Towards organisational collaboration and communication with SharePoint and Yammer

Lotta Linko (ed.)

Contents

Lea Mustonen, Communication Manager

Using internal communications tools and channels to develop the HAMK brand

The HAMK strategy, which emphasises working together by means of digitalisation, accelerated construction of the intranet as a tool for work community communications and working in teams.

The HAMK strategy is a message from the organisation to staff, students and partners: 'HAMK offers the most inspiring higher education and work-related research activities'. Digitalisation is one of the main elements of our strategy, and is not only a development target but also a tool for achieving goals. The strategy guides decisions made in the organisation, and we have particularly focused on the planning and implementation of new systems and channels. Although developing internal communications is a priority, especially with communications services, this is, first and foremost, a matter of furthering communal work.

The path we have chosen is to implement more or less all of the Office 365 tools and channels, and supplement them with Yammer. The offering is comprehensive: Lync as a tool for instant messaging and online meetings will play a stronger role. OneDrive is like the former network disk drive, but more convenient because documents can be easily shared and they can be accessed anywhere on a browser. Shared workspaces bring people who work on a specific topic together across sub-organisational boundaries. E-mail and the calendar are already established, although there is room for improvement in terms of their effective use.

We have built different types of websites in SharePoint Online: personal newsfeed page, unit websites and team workspaces. As opposed to our old systems, the new platform has given us the opportunity to offer every user a personal view for the information offering. A second key change in thinking and operating methods has been to combine the student and staff intranets. In addition to common information, we enable collaboration: teams have workspaces that contain the entire Office tool package as browser versions.

Our actions send a message about HAMK, where people really work together. Easy-to-use everyday communal systems and tools are at the very heart of this process, because our students and staff are some of the most important messengers. Digitalisation is a strategic choice made by HAMK. It is also a key element of the HAMK brand.

Lotta Linko, Online Communications Manager

Implementing a new intranet as an agile project

HAMK's new intranet is the first comprehensive information system acquisition implemented mainly according to the agile method. Earlier intranets were implemented with the traditional waterfall method prevalent at that time.

We have achieved a lot by combining the good features of the waterfall model with agile methods. The most important practices in the agile model have proven to be clear product ownership and management commitment to decision-making, phased and realistic product versions with clear definitions, task management and assessment in the development periods, procurement in the form of mini competitive tendering via framework agreements, a rapid pace of development, and broad-based team work across unit boundaries.

Among others, we have been satisfied with the following elements of the new operating model: We are able to prioritise targets and assignments in a better way, and we can complete sub-entities fairly rapidly by dividing our work into phases. The feedback received on completed work allows us to change plans and make corrections quickly, and it is easy to add content and functionality to existing context. We have also noticed that end users understand a 'finished' product better than abstract plans, although their expectations of the 'finished' product can also be very different! At best, project work has clear roles, and the tasks can be arranged in a good way with regard to time and content. We have found flexible, browser-based applications and tools to support this project model and new style of work, and the new work style has enabled the development of new learning and competence.

Regardless of the project implementation model, a new generation tool is a major challenge to an old school organisation – technically, at the concept level, and in terms of operating culture and management. Since many users want to retain old operating methods, induction, training and support are essential elements when initiating a change and achieving the necessary competence and desire. In the same manner, the gap between pioneers and other users must be closed by means of management. Changing an operating culture is much more challenging than technical implementation – but also more rewarding.

Lotta Linko, Online Communications Manager

From old servers and services to a new cloud service

The operating logic for new generation tools differs from that of HAMK's earlier portal system. The new intranet is part of the Office 365 cloud service, which is made up of e-mail, an address book, calendar, tasks, documents, and different types of websites. One log-in provides access to all the tools needed for collaboration and communication.

