The Uses, Roles, and Contents of Intranets in Multinational Companies in Finland

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Intranets are fast and cost-effective channels for internal business communication. They are especially suitable for situations in which a company needs to offer the same information or news simultaneously to the entire staff at various company locations despite geographic distances and time differences. But, communication via intranet is not uncomplicated, and certain issues may be critical to the intranet’s success within multinational companies, including access, language, and content. This article reports the results of a questionnaire surveying these critical areas and intranets’ roles and functions within 25 of the largest multinational companies operating in Finland.

Keywords: intranet; internal communication; corporate communication; business communication; intranet access; intranet language; intranet content; content creation

Multinational companies, and especially those operating globally, live in a world of constant changes and fierce competition in which knowledge—and speed of action and reaction—is power. Changes in the local or global markets, customers, owners, competitors, and the organizations themselves affect the way business is conducted. Companies and their employees have to be able to adjust quickly to changes in complex business environments and base their decisions on a “global organizational view instead of individually biased perspectives” (Ba, Lang, & Whinston, 1997, p. 99). In addition to having to make quick decisions, companies are also forced to communicate fast and effectively to reach their employees around the world with the latest news,
tools, instructions, and guidelines. The intranet is one of the most useful and effective tools for distributing the organizational news, latest guidelines, and newest tools quickly, cost-effectively, simultaneously, and thoroughly to the entire staff at various company locations despite geographic distances and time differences.

Intranets help companies overcome some communication-related problems, such as slow delivery of company news. Many intranet strengths—speedy and quality data transmission, efficient information storage and retrieval, interactive collaboration, cost-effective communication, and technical compatibility—have been widely documented by researchers. Lured by these many advantages, companies around the world have been building and adopting intranets at an increasing pace in the past 10 years. For example, a survey of 500 organizations in Hong Kong revealed that even in 1996, 41% already had intranets in place (Lai, 2001). A few years later, research suggests that approximately 60% of large companies in the United States had implemented intranets (Sridhar, 1998; Wachter & Gupta, 1997). The study I present here shows that nearly 93% of the respondents from the largest companies operating in Finland say that their companies have intranets, and nearly 74% consider the intranet the most important source of internal company information. Companies in Europe and other parts of the industrialized world have probably also adopted intranets at an equally fast pace; however, studies presenting specific percentages were not available.

But, researchers have acknowledged the many benefits that intranets offer to business communication, they have also identified weaknesses that make communicating via intranet challenging and complicated. Earlier research has highlighted, for example, problems with media accessibility and technology usability (Lamb, 1999) and problems related to information overload. Researchers have pointed out that an intranet is a “pull medium,” which means that information flow via an intranet depends on user activity (Stenmark, 2003). Partly because of this, intranets often contain redundant information or unnecessary duplication, disorganized documents, obsolete information, and decaying links (Scott, 1998). In addition, multicultural, multinational, and multilingual companies face some specific business communication challenges that I discuss in this article.

Intranets have so many diverse advantages that, despite the weaknesses, companies all over the world seem to rely heavily on them as channels of internal communication and collaboration. Many companies have started using the intranet as their main gateway to many of
their internal services and work tools. And many work processes are integrated into intranets; in other words, intranets offer not only information about how to complete work processes but also all the necessary tools and services needed for task completion. In addition, through intranets companies can communicate corporate strategy. As such, intranets become strategic business tools.

A GAP IN THE RESEARCH

Intranets have been frequently studied since companies started to adopt them at an increasing pace in the early to mid-1990s. Information systems (IS) researchers in particular have conducted a vast amount of research on intranets, contributing to the fairly comprehensive knowledge that we now have on intranets as networks and systems. Because intranets are not only networks or systems but also versatile and multifaceted tools for communication, collaboration, and data and knowledge management, intranet research in recent years has unsurprisingly become more and more multidisciplinary. The most recent studies on intranets from fields related to business communication have focused on a wide variety of aspects and features: Vaast (2004) explored how intranet use contributes to the interconnections of local communities and the emergence of networks of practice; Flanagin and Waldeck (2004) offered a model for examining the socialization of newcomers in organizations in light of recent developments in communication and information technologies, such as intranets; Jones (2005) examined how recent adoption of new technology, such as an intranet, has altered collaborative writing activities of corporate communication writers at an insurance company; and Banck and Nyström (2005) investigated various uses of intranets in five Swedish organizations.

However, in business communication journals published in the past couple of years, surprisingly few studies focus on intranets. This scarcity of intranet research is surprising, considering the widespread adoption of intranets and the vast amount of money and other resources companies spend annually on building and developing intranets. It is especially surprising that intranets at multinational companies have not received more attention. So far, no studies on intranets have explored how multinational companies attempt to meet the varying needs of their multinational, multicultural, and multilingual staff. Therefore, a study that offers a wide perspective...
and a holistic approach in providing a general overview of the state of intranets in multinational companies today would be especially valuable.

Intranets are not always easy to investigate because they exist securely within company networks surrounded by company firewalls, and exploring them requires permission from the company, which may explain why intranets have not been more thoroughly investigated by business communication scholars. Thus, to give business communication researchers, intranet developers, and management opportunities to benchmark, analyze, and compare intranets around the world, researchers must find ways to investigate intranets and the many puzzling questions raised by their use.

The current study begins to explore the uses, roles, functions and overall state of intranets in large multinational companies. It focuses particularly on three issues identified as most critical to intranet success in multinational companies: access, language, and content. Before discussing these three critical issues, I first briefly define the intranet concept.

THE INTRANET CONCEPT

Information systems researchers have constructed many useful definitions of intranets that, logically, reflect the research focus of networks or technology but also offer a useful interpretation of the intranet as a concept for business communication studies. According to Green (2002), an intranet is a private network offering features equivalent to the Internet but that is operated and maintained by a company or an organization for the exclusive use of its members and authorized users. Stenmark (2004) pointed out that although “the technology used in intranets is the same as in Internet, usage and content are different” (p. 2). Lamb (1999), in turn, noted that intranets are an “inside-the-firm technological configuration” (p. 1) and defined intranets as “web-based technologies that are accessible inside the firewall” (p. 7). The essence of these three definitions is that intranets are networks, built and maintained within the company firewalls, offering Internet technology and various contents for the exclusive use of the company staff. What these definitions lack, however, is the notion that intranets are built and maintained not only for information storage and retrieval but also particularly for enhancing information flow, or communication, within the organization.
For the purposes of the current study and from the business communication perspective, an intranet is a medium by which and in which company-wide internal communication may take place. An intranet is a channel by which selected content—information, news, and tools—can be circulated and offered to the entire staff simultaneously across the world. In this sense, an intranet can be considered a company-wide mass medium. Alternatively, the intranet may be used to target smaller, predetermined groups of users with certain types of information. Communication may also take place within the company intranet, as many intranets today offer virtual team or meeting rooms, discussion forums or blogs, and other collaboration tools.

