedom of expression, and innovation.

## What Aspects of Organizational Culture are Relevant to Modern Intranets?

There are many aspects of corporate culture that are expressed in an intranet platform and therefore subject to influence by it. For the purposes of this article we will concentrate on just four of the most obvious:

- **Design**

Modern intranets' design is no longer just about extending the corporate brand to internal stakeholders, but is rather an environment where style and expression provide an immediate, strong representation of organizational culture that is reinforced every working day. When well executed, design elements express many facets of company culture in a visual form - including contemporary validity, choice of images, and the extent to which participation is valued.

- **Communication and Access to Information**

Communication is a critical expression of organizational culture and for most companies, the intranet platform is the central vehicle for all internal communication.

The control of access to information is also strongly governed by company culture - does a company allow all staff access to most information in the hope that they will engage with it and participate in making it better, or do they use modern intranets' permission engines as a way to provide information purely on a need-to-know basis?

- **Freedom of Expression and Participation**

Companies need to decide whether staff should be allowed or encouraged to interact with all news systems and blogs, whether those comments need monitoring and approval, and whether staff can provide feedback on the quality of all types of information on the intranet platform - such as documents, policies, and even staff profiles and departmental sections.

Further decisions about organizational culture need to be made as to whether one member of staff can track the collaborative activities of another on modern intranets to establish and follow mentors - a key aspect of enterprise 2.0, but one that some companies are still equivocal towards.

- **Innovation**

Modern intranets provide innovative solutions such as channel-based micro-blogging where staff can be 'introduced' to other staff members, follow them, interact, and together evolve new ideas outside of the more formal and static organizational culture of the company.

Some of these innovative discussions on the intranet platform will ultimately be expressed as new processes and products. Companies need to decide to what extent they welcome participation on modern intranets by staff in such informal, loosely-guided areas without any formal control that ultimately would be counter-productive to the free debate required in such areas.

## Why Focus on an Intranet Platform for Medium-Sized Businesses?

The U.K.'s Companies Act 2006 defines the upper limit on employees of a small company as 50 people and 250 people for a medium-sized company. On this basis, a medium-sized company of 50 to 250 staff has critical mass in terms of participation and yet can still be highly responsive. In our view, this is an ideal ground to work with modern intranets' design, applications, and configuration to influence organizational culture.

Smaller companies might find it difficult to obtain sufficient sustained participation on various topics to produce a notable shift in corporate culture. In turn, larger companies would require high-level and sustained coordination to make a difference - they would need to work on many value definitions, HR change initiatives and communication strategies of which the intranet platform would be an important part - but only a part.

## Why do Modern Intranets Bring so Much Relevance to Organizational Culture?

Modern intranets are offering so many choices and so many alternate design philosophies, that they now genuinely represent a platform with which corporate culture can be clearly impacted. Just a few years ago, enterprise 2.0 did not exist, vendors produced configurable but well-defined rigid products rather than genuine web-based frameworks for businesses, and social media was still in its infancy.

## Summary

In our opinion, a new modern intranet platform should at least in part be a discovery process to really engage with and learn about the existing staff. A focus on the requirements for assessing and changing organizational culture should be a factor in all new intranet project plans.

While we have yet to be contracted solely because a new client wanted to use modern intranets to change a company culture, we are increasingly asking if that is a required outcome when we start a new project.

Given the well-known difficulty with changing organizational culture, and the many different ways that an intranet platform can impact the internal cultural aspects that are within the control of management, we anticipate that this will be a growing part of our work with new clients.

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## Biography

Nigel Davies, Managing Director & founder of Claromentis has been involved with corporate software for 30 years. He has lived & worked in Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the US, & brings this global perspective to all business relationships.

His current three-year goal is to establish Claromentis as a significant supplier of web platforms to over 1,000 organizations.

## About Claromentis

### A web platform for your business

By combining our extensive software products for information and process management with our portal framework and custom development services Claromentis provides a tailored web platform for your business.

We listen carefully to your requirements, provide any custom solutions that you need and offer a complete range of options: on any platform, perpetual licenses or software as a service.

### Our Software

Our significant product set is fast to deploy and addresses the major requirements of companies in the areas of information management, process management and intranets and portals. Our core products and modules are available on Windows or Linux servers and in the cloud. End users are supported on PCs and Macs through any modern browsers.

Our software integrates with active directory, is fully localized for deployment in multiple languages, and has a strong permission system. Our interfaces are completely customizable, and the software configurable and extendable through our API.

### Our Approach

We believe in minimizing confusion, listening carefully to your requirements and working through an established process of mock ups and prototypes to minimize risks, control the budget and meet your timelines.

### Our Experience

We have been working with web software since 1998, are an ISO 9001 quality controlled company and are proud to have worked with clients on every continent.

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