The new intranet has been implemented as a combination of SharePoint 2013 Online and Yammer. They have been used to build tools for communications inside the organisation, messaging between teams, and collaboration that is independent of time and place. The guiding principles have been

- Personalisation of information: every user has a personal newsfeed page providing common content and a personal feed based on his/her interests and activity.
- Use on several devices and different-sized screens: the websites have been built to function responsively, so that they can be browsed on a mobile phone or used on a large-screen computer alike.
- Use independent of place: users can log in to the cloud service anywhere, at any time, and on different devices as long as the device is connected to the internet.
- Finding information: the system contains an efficient search engine and a common information architecture and interface between the unit websites.
- Info services and work services behind the same log-in but in different spaces: collaboration takes place in the teams' workspaces while completed content is published on the units' informative intranet websites, both of which are located in the same O365 service.
- One service entity and a consistent user experience behind a single log-in: Along with websites, Office 365 contains contact information, e-mail, a calendar, tasks, and a personal cloud storage space with browser-based office programs, and the user logs in to all these services with the same username at a single address.

The new tools not only enable a change in operating culture but also force it to happen. This is no longer a matter of mere software or applications, but of a work culture that is a strategic concept managed in the organisation.

Henna Pirttilä, Planner, and Nea Yalcin, Planner

New intranet as part of everyday studies

At HAMK, the intranet has played a strong role in everyday student life for years. The former 'Oskari' student portal available to all student was created in 2006, when the intranets for different degree programmes and locations were combined into a single entity that was in part centrally administered – and also very extensive.

The idea of renewing the content of the student intranet had already been discussed many times. The final decision concerning the renewal process was triggered by the fact that the technology and functionalities of the old publishing system could no longer meet the requirements of modern activities. There was a need for a clearer content structure, content independent of terminal devices, and social services.

According to user data, the student portal was most used for finding the latest credits, timetables, academic year calendars, contact information, library services, and information about resit exam dates, work placement, exchange opportunities, and thesis work.

It was decided that HAMK's public website, which was being renewed at the same time, would be a source of general and common information, while the new intranet would provide more detailed information about everyday education and tools for work.

The change was started with pilot groups in early 2014. Based on background information and personal experiences, the pilot groups were asked to specify the kind of student intranet sites that would best serve their needs.

After small-scale initial pilots, one of the campuses switched to using the new intranet in autumn 2014. This was R1.0 of the new intranet. Based on the original plans and practical experiences, all other degree programme sites were built on the new platform while maintaining the old entity at a sufficient level and preparing users for the upcoming change.

Version R1.1 of the new intranet was launched in March 2015. All common content of the degree programmes was included in the development version, as well as the students' personal newsfeed pages and team workspaces. Now, a diverse range of tools and services is available behind a single log-in, regardless of the terminal device or physical location. The new intranet content will be supplemented during spring 2015.

The challenge of this development work has been the fact that such a large change in the work environment and everyday tools requires a change in the culture of work throughout the organisation. A wide range of tools and services is not enough – goal-oriented management and staff activity is also required in order to create and maintain a new way of collaboration and communication.

Mirlinda Kosova-Alija, Web Developer and Part-time Teacher

Cloud service tools for collaboration give students skills needed in the workplace

Work and the skills needed for it have changed radically in comparison to the situation a few years ago: the required knowledge and related services and tools are always accessible on nearly any terminal device. Communities form and communications takes place in a variety of cloud, mobile and social media services. Services are becoming easier to use and, rather than focusing on being an expert with a specific tool or technology, people can concentrate on the essential: communications, networking, content production, sharing, and collaboration.

In addition to personal use, the role of cloud services has been emphasised in the world of work, because work is now independent of time and place. Educational institutes have to ensure that graduates are able to use and exploit these services when they move into the workplace. The popularity of O365 is growing in Finnish organisations, which means that it is very important for students to have at least a basic mastery of the operating logic of it and similar services when moving into the workplace. Adopting a service that enhances a sense of community while studying provides students with concrete tools to function in future work communities, and simultaneously provides a good foundation for new learning. Communities and collaboration have huge potential in terms of developing the efficiency of studying and work.

HAMK implemented the O365 service for pilot use in spring 2014. It was provided to new business information technology students in two groups containing nearly 100 full-time and part-time students. The students considered the service very easy to use. The greatest amount of attention was focused on OneDrive for Business, which is intended for creating, saving, editing and sharing files, and on various workspaces established for group working: a natural need and use existed for these features.