Modern intranet technology supports communication from various directions: top-down (e.g., when corporate executives convey corporate news), bottom-up (e.g., when departments publish information about product development), and horizontally across the organization (e.g., when grassroots users or teams collaborate on projects). Intranets offer opportunities not only for many-to-many communication (e.g., when employees participate in corporate-level discussion forums) and some-to-many communication (e.g., when management publishes new corporate-level guidelines) but also for one-to-one communication (e.g., when an employee sends feedback to the author of a company news article via e-mail).

What this extremely versatile technology is used for and how it is allowed to support internal communication often seem to depend more on business policies, resources, and context rather than on its technical qualities as a communications channel.

**ISSUES CRITICAL TO INTRANET SUCCESS**

As much as company goals for intranets vary, so do definitions of successful intranets and measures that are used to determine intranet success. For example, what is considered high intranet usage may vary from company to company based on the purposes and goals that have been appointed for each particular intranet. But, intranets generally can be considered successful if their usage rates are high (i.e., if a relatively large proportion of the company staff regularly uses the intranet); they serve their purpose as defined by management, corporate communications, or other responsible departments; and they meet the needs of their users. Although the current study does not define and specify measures of successful
intranets, intranet users indicated the successfulness of their company intranet by evaluating its access, language, and content. Despite the variation in definitions and measures of successful intranets, these three issues—intranet access, language, and content—seem commonly problematic and critical to intranet success in business communication.

**Intranet Access**

Companies are not always able to offer intranet access to all their employees. Access is sometimes limited or even denied to some individuals or groups for financial or technical reasons or, even more often, because of the nature or demands of specific job tasks. For example, direct intranet access may be difficult or impossible to offer to assembly-line workers or to staff members working outdoors. No matter how logical the reasons are for excluding some employees from intranet access, management should question whether this practice places people at unequal positions within the company. The employees without access may miss information and thus feel left out and less appreciated. Weerakkody (2004) noted that an “intranet marginalizes those without access to it and reinforces the privileged position of those already with higher status within the organization, contrary to the utopian predictions of new technologies leading to social equality” (p. 545). And, as Weerakkody pointed out, intranet access may even be considered a status symbol in some organizations. Newell, Scarbrough, and Swan (2001) stated that an intranet at a global bank created “electronic fences” by reinforcing demarcations between existing national and functional boundaries and encouraged fission instead of integration between individuals across the organization. Deetz (1990) suggested that new technologies may end up sustaining rather than changing existing power configurations and current differences between groups. Bernard (1998), in turn, maintained that intranets are constrained by the old assumption that the use of computer networks should be restricted even though they are primarily conduits for communication and collaboration within companies.

**Intranet Language**

Sometimes texts on intranets are written in languages that readers do not fully understand. This problem may occur in multinational
companies that use, for example, English as their business language when communicating to their branch offices or subsidiaries in countries in which English is not the first language. Even though employees may understand the language used, the texts may include jargon, difficult terms, or other words that they may not be able to interpret or understand sufficiently. This problem may be common to companies that encourage various employees to write and publish information regarding their own fields of expertise.

If the information published on an intranet cannot be understood fully or interpreted correctly, what good is the intranet to the company or its employees? And if an intranet is not able to offer information that employees can use to complete their everyday tasks, they may eventually turn to other sources of information and stop using the intranet completely. A recent study by International Survey Research (ISR, 2005) shows that 67% of the employees in the United Kingdom and France, 62% in the Netherlands, 61% in Germany, 55% in Sweden and Finland, 46% in Norway, and 41% in Denmark said they heard about important matters as rumors first. ISR researchers suggested that rumors prevail because business leaders are poor communicators. Thus if the company intranet does not succeed in communicating information (e.g., by publishing texts that employees cannot understand), company employees may start to search for information via unofficial channels.

Intranet Content

An intranet is perhaps most affected by the creation and management of its content. Intranets, like traditional news media, are only as good as the amount and quality of relevant and useful information they offer. If intranets fail to offer information that employees consider current, useful, and relevant to their everyday tasks, employees will not use them regularly, if at all. Damsgaard and Scheepers (2000) pointed out that if the trustworthy intranet content falls below the critical mass, users will perceive the intranet as useless and will abandon it. Andersen (2001), however, found a significant positive association between the use of communication enhancing information technology, such as intranets, and organizational performance across industrial environments. This finding suggests that intranets have strategic value to companies—but only if they are used more than just occasionally when employees have spare time.
Even though many researchers have investigated content creation and management, they disagree on how to best create and maintain content for corporate intranets. Several researchers (e.g., Curry & Stancich, 2000; Damsgaard & Scheepers, 2000) claimed that for intranet communication to succeed (i.e., for the content to remain relevant and current so that employees regularly use the intranet), the content of intranets should be tightly controlled and strictly managed. These researchers suggest that a centralized approach to creating content may make controlling the amount and quality of texts easier. They argue that this control, achieved by allowing only a few people to create content for an intranet, would improve intranet usability by making the structuring of information more efficient. These arguments support the efforts many companies make to integrate all grassroots intranets into one corporate-controlled intranet.

The supporters of centralized content creation argue that liberal publishing policies result in a chaotic web of interrelated pages and information overload and that restricting publishing to a small, well-trained staff of content creators would help to maintain consistency (Stenmark, 2004). In his work concerning intranets and organizational culture, Stenmark (2004) critiqued this centralized approach by pointing out that it often results in intranet content that is very general in nature. He noted that “content providers are adding information that is supposed to be of concern to most employees, regardless of job position or organisational belonging” (p. 8); however, employees would appreciate more job-specific, highly situated information, such as solutions to technical problems—information that should come from colleagues and not from the selected content creators. He argued that allowing all users to publish would “facilitate knowledge sharing and encourage debate and peer-to-peer collaboration” (p. 10). Stenmark (2003, 2004) further claimed that if the corporate culture discourages decentralized content creation, prohibiting grassroots users from sharing knowledge via intranets, end users cannot expect to find the specific job-related information they need, which will have negative effects on intranet usage.