In the initial phase, some students were concerned about the scope of the service, and use seemed disorganised. However, once the basic functions had been reviewed, the purpose of the service became quite clear. Students were pleased that the entire service and its sub-parts can be found under a single address and accessed with a single log-in and username. The possibility of using the service in a browser-based format at home, for example, was popular with students who are working while completing their degrees. The simultaneous use of files made possible by OneDrive for Business was praised by many students in their feedback. Students also made development proposals related to the scope, speed and use of the service.

At work, students are expected to have a diverse range of skills and be able to operate flexibly in a rapidly changing work environment. Since the new, collaborative and communicative way of working is not yet prevalent in all workplaces, today's students may very well be the agents of change in this respect.
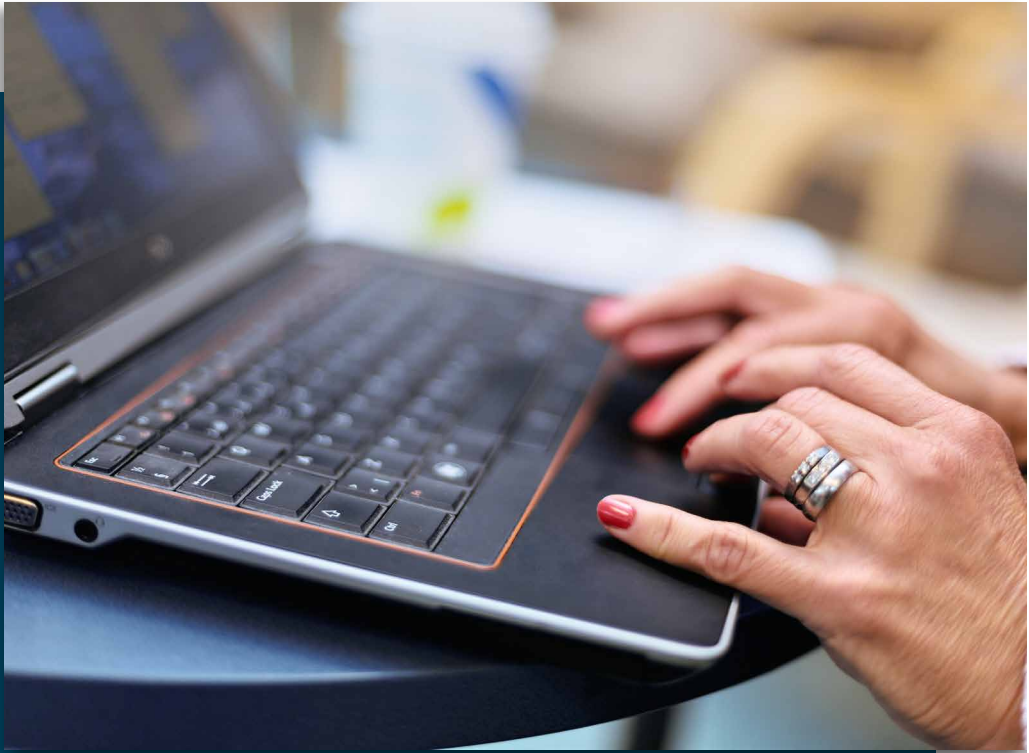
Pirjo Kuisma, Development Manager

New tools enable team-like model of work for heads of degree programmes

The rules and operating methods for HAMK's educational responsibilities are based on cooperation between the management team, heads of degree programme and education development services. Operational quality assurance is built in by means of new cloud tools and workspaces.

HAMK has 20 heads of degree programme. They meet once a month for a meeting lasting some two hours. When meeting face-to-face, they address issues that require more extensive discussion, exchange of opinions, and development consideration. The meetings build a common HAMK spirit and deepen relationships with colleagues, which also contributes to building the interaction in online meetings.

Each week, a one-hour online meeting is held in the Lync meeting system. Online meetings provide a quick and concise forum for handling matters that require joint agreement, various introductions, communications issues, and clearly defined tasks. Depending on the topics, online meetings may be recorded. Memos from the meetings are written simultaneously in the workspace used by the heads of degree programme.

Holding meetings online saves time: physically travelling to the same place on a weekly basis would take three times as much time as online meetings. An online meeting also makes it possible for each participant to quickly move to the next task on his or her campus. Good preparation and a concise introduction to the topic also play a key role when meeting online. The amount of time saved is very significant at the annual level.

A workspace in SharePoint has been created for collaboration among the heads of degree programme, and this space is open to the entire staff. All agendas and memos from the meetings and the material handled in the meeting are added to the workspace. A common workspace with a document library reduces the sending of attachments, and the amount of e-mail sent. Joint editing and supplementing of files also increases openness, sense of community and peer learning. The newsfeed in the workspace allows discussion of matters that jointly affect the heads of degree programme. Each head of degree programme is also a member of the Education Support Services Yammer group.

The new workspaces allow for a new kind of interaction and community activity. However, operating methods do not change suddenly, and such a change requires purposeful analysis of personal and team activities and an open-minded approach to learning new things.

Taina Lehtomäki, Communications Coordinator

Social communications and networks are also coming to the intranet

Yammer is an internal social network and discussion platform for companies. As a result of our intranet reform, Yammer will become the main channel for internal communications as part of the intranet built in SharePoint Online.

Implementation of Yammer began with outlining operating methods: We need to communicate jointly with the entire staff and with all students. There must be a channel for communications that is campus-specific in nature, and which also reaches the staff and students.

In the planning phase, most questions were related to practices for student communications, an area that already involved the greatest variation in practices. On the other hand, Yammer appeared to be a good match for internal communications among staff in the units providing education, with support services groups serving as discussion forums and channels for customer service and communications.

The Yammer start page feed was embedded in each user's personal newsfeed page on the new intranet. Yammer feeds were also embedded in the unit and degree programme websites, and in some workspaces. These measures have made Yammer a more integrated part of the intranet.

We have different levels of Yammer users: users who follow and may, over time, also participate, users who follow and participate somewhat, and users who participate actively. People have started to share smaller issues and those that may still be in progress – they realise that not everything requires a one-page bulletin that is approved by 10 people. Although this culture of sharing and commenting may be a little foreign in our organisation, users have also become bolder in terms of encouraging and advising each other.

Our problems with Yammer have been the All company group, poor tailorability, the Invite link, and unnecessary groups. In this case – as with many other issues – we have noticed that people tend to just start trying things rather than taking the time to read the user instructions or guidelines.

Generally speaking, Yammer has been considered relatively easy to use, with problems and questions mainly being related to the change in culture and to how the service should be used. In terms of implementing Yammer, the challenges included the large number of users, different needs, and the wide range of previous practices. The two most important targets with regard to Yammer are inspiring the staff to make diverse use of Yammer and establishing practices for student communications.

Taina Lehtomäki, Communications Coordinator

Asking about the cloud service in the cloud service

When we began to hold the first inductions for the new intranet, we discovered the need for a place where a user could, for example, present quick questions, talk about observations and problems, report the need for guidance, and share their own tips. We set up an Ask about O365 cloud services group in Yammer.

At that time, we considered the group to be an archive for frequently asked questions and a discussion forum, but as the project progressed we found that it could also be used more extensively. The group has been utilised to communicate about various disturbances and problem situations. Active members have shared group posts with their own groups. We have also used the group to provide information about new O365 features. Users have also been able to comment on the instructions provided or present their opinion about matters related to the intranet.

However, the most important element of the Ask about O365 cloud services group may be that it allowed users to ask us for more information on, for example, updating pages, editing workspaces, or even handling documents. We have also added questions and answers that arose in training sessions or were presented to the group through other channels.

Of course, replying to the questions and following the group requires some effort. An intranet reform should inspire a lot of questions – without the group, these questions would have been presented in e-mail, instant messaging, face-to-face or by phone. In practice, this would have meant advising each user on an individual basis. In Yammer, everyone can see the previous questions and answers. Yammer makes it possible to add other people to the discussion, so that questions can easily be directed to the right person if someone doesn't know the answer. Over time, the goal is to crowdsource the answer process, thus making it easier for users to advise each other.

Taru Kosunen, Planner

Using Yammer and O365 tools to reform recruiting communications

When HAMK began using Yammer, the group for developing career and recruitment matters decided to create a simple operating method for directing company assignments and open jobs to the right students effectively, quickly and without intermediaries.

A decision was made to establish a Yammer group called Jobs and projects / Technology. The group communicates extensively about assignments in the field so that any staff member or student can easily publish an assignment or job that he or she has become aware of. The group was added to the front page of the work placement page on the technology degree programmes intranet, thus giving students access to work placement instructions and a selection of open assignments in a single location.