A centralized approach means fewer content contributors, which usually leads to less information published on an intranet. Because only a few content creators may be in charge of choosing, writing, and publishing all the texts for the entire organization, these few people may be overburdened, which may result in insufficient coverage of important company issues. A small number of content creators may
not be able to produce and publish enough new information to meet the needs of the entire organization.

Strict control and a centralized approach to content creation may also result in biased intranet content and a skewed view of company issues. In deciding what issues to cover and what angles to take, content creators act as gatekeepers. Such gatekeeping (see Snider, 1967; White, 1950) may result in highly subjective and biased world-views being presented via intranet to users. Gatekeepers restrict the free flow of information by making decisions based on their own frame of reference, company policy, or management’s perspective instead of first seeking a thorough understanding of what others in the company consider important and relevant. And a centralized approach to content creation may lead to diminished use of intranets because the information published fails to meet users’ needs and expectations. Users may feel that issues discussed on the intranet are not relevant to them. Texts may convey a strong top-down feeling, which may irritate some readers.

Some researchers who are not satisfied with corporate control and centralized content creation (e.g., Lamb & Davidson, 2000; Stenmark, 2003, 2004) advocated a many-to-many, bottom-up, or distributed approach to creating content, which means that a large number of employees (sometimes all the employees) are allowed to write and publish content for their intranet. According to Stenmark (2003, 2004), the distributed approach results in highly usable, specific job-related information. Although, as Scheepers (1999) has noted, intranet coordinators, developers, and content providers are important to intranets’ success, Lamb and Davidson (2000) maintained that the best results, in terms of regular and intense intranet use, can be achieved when intranet content is created by users, or when “the roles of a user and developer of intranets are conflated” (p. 264). This finding lends support to efforts toward decentralizing or distributing content creation and grassroots intranet development. But, a distributed approach to content creation also has disadvantages. Distributed content creation and insufficient control over publishing may, for example, drastically increase the amount of text published on an intranet, resulting in information overload and chaos.

Many intranet researchers have taken sides, calling for either a distributed grassroots effort (Lamb & Davidson, 2000; Stenmark, 2003, 2004) or a more centralized and coordinated approach (Curry & Stancich, 2000; Damsgaard & Scheepers, 2000); however, few researchers have pointed out that instead of two opposing approaches,
a continuum exists. And surprisingly, I found no previous research that specifically discusses a middle-ground or hybrid approach. I considered this continuum in the current study in order to investigate middle-ground approaches that companies may take in developing and creating content creation for their intranets.

To provide a deeper understanding of this continuum and why content-creation approaches and models vary from one company to another, I briefly discuss the development of intranets and trends in content creation before I present the method, theoretical framework, and results of the current study.

DEVELOPMENT OF INTRANETS AND TRENDS IN CONTENT CREATION

Research (e.g., Lamb, 1999; Lamb & Davidson, 2000; Scheepers, 1999) suggests that intranets were born mainly out of grassroots efforts and that business personnel developed early intranets initially for their own specific needs. According to Lamb and Davidson (2000), “individuals or small ad-hoc teams crafted a set of web pages that linked together documents of local interest or Internet sites for common use, and provided access through the existing organizational networks” (p. 260). They pointed out, however, that even when these separate organizational intranets were linked to one another and easily accessed by all company employees, cross-use was uncommon, resulting in what the researchers called “islands of practice” (p. 262).

As management, IS, and corporate communications departments in many companies realized the intranet’s potential as a unifying and strategic tool, they developed their intranets from a few-to-few medium to a larger, more important corporate-level network. At the same time, development and maintenance responsibilities were removed from grassroots intranet builders and given to corporate-level developers, and content was created in a more bureaucratic and controlled top-down fashion. As Stenmark (2004) described it, “information is added via a centralized process where a small number of professionals are assigned the responsibility of maintaining a page or a site. This process may further be subject to careful review and approval—and sometimes even censorship” (p. 7). As corporate-level intranet developers (often consisting of IS, information technology [IT], and corporate communications personnel) became concerned
about the ineffectiveness of the content and development effort as well as the lack of intranet standards (Lamb & Davidson, 2000), they began integrating multiple grassroots intranets and loosely interconnected intranet pages into one corporate intranet (Lamb, 1999). Companies started coordinating their intranet efforts to standardize the presentation of content and the appearance of intranet sites and to make useful content available to all (Lamb & Davidson, 2000).

The need to standardize led many organizations to integrate their intranets into one corporate site. Even though such corporate intranets were supposed to integrate all company-level information and materials into one easily accessible channel, many companies left some well-functioning and much-used intranet versions, or subintranets, in place. These subintranets, though often revised to follow company guidelines and standards (i.e., using the company’s templates, software, and editing tools and following the company’s content-quality specifications), were left to serve various business units, functions, and specific user groups and were still maintained by the groups they served. Lamb and Davidson (2000) noted that “in organizations where intranet use is intense, multiple intranets commonly co-exist—each one created and used by a separate group in the firm” (p. 269).

Many company intranets start from multiple grassroots efforts, and many develop later, through company standardizing and controlling efforts, into integrated company or corporate intranets. But, some companies completely integrate all intranet efforts by constructing one corporate intranet while other companies choose to function with a network of interrelated intranets. Not all company intranets evolve this way or in this order because companies develop their intranets at their own pace, according to their own strategies. Intranet development is continuous and dynamic—never finished or complete—and development efforts are at times centralizing and at other times decentralizing. Companies weigh the advantages and disadvantages of centralized and distributed development and control, shifting their intranet strategy accordingly. One objective of the current study was to discover the various kinds of intranets and how they were constructed and developed.

**METHOD**

To explore the functions and importance of the intranet as a communication medium, I surveyed Finland’s largest companies. I designed
the survey questionnaire to investigate the three critical issues of successful intranets—access, language, and content—and to generate an overview of the current state of intranets in large multinational companies. (An English translation of the survey questionnaire is included in the Appendix.)

In December 2004, I sent the questionnaire to the 50 largest companies in Finland. By largest, I mean companies having the highest annual revenues; the annual revenue of each of the 50 companies exceeded $1 billion euros. These companies were included in the 2003 Talouselämä Top 500, which annually lists 500 of Finland’s largest companies based on revenues claimed in their official financial statements. The Talouselämä Top 500 is much quoted by the Finnish business media and considered a reputable source for financial information in Finland. The list included companies that have a head office or headquarters in Finland; however, a few companies were Finnish subsidiaries or branch offices belonging to a larger corporation headquartered outside Finland. I chose the Top-50 companies operating in Finland because they represent the most complex organizations taking part in a variety of fields of multinational or global business and thus need effective internal communication via efficiently and purposefully functioning company intranets. A survey of these companies, given their rankings and global involvements, was likely to indicate the kind of resources and knowledge necessary for implementing and developing top-quality company intranets.

I sent the questionnaire to 50 persons who were in charge of their company’s intranet or internal business communication. These people would know about the intranet from operational and strategic perspectives. They would also know about company strategies and goals defined for internal communication and, more specifically, the company intranet. I collected the names of these people by calling company switchboards and asking operators to check the internal company directory for the person responsible for the company intranet or internal communication. Despite the length of the questionnaire (38 multiple-choice questions, most of them including open-ended parts, plus 15 questions concerning the respondents and the company they represent), 27 persons, or 54% of the initial target group, filled out and returned the questionnaire.

This approach is considered suitable for an explorative study attempting to accumulate practical data and a general understanding of how companies develop and use their intranet or a network of intranets to reach personnel who work in various geographic
locations or business units, speak various languages, and represent various cultures. Surveying these intranet experts would shed light on how being a multinational or global company affected company intranets.

I sent the questionnaire in traditional paper format. I encouraged respondents to write any thoughts or questions they had relating to the study. Many respondents used this opportunity extensively, for example, to explain about their company’s future plans for its intranet.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intranets are neither developed nor maintained in a vacuum but situated and operated in varying contextual settings. Organizational culture is fragmented, pluralistic, and constantly interpreted and reproduced in social relations (Iivari & Abrahamsson, as cited in Stenmark, 2004). Lamb (1999) pointed out that various people taking part in content creation have different frames of reference; they may be professionally involved with varying social groups and have differing conceptualizations about uses of new technology, such as intranets. This contextual or cultural variation could explain why intranets developed independently look very different from one another even when applications and services on intranet sites are the same. Therefore, the business context and prevailing organizational culture obviously would affect the content provider, content-creation process, and, through these, actual content being created. Following Lamb’s and Iivari and Abrahamsson’s lines of thought, this research explores intranets from a social constructivist viewpoint and the perspective of structuration. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1979), which provides a connection between human action and social structure, has proved useful in studying various aspects of information technology, such as intranets, in organizations (Orlikowski & Robey, 1991; Scheepers & Damsgaard, 1997).

According to Giddens’s (1979) theory of structuration, “social reality is constituted by both subjective human actors and by institutional properties” (Orlikowski & Robey, 1991, p. 146). Orlikowski and Robey (1991), who have applied this structuration theory to information technology, noted that “it is improper to conceive of a social system merely as the product of either deliberate human action or of institutional forces,” and they concluded that “human
action can be seen on the one hand to constitute the institutional properties of social systems, yet on the other hand it can be seen to be constituted by institutional properties” (pp. 146-147). In other words, human action is enabled and constrained by structure, and at the same time, structure is produced and reproduced by human action. As Scheepers and Damsgaard (1997) pointed out, “Action and structure presuppose each other and they are therefore viewed as a duality in structuration theory. Thus structure is both the medium and outcome of action that it recursively organizes” (p. 11).

Because in the current study I explored various aspects of intranets from the perspective of intranet developers and experts, I used structuration theory mainly as a tool for viewing intranets, especially as productions (and reproductions) of deliberate human action. And as such, I viewed intranets as context-bound, socially constructed, and multifaceted business communication phenomena reflecting and simultaneously affecting human and institutional factors.

RESULTS

In this section, I discuss the data I collected concerning the companies, respondents, intranet uses and roles, intranet versions and access, language and content, content creation, and overall intranet satisfaction.

The Companies

Based on the background data I collected, I could not identify any obvious pattern for the 27 respondent companies (see Table 1). For example, according to their annual revenues, these companies equally represent the largest, mid-largest, and smallest companies in the Top-50 list. In examining the demographic data, we see that the companies come from many different fields, and their staff sizes vary from fewer than 1,000 to more than 30,000 employees. More than one half of the companies (17 of 27) are listed on the stock exchange, and almost all of the companies (22 of 27) indicated they operate internationally. In addition to operating in Finland, 19 companies operate in Europe, 17 specifically in other Scandinavian countries, 14 in Asia, 12 in North America, 10 in South America, 9 in Africa, and 7 in countries or continents not mentioned in the questionnaire, such as Australia, the Baltic countries, and Russia. Five of
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<th>Top-500 Ranking</th>
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<th>Stock Exchange Listing</th>
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<td>More than 30,000</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>More than 30,000</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Banking</td>
<td>More than 30,000</td>
<td>Stockholm, Copenhagen, Helsinki</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English + each country's own language</td>
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<td>Finnish, Swedish, English, Estonian, Lithuanian, Lett, Russian</td>
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<td>Finnish&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Food industry</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>5,000-9,999</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish, English</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Fiber-based materials and paper</td>
<td>5,000-9,999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Insurance and financial services&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Paper industry&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td>Fewer than 1,000</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>English, Finnish</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Beverage retail&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Sports equipment</td>
<td>1,000-4,999</td>
<td>Helsinki, London</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Oil industry</td>
<td>Fewer than 1,000</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Healthcare, information technology</td>
<td>More than 30,000</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>USA and UK</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NN&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fewer than 1,000</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish&lt;br&gt;b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The ranking based on annual revenues as listed in *Talouselämä Top–500*
b. Companies do not specify the range of their international operations.
c. No data on which stock exchange
d. 1 = other Scandinavian countries, 2 = Europe, 3 = North America, 4 = South America, 5 = Africa, 6 = Asia, 7 = elsewhere.
e. Respondent did not provide the name of this company; therefore, its ranking could not be determined.
the companies did not specify the range of their international operations although some are known to operate internationally.

The Respondents

The respondents were mainly females (24 of 27), and their titles indicated that they worked for corporate communications (e.g., communications officer, communications manager, communications specialist) or a unit responsible for publications or Web communication (e.g., net editor, editor in chief, digital communications coordinator). Thus, at least in many of the largest companies operating in Finland, corporate communications personnel act as owners of their intranets and are responsible for it and its development. This finding supports the notion that intranets should be studied extensively from the perspective of corporate communications.

Twenty-two respondents considered their company Finnish, and one respondent considered her company as Swedish or Scandinavian. Four respondents considered their company global, or international, based on, for example, the company’s global brands and presence. Ten respondents said their company’s nationality is based on the location of the company headquarters while eight said their company’s nationality is based on that of its owner. The rest (9 respondents) said the company’s nationality is based on the nationality of the majority of the employees or the top management; the country where most company operations take place, the majority of company revenue comes from, or the company is registered in; or the company values, identity, and culture.

Intranet Uses and Roles

Based on survey results, almost all of the respondents’ companies (25 of 27) have an intranet. All 25 respondents whose companies have an intranet said that they participate in intranet creation and maintenance. One of the two respondents whose companies did not have intranets said an intranet was not needed because the company used Outlook and F-disc. In other words, the company shared information through other means, such as e-mail and group folders. The responses by the two respondents representing companies without intranets were excluded from the rest of the analysis.

Twenty-three respondents said they use the intranet several times a day, and 2 use it daily. Six respondents said they assume
that employees in general use the company intranet several times a day, 10 assumed the employees use it daily, and the rest assumed employees use it several times a week or weekly. According to these reports, most company employees seem to use the intranet at least daily. This finding, however, represents the respondents’ assumptions and serves only as an indication of actual usage. Intranet use needs to be researched further to get more accurate information about usage rates.

Of the 25 respondents, 18 considered the intranet a very important channel for internal information, and 6 saw it as quite important. When compared to other forms of internal business communication, 17 respondents considered the intranet the most important channel of internal information; 4 respondents found team, group, and unit meetings to be the most important channel of internal information; only one respondent considered personal e-mail to be the most important source of internal information; and one respondent mentioned weekly news bulletins, summaries, or newsletters as the most important sources of internal information. The remaining 2 respondents could not identify a single most important source of internal information. None of the respondents considered the staff magazine, corridor or coffee room conversations, or staff meetings to be the most important sources of internal information. And quite surprisingly no respondent mentioned manager-subordinate communication as the main source of internal information.2

Although the intranet is seen as very important or, in many cases, the most important channel of internal information, it is not the only channel for such in these companies: Of the 25 companies, 22 publish a staff magazine, 18 deliver electronic bulletins and news releases, 18 hold staff meetings or internal conferences, and 11 deliver printed internal releases or bulletins. Respondents also listed various other meetings and conferences as well as interpersonal communication as other sources of internal information. One respondent also mentioned communication via fax and notices posted on traditional bulletin boards.

**Intranet Versions and Access**

Typically companies have a network of intranets in addition to the corporate intranet. The survey results showed that 11 respondents (44%) shared just one common corporate intranet with all the employees, 10 (40%) also had some country or location-based versions
of the company intranet, and 7 (28%) had different intranets for var-
ious business units, functions, or departments. These findings sug-
gest that companies often offer a common corporate intranet and a
variety of intranets for varying user groups.

Because most respondents (25 of 27) worked at company head-
quarters in corporate-level departments or units, I expected that
the corporate intranet would be the one they most often used. But,
only 7 respondents said they used the corporate intranet most reg-
ularly. In addition, although more than one half of the respondents
(14 of 25) reported using only one intranet version, less than one
half (11 of 25) said they used many versions of the intranet regu-
larly. This finding may indicate that the respondents consider
the company intranet to be the entire network of their interconnected
versions.

Nine respondents said they offer varying intranet views, or con-
tent, to different user groups within the company. This phenomenon
is called *profiling*, which means that users gain access to intranet con-
tent depending on the role-based profiles that are assigned to them.
Such profiles are constructed (often by management or human
resources personnel) for users based on their varying needs for tools
and information. By receiving predetermined or focused content,
users may experience less information overload and gain easier
access to the most relevant and task-related intranet content.

In contrast to profiling, *personalizing* intranet content means that
users themselves can choose between many intranet contents, tools,
and other elements to create a view of the intranet that best suits
their needs (e.g., deciding what content they want to see on their
home page). Personalizing may also improve the usability and rele-
vance of intranet content. Even though profiling and personalizing
are currently hot topics among intranet developers in Finland, only
9 respondents reported that their companies used profiling, and
none reported that they offered the opportunity for personalizing
intranet content, a finding that is understandable considering the
effort and resources required for such endeavors.

Of the 25 respondents, 17 (68%) said their companies offer the
intranet in almost all of the company locations whereas only 7 (28%)
said that the intranet is offered in all of the company locations.
Additional research is needed to find out which parts of the organi-
izations are left without intranet access and why. According to
researchers, providing intranet access to some groups while not to
others may cause social divergence and marginalization within a
company, create (unintentionally or intentionally) hierarchical power structures, and raise internal fences among various company groups based on who does and does not have access to information (Deetz, 1990; Newell et al., 2001; Weerakkody, 2004).

Intranet access outside company walls remains limited to select employees. Only 4 respondents (16%) said their companies offer remote access to everyone or almost everyone. Most respondents (14 of 25) said that only some of the employees have remote access, 4 respondents said that few employees have remote access, and 3 said that employees, in general, have no remote access. I was surprised to find that even though intranet technology can defy physical barriers, not all companies fully use this major advantage or strength of the intranet. Further research is needed to investigate which employee groups have remote intranet access and which do not.

Intranet access inside company walls, however, in some companies is relatively barrier free. Of the 25 respondents, 11 (44%) said they never need to log on or give their user name and password to get into the intranet while 9 (36%) said they must always provide authentication. The other 5 respondents reported that they need to provide authentication “only in some specific situations (such as when accessing intranet from outside the office).” One reason employees are not required to log on to the intranet may be that their companies rely on single sign-on; that is, as employees log on to the company network, they also gain access to all the other tools and systems, including the intranet, that the network offers. The questionnaire did not account for the possibility that companies may use single sign-on.

Language and Content

More than 70% of the respondents said their companies offer different language versions of the intranet whereas nearly 30% provide only one language version. Most often the intranet is offered in Finnish and English because in all but one company, the official company language is either Finnish or English or both. In some instances, the intranet is offered in each country in that country’s own language while the corporate intranet is offered in English.

About 54% of the respondents reported that content creators within the company write the original texts directly in each language version of the intranet, 21% use translators from outside the company, and about 17% use in-house translators to create various language
versions. Only 3 respondents (12%) said that intranet texts are translated by company staff members with sufficient language skills.

A majority of the respondents (72%) said they are able to use the intranet in their native language while 5 respondents (20%) use it in a foreign language that they know well. Whether the language was Finnish or English, respondents did not find intranet language to be a problem. But, these respondents may not represent the average company intranet user. As communication professionals, the respondents’ language skills may exceed that of the average employee.

The results showed that company intranets offer a wide variety of content (see Table 2). All respondents said their company intranet offers internal news articles and news releases, external news and press releases, and work instructions and process descriptions. In addition to the intranet content listed in Table 2, respondents mentioned that their company intranets offer question-and-answer sections, customer cases, various company presentation materials, and presentation materials produced by staff for external events, e-learning materials, company publications and printed materials and internal staff directories with names, numbers, and even photos.

According to 15 respondents (60%), new information is published on the intranet several times a day whereas 9 said that new information is published daily, and only one respondent said that new information is published just weekly. Not surprisingly then, most

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal news articles and news releases</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External news and press releases</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working instructions or orders and process descriptions</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links (e.g., to the company Internet sites)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the markets, line of business, and competitors</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to tools and systems (e.g., human resources and finance systems)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive sections (e.g., flea market and discussion forum)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
respondents reported that they get enough information via the intranet. These respondents themselves, however, create content and make decisions concerning their intranets and thus do not represent the staff in general. Respondents who did complain that they get too little information wanted more news about the competition and markets as well as externally published news about the company. Interestingly, one respondent said he would like to get more bad news, suggesting that company intranet content may focus on positive news.

In summary, all companies offered a wide variety of intranet content. New content is published at least daily and, in most companies, several times a day. Let us next look at how companies approach content creation.

Content Creation

Who actually creates intranet content? An editor in chief or one specific person is responsible for the company intranet according to 76% of the respondents. At the same time, nearly all respondents (23 of 25) reported that more than 10 people create intranet content. The other 2 respondents reported that their company had only two to five content creators. Unfortunately, more than 10 persons was the questionnaire’s highest option to choose (see Appendix, question 29); consequently, the number of content creators per company could not be determined. Clearly, I did not anticipate the extent of employee involvement. But, the findings indicate that, in most cases, a good number of people create content for the intranet; it is not left to a few.

When respondents were asked to estimate whether content creation was centralized or decentralized (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing a very centralized approach with very few content creators and 5 representing a very decentralized approach in which many participate), only one respondent reported centralization (see Figure 1). Altogether, the majority of the respondents (20 of 25) said their company creates intranet content in a way that reflects both some central control and distributed content creation (indicated by answers 2 to 4 on the scale). The average score of 3.2 indicates that most companies have chosen a hybrid approach to content creation with a slight tendency toward decentralization.

Advantages of decentralized content creation included dispersed maintenance loads, efficient content updates, and contributions by
those who know particular issues well. Advantages of the centralized model included more control and therefore improved quality. The listed advantages are similar to what has been found by Curry and Stancich (2000), Damsgaard and Scheepers (2000), and Stenmark (2003, 2004). Because the hybrid approach was not mentioned in the questionnaire, respondents did not list advantages specifically for the mixed approach, which could have reflected the advantages of centralized and distributed approaches.

Finally, in all the companies both corporate communications and human resources personnel take part in creating intranet content. The corporate communications department seems to be in charge in most companies; however, other departments and individuals also provide content. Many respondents pointed out that company units often appoint someone to take part in content creation as the unit’s spokesperson. In addition, some respondents reported that experts in particular subject areas are encouraged to take part in content creation because they are believed to provide the most-accurate information on these subjects. These findings reflect a tendency for the hybrid approach to content creation: centralized control but distributed content creation.
Overall Intranet Satisfaction

The respondents rated their company’s intranet content on a scale of 4 to 10, reflecting the grading system in Finnish schools (with 4 representing intranet content offering very little useful and practical information and 10 representing intranet content offering useful and practical information). Excluding one response, the grades given for content ranged from 7 to 9, with an average of 8. Only one respondent graded the company intranet’s content 5, or poor. Evaluating intranet usability on the same scale (with 4 meaning very difficult to use and 10 very simple), the respondents gave grades for usability ranging from 6 to 9, with an average of 7.6. Therefore, the respondents were, on average, quite satisfied with the content and usability of their company intranets. In addition, respondents indicated in their open answers that their company plans to improve and develop the intranet in the future. The respondents, however, anticipated taking part in intranet development, so they may not represent the average intranet user.

DISCUSSION

The survey results show that intranets have been implemented and are used in nearly all the respondents’ companies regardless of the company’s field of business, number of employees, or depth of international operations. Intranets offer a wide variety of content, and new content is published once or more daily. In these companies, the intranet was considered the most important source of internal information, clearly surpassing all other channels of communication, even face-to-face and interpersonal communication as well as e-mail.

A Controlled Collaborative Approach to Creating Content

Some prominent intranet researchers with IT and IS viewpoints suggest that content creation should be highly distributed and that most, if not all, staff members should be able and allowed to contribute (e.g., Stenmark, 2004). The findings of the current study do not support these suggestions. Instead of adopting a highly distributed content creation approach, the respondents’ companies seem to combine the advantages of the centralized and decentralized approaches, thereby gaining the best of both. The findings indicate
that, at this point, these companies have adopted a hybrid approach favoring slightly decentralized efforts to create content. These findings suggest that content creation and intranet maintenance are also a collaborative effort involving experts, for example, with in-house business communications professionals or other corporate-level departments maintaining overall control.

Furthermore, the current study supports Lamb’s (1999) notion that most intranet development is done in-house. Even though creating content is obviously not easy, these results do not show that companies outsource or plan to outsource their content creation efforts to improve, for example, cost-effectiveness. Rather, these companies seem to find the most-suitable approach for content creation by shifting between highly centralized and highly distributed approaches to find the appropriate balance for their specific contexts. Structuration theory suggests that as contexts change, human actors consciously (but also unconsciously) modify their actions. Although the data collected for the current study do not offer a possibility to view intranet development over time, such a topic would make interesting research, presenting a bird’s-eye view of structuration at work inside a firm.

Corporate communications managers may view the highly distributed approach to content creation suggested by some researchers as diminishing the intranet’s effectiveness, credibility, and usability as the number-one internal business and corporate communications medium. Users receiving intranet pages from various sources may have difficulty determining what content represents the company’s official viewpoint and what content is based on the content creator’s own interpretations and opinions. This uncertainty regarding the source and even the accuracy of the information, by structuration terms, may constrain rather than enable intranet activity. In addition, the large number of intranet pages or documents produced may make intranet maintenance and ownership a challenge that no one person or department wants to face alone. As the respondents in the current study feared, lack of clear intranet ownership may lead to unorganized intranet structure and content, which in turn may make finding documents and information difficult and time-consuming.

**Tailored Content to Various Languages**

As we have seen, most of the respondents’ companies offered their employees different language versions of the intranet, mostly
in English, Finnish, or both. Although I would consider language as critical to intranet success, the respondents did not see intranet language as a problem perhaps because they had the opportunity to use the company intranet either in their native language or in a language they knew well. But, these respondents do not represent the average user—their language skills may exceed those of most employees. Intranet language may prove problematic for more diverse users. Even when companies provide various language versions of intranets, they probably do not offer all or even most of these users a version in their native language or in a language they know well. From the perspective of structuration theory, an intranet is “a social product of subjective human action within specific structural and cultural contexts” that simultaneously contributes to the “creation, recreation and transformation of those contexts” (Rose & Scheepers, 2001, p. 222). With that in mind, companies should question what happens when certain individuals or user groups are not able to use information offered via the intranet, thereby missing opportunities to collaborate and exchange knowledge with others. Furthermore, companies should carefully weigh how this possible lack of online interaction with some user segments may affect the company in the long run.

Many respondents indicated that their companies offer not only the official corporate intranet and its various language versions to employees but also some country or location-based versions. These versions commonly offer content tailored to meet the needs of users in specific countries or locations. Respondents’ companies also offer a variety of intranet sites to various business units, functions, or departments. These sites are often either completely or partly maintained and operated by these departments themselves.

Even though most of the respondents’ companies provide the intranet in almost all company locations, units, and departments, only one third of the companies offer their intranet in all company locations, units, and departments. Thus the lack of access to the company intranet and corporate-level information can be considered a problem, at least potentially. The effects that such a lack of access has on the perceived hierarchy, equality, and status of employees would provide an interesting area of future research. For example, a study could determine in which situations intranet access should be made easier and more widely available within a company to improve its internal communication.
CONCLUSION

I conducted the current explorative study to provide a general understanding of the present state of intranets in large multinational companies. The current study suggests that the intranet has superseded face-to-face and e-mail modes of internal communication, that the creation of intranet content is surprisingly collaborative, that not all companies profile target groups and offer personalization despite having the technological capability to do so, and that intranet use is largely physically confined.

Although the current study offers new information about widely used and valued intranets, it also highlights new areas demanding more attention in the future. For example, intranets should be taken into account in the researching and teaching of collaborative writing. In addition, intranets’ possible role in creating and maintaining unnecessary hierarchy and inequality within organizations requires more attention from researchers and educators.

A company creates new content, changes related policies, and adopts newer technology and tools for developing its intranet based on changes taking place within the company and its environment. These changes should not be viewed as impediments to intranet-related research but rather as driving forces. This dynamic evolution is what makes intranet research not only challenging and interesting but necessary and worthwhile.

APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire (Translation of the Finnish original)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
Name: ________________________________________________________________
Title: _________________________________________________________________
Company: _____________________________________________________________
Line of business: ______________________________________________________

I am available for an in-depth interview to be possibly conducted at a later date:
  a. Yes
  b. No
Size of the staff in your company:
  a. under 1,000
  b. 1,000–4,999
  c. 5,000–9,999
  d. 10,000–14,999
  e. 15,000–19,999
  f. 20,000–24,999
  g. 25,000–29,999
  h. over 30,000

Do you participate in the intranet development in your company?
  a. Yes. How? _______________________________________________________
  b. No

Is your company stock-exchange listed?
  a. Yes. In which stock exchange? _________________________________
  b. No

In which country is your company headquarters located? ________________

Do you work at your company’s [choose the location in which you work most of the time]
  a. headquarters
  b. other company office, located in _________________________________

What is the official language at your company? __________________________

Where does your company operate? In addition to Finland, our company operates in [you may select multiple options]:
  a. other Nordic/Scandinavian countries
  b. Europe
  c. North America
  d. South America
  e. Africa
  f. Asia
  g. other location(s) (list where) _________________________________

In addition to Finland, in which geographic locations does your company have more than 10 employees (you may select multiple options)?
  a. other Nordic/Scandinavian countries
  b. Europe
  c. North America
  d. South America
  e. Africa
  f. Asia
  g. other location(s) (list where) _________________________________
Is your company
a. Finnish
b. some other nationality (list which) _____________________________

How does your company define its nationality?
  a. Based on the location of its headquarters
  b. Based on the nationality of the major shareholder
  c. In another way (explain) _____________________________

QUESTIONS REGARDING INTRANET, ITS ROLE, AND ITS USE:

1. Does your company have an intranet?
   a. Yes
   b. No (What is your own assumption of why your company does not have an intranet?) _____________________________

If you answered no, you may finish the survey at this point. Thank you! If you answered yes, please continue answering to the rest of the survey.

2. How do you find your way to the company intranet?
   a. I have intranet bookmarked on my Internet browser.
   b. I have an icon or a link to intranet on my computer desktop.
   c. Intranet opens up automatically when I start up my computer.
   d. Intranet opens up automatically when I sign onto the company network.
   e. Intranet opens up automatically when I start up the Internet browser (intranet’s front page is the browser’s start-up page).
   f. Some other way (explain) _____________________________

3. Can you access the company intranet while in a location other than your main work location (you may select multiple options)?
   a. Yes, I may access the intranet also at other company locations.
   b. Yes, I may access the intranet via remote access, for example, while at home.
   c. No, I cannot access the intranet outside of my main work location.
   d. I do not know.

4. Do the company employees in general have access to the intranet via remote access (you may select multiple options)?
   a. Yes, everyone has remote access.
   b. Yes, almost everyone has remote access.
   c. Yes, but only some have remote access.
   d. Yes, but only few have remote access.
   e. In general, no.
   f. I do not know.
5. Is the intranet offered to the company staff in all the company locations and units?
   a. Yes, in all locations
   b. In almost all locations
   c. In only a few locations
   d. Only at headquarters
   e. I do not know.

6. Does your company publish various content versions of the company intranet (you may select multiple options)?
   a. No, our company offers one intranet to all company employees.
   b. Yes, there are various location or country-based versions of the intranet.
   c. Yes, there are various content versions for different units or business groups.
   d. Yes, there are various content versions of the intranet for different reasons (list reasons) _______________________________
   e. I do not know.

7. Do you regularly use many different intranet versions (for example, business unit’s own version and the corporate intranet)?
   a. Yes, I do use many intranet versions.
   b. No, I only use one intranet.

8. Does the intranet you most regularly use differ in content from the intranet version offered at the company headquarters?
   a. Not at all
   b. Yes, a little
   c. Yes, quite a lot
   d. Yes, completely
   e. I use the headquarters version.
   f. I do not know.

9. Does the company publish many different language versions of the intranet?
   a. No, the intranet is offered to all employees in the same language.
      The language is ________________________________.
   b. Yes, there are various language versions of the intranet. The languages offered are ________________________________.
   c. I do not know.

10. Is the language of the intranet you most regularly use the same as in the intranet version offered in the headquarters?
    a. Yes, because I work in the headquarters.
    b. Yes
    c. No
    d. I do not know
11. What is the language of the intranet you use most regularly?
   a. Finnish
   b. Swedish
   c. English
   d. Other (list language) ________________________________

12. What is your proficiency in the language used in the intranet?
   a. My native language
   b. A foreign language I know well
   c. A foreign language I know reasonably well
   d. A foreign language I know poorly
   e. A foreign language that I do not know at all
   f. Cannot say

13. If the intranet language is not your native language, do you know it?
   a. Well enough so that it does not interfere with intranet use
   b. Fairly well, so that it interferes with intranet use only a little
   c. Poorly, it interferes with the intranet use
   d. Intranet is offered in my native language
   e. Cannot say

14. If there are various different language versions of the intranet, who translates the intranet contents?
   a. The content creators themselves write the originals in various languages.
   b. The texts are translated by professional translators within the company.
   c. The texts are translated by some other company employees.
   d. The texts are translated by professional translators outside the company.
   e. There are no different language versions of the intranet.
   f. I do not know.

15. Do you need a username and/or password for using the intranet?
   a. Yes, always
   b. Yes, in some specific situations (for example, when remote accessing)
   c. No, I do not.

16. Does the entire staff have free access to all intranet’s sections and documents?
   a. Yes, the entire staff may access all the sections and all the documents.
   b. No, there are sections or pages on the intranet that are accessible to only some predefined users or user groups.
   c. I do not know.
17. Are different views of the intranet offered to different user groups, teams or departments (i.e., does your intranet offer profiling)?
   a. Yes, the view of the company intranet that is offered to each user varies based on the user group, team, and unit the user belongs to.
   b. No, all users see the same view of the intranet.
   c. I do not know.

18. How often do you use your company intranet on the average?
   a. Many times a day
   b. Daily
   c. Many times a week
   d. Weekly
   e. Less frequently than once a week
   f. I do not know.

19. How often do you think the company staff on the average uses the company intranet?
   a. Many times a day
   b. Daily
   c. Many times a week
   d. Weekly
   e. Less frequently than once a week
   f. I do not know.

20. What content does your company intranet offer to its users (you may select multiple options)?
   a. Internal company news or releases
   b. External company news or press releases
   c. Information about the markets, line of business, or competitors
   d. Work instructions, guidelines, and process descriptions
   e. Access to tools and systems (such as HR or finance systems)
   f. Interactive sections (such as discussion forum, flea market, etc.)
   g. Links (for example, to the company’s Internet pages)
   h. Other (list) ______________________________________________________

21. How often is new information published on the intranet?
   a. Many times a day
   b. Daily
   c. Many times a week
   d. Weekly
   e. Less frequently
   f. I do not know
22. Do you think you get enough information via your company intranet?
   a. Yes
   b. No, I would like to receive more information on ________________________________
   c. I do not know.

23. How important is the company intranet as an internal communications medium in your company?
   a. Very important
   b. Quite important
   c. I do not have an opinion, I do not know.
   d. Not very important
   e. Not at all important

24. Besides intranet, what other internal communications media does your company use?
   a. Internal printed releases (such as weekly news bulletins)
   b. Internal electronic news bulletins (for example, via e-mail)
   c. Staff magazine
   d. Staff information meetings
   e. Other (list) ______________________________________________________

25. Which one of the internal communications media do you consider the most important source of internal company information to you?
   a. Intranet
   b. Weekly news bulletins or other regularly published news summaries or newsletters
   c. Staff magazine
   d. Staff information meetings
   e. Team, group, or unit meetings
   f. Personal e-mail messages
   g. Corridor or coffee room conversations
   h. Other (list) ______________________________________________________

26. Are intranet users offered any user training?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I do not know.

27. Are intranet users offered user support (for example, a help line via phone)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I do not know.
28. Does your intranet have an editor in chief?
   a. Yes, his or her title is ________________________________.
   b. No
   c. I do not know.

29. How many persons take part in creating content for the intranet?
   a. 1
   b. 2–5
   c. 6–10
   d. More than 10 persons
   e. I do not know.

30. Who participates in creating content for the intranet (you may select multiple options)?
   a. Communications personnel
   b. Human resources personnel
   c. Top management
   d. Middle management
   e. Entire staff
   f. External groups (for example, communications partners such as PR companies)
   g. Others (list) ________________________________
   h. I do not know.

31. Assess the degree to which your company has centralized the content creation activities. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 represents a very centralized content creation approach (only a few content creators, often from the corporate communications), and 5 represents a very distributed content creation approach (all members of the staff may create intranet content). Please circle the appropriate number.
   1  2  3  4  5

32. What advantages does your company’s content-creation approach offer (centralized–distributed)?

33. What are the challenges involved in your company’s content-creation approach?
34. What overall grade would you give to your company’s intranet content (On the Finnish school-system scale of 4 to 10, in which 4 represents intranet content offering very little useful and practical information, and 10 represents intranet content offering lots of useful and practical information)? _______________________________________________________

35. What overall grade would you give to the usability of your company’s intranet (on a scale of 4-10, in which 4 represents a very difficult to use intranet, and 10 a very easy to use intranet)? __________________

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:
What in your company intranet is well functioning and good?

What in your company intranet is bad or poorly functioning?

How could you improve your company intranet?

NOTES

1. The Talouselämä Top 500 list is collected and published annually by Talentum Corporation in Finland. The current list can be found at www.talouselama.fi/te500list_eng.te.
2. In the questionnaire, manager-subordinate communication was not listed as an option as the main source of internal information. But, respondents were encouraged to add to the list those sources that they considered most important.
REFERENCES


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