The beginning has been promising. The number of announcements has been good and user feedback positive. The staff has become more active in terms of communicating about jobs, and students have been satisfied with the new practice. In the future, the goal is to achieve an energetic and active group that quickly reports different assignments, projects, thesis topics, and open jobs.

Mirlinda Kosova-Alija, Web Developer and Part-time Teacher

A responsive interface was tailored for the new intranet

HAMK's intranet was built as a combination of SharePoint and Yammer and it works in three ways: 1) as a traditional intranet site where information of a permanent nature is published, 2) as an interactive communications channel for staff and students, and 3) as a platform for project work. Planning took into account intranet use on different devices – from smart phones to large-screen phones, tablets and laptops to standard desktop computers.

When considering the intended use, issues such as content architecture and information availability stood out as being more important than appearance. We also wanted to comply with Microsoft recommendations by giving the service a simple look and focusing on good functionalities and user-oriented content. A further goal was to use standard models and proven elements of the SharePoint 2013 Online product whenever possible. Microsoft updates the cloud service in a variety of ways without separately notifying the organisations using SharePoint Online, and automatic updates can pose major challenges to tailoring, because they may break something. As a result, it is important for tailoring to be implemented in a manner that relies on standard functionalities as much as possible.

However, Microsoft's standard themes are not sufficient to achieve our desired appearance and functionality. We were very careful when reviewing the need for tailored functionalities, some of which were components that worked in the old portals and found necessary. Together with our supplier, we planned the tailoring of functionalities and tasks in a way that made the greatest possible use of standard features. We also added the following tailored elements: CSS, common bulletins, tabs, and Yammer embedding.

Responsiveness is already becoming a web standard, and HAMK made its own public website responsive in 2012 – 2013 – now it was time to do the same for the intranet. SharePoint Online is not responsive by default, so tailoring was required to make it mobile-friendly. We re-installed the SharePoint content areas via CSS styles; our responsive implementation uses all of the full version elements, meaning that nothing extra has been implemented for it. The device base is evolving rapidly today, and it is only a matter of time before the intranet is designed on an entirely 'mobile first' basis and SharePoint Online begins to offer a responsive interface as a default feature.

Jyrki Juuti, Head Architect, and Olli Kari, Sales Director, VisualWeb

The future of intranet systems

Some time ago, internal organisational communications operated in a single direction and were intended to disseminate important operational issues from the management to the company's internal stakeholders, which in practice means the employees. An intranet often contained comprehensive news functions, but information was saved in different formats and read in varying ways.

Information is the most important resource for specialist organisations, and it must be available in an increasingly better and faster way so that all organisational functions can utilise it as rapidly as possible. As a result, internal organisational communications has been forced to change its operating models from saving information to sharing and utilising information. It is now time for every internal and external stakeholder to contribute to making business and organisational activities more profitable and competitive. The workplace should be one big information sharing community that also stretches outside the organisation itself.

Results can be achieved when information flows are available and

- independent of terminal device (in a cloud)
- intuitive (based on e.g. the social media tools familiar from leisure time)
- live (e.g. in the form of videos)
- transparent (e.g. by means of business system integrations).

New operating ideas, systems and services enable efficient communications and improve the competitiveness of companies. They will be an integral part of and the very heart of future intranets. However, systems are only enablers. In order to continue system development and as part of 'intranet implementation' process, the organisation has to change its operating culture and lead information work in the desired direction.

Cloud services are today's trend in collaboration and communication. Many organisations use Microsoft's Office 365 as their platform, and Yammer brings the social into enterprises. We at HAMK – Häme University of Applied Sciences – have built our new intranet on SharePoint 2013 Online and integrated Yammer into the site.

This online booklet briefly gathers some of the findings of the planning and building phase of HAMK's new intranet. The topics covered include the role of new digital tools in branding and culture change as well as students' everyday life, the benefits of teamwork, the social aspect in corporate communications, and the agile development of an online service.

This publication is a translation of the summaries of the Finnish "Kohti yhteisöllistä viestintää SharePointilla ja Yammerilla".

HAMK
HÄMEEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
HÄME UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES