

Factors Encouraging Upward Employee Voice in an Online
Workplace Portal: A Case Study of an Academic Research Institute

by

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ABSTRACT

Few studies bridge workplace engagement and employee voice with internal communication. This analysis builds upon both the crucial concept of employee engagement and its implications for communication professionals and leaders. Further, it calls for more strategic integration of upward employee voice in internal communications. By examining factors that support communication (in two directions) and especially upward employee voice, researchers examine a case study of an intranet site at a major academic research institute. Factors that support employee expression are compared with data streams from both user survey and website analytics. The results point to voice-inducing techniques include projecting critical mass, fostering trust, and emphasizing intranet usefulness and rewards. By enriching workplace communications, voice can strengthen the employee's ability to contribute, connect leaders with a source for direct feedback, and help employers be more responsive and nimbler.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Although online commerce rivals physical stores today, most consumers can still vote with their feet – that is, individuals can express their preferences through direct action. If the shopper does not like a retail store or restaurant, she has the option to not return to that business. In light of consumer behavior theory, Hirschman (1970) revisits economists' descriptions of this choice—that is, to not return—and describes it as an “exit.” Exits in business mean a customer is recruited, but not engaged. Thus, the business loses out on future sales, which can be costly. At the time of Hirschman's writings, social protests were prevalent. It is in this context that Hirschman expanded on a second option for the disappointed consumer: he called it “voice.” Hirschman said, “To resort to voice, rather than exit, is for the customer or member to make an attempt at changing the practices, policies, and outputs of the firm from with one buys or the organization to which one belongs,” (p. 30). Like consumers who use their voice as bargaining power over where they shop, employees who choose not to leave their places of employment also have voice with which they can use to influence them. Of course, trade unions have historically been the broker of voice for such employees.

As the unions' popularity waned in Britain, Alex Bryson (2004) analyzed employee expression without the union middlemen. This employee expression, which went straight to management, Bryson called “direct voice.” He explained that when employees speak up about their concerns—like Hirschman's unhappy shopper—they share their desires, thus giving the employee voice (p. 213). The resulting two-way communication mixes upward employee expression with organizational top-down messages. Furthermore, the added expression also gives team members, at every level, a voice. Traditionally, direct voice is formally heard in town-hall forums, committee

meetings, and from idea boxes and workplace surveys. Informal channels, termed as water-cooler talk and the grapevine, are less direct. These tend to be peer-to-peer, but eventually reach management's ears. Updated intranet platforms and other technologies provide interactive functionality to these standard collection methods (both formal and informal), many of which can also facilitate direct voice within their organizations.

Today, intranet portals have expanded on the features they offer to encourage employees to participate in more and more self-expression and two-way communication. These include enterprise social networks (with synchronist messaging), user-generated content, commenting and liking options, polls, idea collection tools, etc. These all provide mechanisms for employees to express themselves to their colleagues, who may hold jobs at all levels within the existing workplace. This self-expression leaves employees with real satisfaction from having been heard beyond the traditional channels of their immediate supervisor and team; and this, in turn, engenders greater loyalty. Employees are, thus, motivated to self-expression when they care about their employers and their jobs. In fact, employee voice occurs when workers feel engaged. Not only do employees benefit from voice; organizations do, as well.

For both the organization and the employee, this direct exchange remains a less costly alternative to an "exit"—especially, when the investment in employee training, benefits, and experience are lost. In fact, some proactive leaders cultivate bottom-up forms of communication and are additionally rewarded with an added source of information and an early chance to respond. This added line of ear-to-the-ground intelligence can help leaders avoid being the last to know of various goings-on within their own organizations and can be a useful tool to strategically shift work cultures in more positive directions.

At the United Nations, Under Secretary General Kofi Annan relaunched iSeek, an intranet for knowledge sharing, to help shift the UN culture from one of being process oriented in a highly politicalized and specialized working environment to a more flexible culture (Stoddart 2007). The site was lauded by an internal auditing department that credited iSeek as a central factor in its knowledge-sharing strategy (p. 182). However, even such a model of knowledge sharing in a repository that relies on experts can be too centralized and cumbersome. Experts can become quickly bogged down with the added consultation time required to share knowledge—that is, in addition to their regular workloads. To relieve this problem, Benbya, and Van Alstyne in their MIT Sloan Management Review article (2011) proposed the idea of developing internal markets of information. These markets move information flow from vertical to horizontal. The model incentivized employees who had expertise to answer client or stakeholder questions, regardless of their place in the organization’s hierarchy. Thus, internal markets are a significant departure from a traditional top-down solution process. Based on Benya and Van Alstyne’s experience in implementing such markets inside 50 organizations, they found this model produced more accurate answers and reduced the slow-down of expert bottlenecks. It also revealed hidden gems of valuable knowledge throughout the organization (p. 67). Such internal markets also supplied a much needed vehicle for bottom-up communication in order to reach leadership and effect change.

So, to add this type of upward stream of communication, the academic research institute—the focus of this case study—launched an intranet with participatory features that could enrich existing top-down communication and help foster a workplace for more collaborative and transparent teamwork. This would, likewise, mirror the institute’s basic tenets of transdisciplinary “team science.” There were 10 ways members could express voice on the intranet, which included: adding links to personalize content,

commenting on stories, completing a quick poll, contributing articles or photos, providing site feedback, rating articles (with one to five stars), selecting or changing a job role, subscribing to preferred tags, pinning personalized content, and recognizing their colleagues. This research study evaluates employee voice using supporting factors identified in existing literature. Consequently, this study centers on one central research question, which is stated as follows:

Research Question. What specific factors are needed for individuals within an organization to share their voice on an online workplace portal? This study explores the literature and analyzes a case study of an intranet referred to as “The Commons.” The Commons is a portal with social features for a scientific research institute at a major (research I) university—a university engaged in the highest levels of scientific discovery.

Case Study Background. Essentially, the institute was built to quicken the pace of scientific research for the entire university through a highly collaborative approach—meaning that scientists from multiple fields would work together on teams to help quicken discovery. The organization proved to be a trailblazer on this path, as interdisciplinary research was a core tenet of its formation in 2003. This approach broke significantly from traditional structures in which each scientific specialty works separately. In the traditional model, physicists, microbiologists, nanoscale engineers, and physicians can all collaborate on a joint research grant; but, they typically do not work day-to-day on the same team, with specialists outside of their own fields. The institute that is the focus of this case study, conversely, was structured for continual collaborations across the major branches of both science and engineering in order to facilitate discoveries and innovations for the solution of societal problems.

This trend toward collaborative—or “team science”—came from a need to solve extremely complicated problems and also to position scientists for success in securing

multi-million-dollar grants. And, in calls for scientific funding proposals, government agencies continue to reward this more integrated approach. In the article “Collaboration and team science: From theory to practice,” Bennett and Gadlin (2012) describe communication as extremely important to all aspects of scientific team cohesion, especially to minimize unforeseen obstacles, in order to stay focused on the research (p. 12). Thus, workplace communication proves to be essential for this sort of intentionally collaborative model.

The institute’s community was comprised of 1,130 students, postdoctoral fellows, staff, and faculty. Not surprising, half of the team is under 30 years of age; and, encouragingly, genders are nearly split 51.8% male, 45.4% female, 2.6% unknown. See age breakdown in Figure 1. Notably, the team experienced fast-paced change from 2012–2016. In fact, this tumultuous period brought several challenges to the organization’s internal communication and cultural identity.

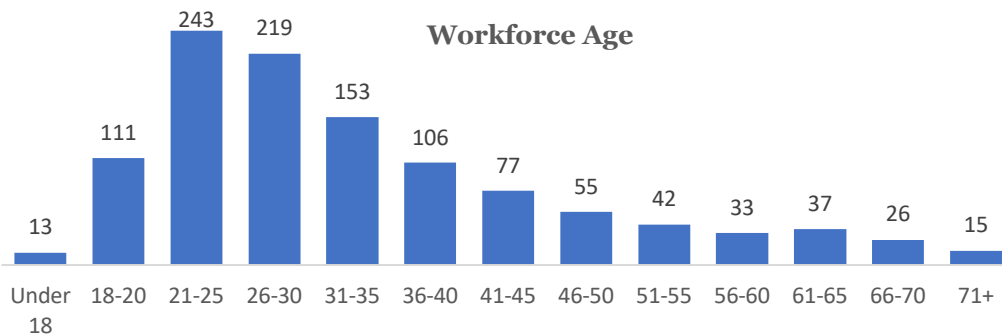


Figure 1: Half of team members of the academic research institute are under 30 years of age.

These challenges included:

- **New leadership.** A brand-new executive director (E.D.) was appointed in 2017, and his leadership team was also new to institute administration. Before the E.D.’s appointment, predecessors from 2009 to 2012 stayed only 2–4 years. Times of leadership vacancies were managed by committee. This rather delicate time left many decisions pending and future directions for the organization

unsettled or not communicated. Naturally, new leadership added to additional office turnover among scientists and staff. This left gaps in historical knowledge, causing additional workplace changes.

- **High turnover and heavy recruiting.** By nature, turnover at the academic scientific institute is high, with 125-150 graduate students and postdoctoral associates advancing onwards with their subsequent careers—as they should in an academic setting. In addition to student graduations, the trajectory of tenure-track professor positions is to spend a few years at one location and then move on to another. This gives budding researchers a chance to work under several different scientists as they progress. This nomadic process starts in graduate school and continues after obtaining doctorates with (two or three) postdoctoral research positions – each lasting a few years – that is, even before being hired as an assistant faculty member. Another transition typically happens at the associate faculty level and, sometimes again, at full-tenured professor.
- **Slippage of a sense of purpose.** With slower decisions and high turnover, team members were often unsure or were unaware of the institute’s mission or intended direction. Ironically, rather than being seen as a research institute, many regarded the complex as merely a laboratory space. Several scientific teams also moved to other universities during this time (2016–2017), causing additional change and confusion.
- **Expansion.** These departures spurred goals for growth and fueled efforts to expand. In 2017, recruiting efforts kicked into overdrive. This resulted in adding half a dozen new research centers, new faculty, and added staff positions. Although a new employee orientation was regularly held, not all attended. This

led to many new institute team members being unevenly introduced to the institute's mission and organizational norms.

- **Physical separation.** The third building in the research complex—called building three—opened in late 2018. The building was a significant departure from the two existing buildings (one and two). While one and two are interconnected, building three is separated from the other two. Building three is designed around three research “neighborhoods” per floor, while one and two are open labs from end to end. Buildings one and two have large centralized, open atriums, but building three is open only to those who work on that floor. The structure of building three lends itself to familiarity among adjoining neighborhoods but is separated from the rest of the institute community.

The research institute team is not alone in experiencing radical changes. In fact, constant change can be expected in today's workplace—with organizational shifts being more normative than occasional. In fact, workers don't need to wait for a layoff or takeover. Instead, the constant rollout of new processes, systems, functional role changes, and team reorganizations completely fill the calendar year. In the case of this particular institute, leadership changes were not planned, but still happened very quickly and repeatedly. This fast pace meant that constant changes from turnover, growth, and leadership happened with little time for foreplanning or preemptive communication. Thus, a communication void resulted and had a negative impact on the institute's culture.

For some survivors of such tumultuous times, these changes signaled opportunity. But for most, these changes constantly signaled a threat—for example, a persistent threat that the employee's job is in jeopardy or at least devalued, for example. According to Kiefer (2005), threats challenge employee trust and confidence in the

organization and its management. These everyday experiences typically lead to anger and disappointment, (p. 890). Change can also shake employee trust and often triggers negative emotional responses, especially those stemming from issues of job treatment, conflicting workplace values, and insecurity (p. 882). Of course, no one aims to intentionally anger employees, but the worker is nevertheless overlooked in the chaos of constant change. This lack of attention often signals to employees that their roles are undervalued, even when that may definitely not be the case. As a consequent, these negative experiences begin the process of employees emotionally withdrawing from the organization (p. 892).

In May 2019, when this constant change began to subside, an updated intranet portal was launched to facilitate better internal communication and to strengthen a sense of community. Prior to selection of an intranet vendor, the intranet planners had crafted an updated intranet site on WordPress. The research office's IT director recommended a vendor be engaged, instead, to provide on-going external support of the internal portal—and, to minimize in-house development time to support this intranet site (and similar sites) from other departments that may arise. So, a hunt for an off-the-shelf platform began, which resulted in selecting a “supped-up” SharePoint model.

The Commons intranet. The Commons is a SharePoint-based intranet enriched by a vendor product's suite of features. SharePoint Online (also called SharePoint 365) is a Microsoft Office product that various organizations use to create their websites. According to Computerworld writer Jonathan Hassell (2018), the purpose of SharePoint is to carve out a digital space where organizational sharing can occur. SharePoint websites include site content through various applications, such as pages—as well as libraries to store and manage documents, photos, and collection lists (para. 17-22).

The vendor provides a rich layer of features to SharePoint sites. The company describes its product as “a next generation of intranets and the hub of your digital workplace,” (ElevatePoint, 2019). The look and feel of the vendor site is polished and professional. Content can be managed with workflows, drag-and-drop widgets for new content blocks, archives, search functionality, content scheduling, and analytics. The product features include site themes, page layouts, branding customization, robust news management tools (with content block widgets), editorial tools, archiving, news feed integration, alert ribbons, personalization features, flexible menu, mobile friendliness, easy navigation, enhanced search functionality, integration with Microsoft Teams, chatbots, calendar/event management and engagement features—even including an idea center, recognition center, and discussion board (p. 5). With these added features, the institute’s central goal for The Commons was to be a source of two-way communication in support of a culture founded on collaborative science.

Consequently, this case study examines the facilitation of employee voice on The Commons. Again, voice is a concept from consumer psychology that was applied heavily by trade unions. Today’s workplace more commonly engages in direct exchanges between employee and employer, which is described as “direct voice.” Researchers, thus, explore this voice as it was expressed on a recently launched intranet after a period of rapid change. This is the case study of that portal and an examination of the factors—identified within existing literature—that help to support upward employee voice through user survey and website analytics.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

External factors influence how information flows within organizations, as well as the trends in how best to administer its dissemination or internal communication. For example, workers use communication tools such as social media on their personal time and enter into workplaces with increasingly flattened work hierarchies. These factors impact team-member expectations related to all workplace communication. While some may not be comfortable voicing their ideas, others want to contribute both their skills and ideas while at work. They are finding new ways to express their voice—a voice that can be heard within all levels of the organization. Opportunities to express voice exist in several different styles of online portals. Intranets serve as a standard information resource for the workplace, with increasingly participatory features. These features provide new opportunities to express alternative views—but who participates in this expression and what factors are needed for them to participate? This study seeks to examine the various factors that need to be present in order for employees to express their voices in workplace portals.

The Evolution of the Workplace Intranet

To enhance knowledge sharing and internal communication, private networks called intranets were created in the mid-1990s. Intranets originally were websites where members or employees could obtain company information to better aid in performing their jobs. In Mettler and Winter's description of intranets, also called enterprise systems, the workplace portals were top-down vehicles for the organization to curate communication for their employees—especially in the name of streamlining or automating work routines (2016, p. 101). Employees could access the site and scroll through posted information or download various documents. Generating content for

these early sites was rather centralized. Intranets now serve organizations of all sizes. They have graduated from the storage of documents to integrating diverse tools for the digital workplace and providing relevant information and content (Maffei, 2019, para. 4-6). In fact, clients rolling out intranets commonly demand quick implementation, beautiful design, functionality, integrated environments, mobile friendliness, personalization, augmented reality assistance, social emphasis, and analytics (Golubenko, 2019, para. 5-15).

Today, many internal communication tools decentralize content generation and use these additional features to encourage employee participation. Such user interactions involve trendy enterprise social networks (with synchronous messaging), collaboration software, tools for project management, document version control, portals to receive and assign work, and ways to respond or comment on content.

Worker Engagement

The term “engagement” is popular within organizations today. Welch (2011) describes the term’s evolution, from general engagement (putting in extra effort), to personal engagement (workers investing themselves in work), to organizational engagement (being invested in the organization) (pp. 330-331). In an early conceptual article, Kahn (1990) describes the first wave (Wave 1) of the term as personal engagement. He explains how workers manifest different aspects of themselves at home and at work. So, the more of these aspects they can bring to their role at work, the more they feel energized about their jobs. Kahn defined personal engagement as, “... expressing a person’s preferred self yields behaviors that bring alive the relation of self to the role. People who are personally engaged keep their selves within a role, without sacrificing one for the other” (p. 700). When engagement is ignited, employees invest

more energy towards their physical, cognitive, and emotional labors (p. 700). Indeed, they are more willing to give freely to the organization and their roles within it.

In the second wave (or Wave 2) of the term, management consultant firms widely popularized employee engagement (Welch, 2011, p. 331). During this time, Saks (2006) was one of the first to specify organizational engagement as a distinct factor from job engagement. He found employees' perception of support to be critical to greater levels of engagement at both their jobs and within the overall organization (p. 613). Also in 2006, findings conducted for the Institute of Personnel and Development—called the “Working life: Employee attitudes and engagement 2006, research report,” by Truss et al.—identified three fundamental factors for employee engagement as “(1) having opportunities to feed your views upwards (2) feeling well informed about what is happening in the organization, and (3) thinking that your manager is committed to your organization,” (as cited by Ruck and Welch, 2012, p. 296). Giving employees a way to express their views has long been thought to not only help management listen, but also to help employees feel heard by their employers. Furthermore, engagement benefits both the employee and the organization.

In the most recent use of the term engagement – Wave 3 – researchers expand it to the affinity workers hold for their employers. According to Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, and Saks (2015), employee engagement leads to positive outcomes such as worker attitude, job satisfaction, commitment, reduction in turnover, better job behavior, lower absenteeism, better team performance and innovation, increased organizational performance, financial returns, and an overall competitive advantage (p.3). Despite these potential benefits, Truss et al (2006) points to key findings that organizations are, in fact, doing poorly at engaging their employees (as cited in Ruck and Welch, 2012, p. 295). In their study, less than half (42%) report being kept well informed

by their employers—so that nearly 60% considered themselves to be uninformed. Ruck and Welch (2012) go further and call for an update in future assessments of workplace engagement to include additional dimensions of organizational engagement and employee voice. They point to internal communication as an essential strategy—combined with manager and team communication—for improving employee engagement with the organization (p. 301). It is within the context of using internal communication strategically that we review various factors of voice.

Employees Find Their Voice

Essentially, employee voice occurs whenever workers are moved to express themselves in order to be heard in the workplace. As already mentioned, the concept of voice has origins in human resources studies involving unions. Cox, Zagelmeyer and Marchington (2006) examined employee involvement and participation (EIP) in a union work environment. EIP practices that included increasing autonomy, exercising voice, and understanding supervisor plans can influence employee perceptions of their employer and loyalty to their jobs. The EIP practices, in fact, mirror the three primary contributors to employee engagement, which are workers feeling informed, supervisor commitment, and employee voice.

A slightly different concept, concerning the relationship between engagement and voice, places voice as an antecedent rather than a contributing factor to engagement. Robinson and Shuck (2012) interviewed public sector employees about conditions in which they decided to share or not share information with management and concluded that employee voice is an outcome from engagement. Ruck and Welch's model (2012) agrees and points to internal communication as key to driving opportunity for engagement and employee voice (p. 301). Then, in a 2017 study, Ruck, Welch, and Menara considerably expanded on Saks' (2006) positive associations between employee

voice and organizational engagement through a sizable study of five UK-based organizations. Their survey thoroughly examined the question of how employee voice effects employee engagement at work. They, in fact, found the strongest linkages between emotional organizational engagement and voice. Further, the authors noted that in the organizations studied, voice was not fully utilized. This study points to the significant impact of internal communication on employee voice and the approach to strategic internal communications as coming from public relations practitioners, who are adept at encouraging discourse (p. 906). Finally, Ruck, Welch, and Menara suggest employing Kent and Taylor's 2002 five dimensions for dialogue in public relations—namely mutuality, propinquity (willingness to express demands), empathy, risk, and commitment (as cited in Ruck, Welch, and Menara)—be applied internally by all strategic internal corporate communication professionals.

Factors that Encourage Voice

Studies on employee voice point to several necessary factors related to (a) social exchanges; (b) privacy and trust; (c) aggregation, domestication and critical mass; (d) conducive culture, training and rewards; and (e) common ownership and incentives.

The social factor. Individuals are constantly accommodating both their personal identities in context to the social exchanges at hand. Flynn (2005) links theories of social exchange (negotiated, reciprocal, and generalized) with identity orientations (personal, relational, and collective) to understand social dynamics in the workplace (pp. 738–741). For employees to make less self-interested and more beneficial exchanges, organizations should encourage more group-oriented identities—that is, doing things for the betterment of the group overall (pp. 744–745). Moving from personal or relational exchanges to a generalized one builds a “collegial environment that will heighten employees’ sense of attachment to one another and that will promote their

cooperation,” (p. 747). Contributions to digital knowledge repositories are an example of exchanges that improve organizational knowledge sharing.

Huang, Barbour, Su, and Contractor (2013) administered a workplace survey to analyze and weigh various factors of transactive memory theory to a large multi-continent workforce. They found communication critical to establishing relationships (especially transactive memory systems that inform “who knows what”) and the context of why those relationships are important (p. 553). These synergistic relationships produced group efficiency. Indeed, not all members have to know specialized information themselves, they just need relational context in order to know who to contact for any specialized knowledge. Greater communication fosters this larger group context and is the basis for future social encounters. In fact, Sievert and Scholz (2017) found that internal communication using social tools also play an important role in supporting employee engagement creating increased transparency and participation in decision-making (p. 900).

Additionally, a major survey conducted by Yuan, Fulk, Shumate, Monge, Bryant and Matsaganis (2005) put motivations for knowledge sharing in a greater social context. Their findings link social influence (via perceived usage and technology-specific competence) to be the biggest factor encouraging intranet participation (p. 229). Thus, from intranet participation, employees tend to seek opportunities to gain stature—or social capital. Wasko and Faraj (2005) examine member motivations for (nonanonymously) answering questions posed on a legal “community-of-practice” message board and found that the perceived benefits of enhancing reputation and, to a lesser degree, the gratification of helping others were among the main drivers for answering online questions (p. 53).

Trust and privacy. Addressing privacy concerns also engenders trust among employee contributors. Buettner (2015) statistically sets out to explore the impact of privacy concerns on low employee adoption of internal social networking sites and found that perceived usefulness and ease of use of the site overcame participant concerns (p. 1825).

However, in addition to privacy, teams also need trust to readily share information, especially in a loosely structured, task-dependent environment. Staples and Webster (2008) examined the impact of trust on knowledge sharing and found it to be uniquely dependent on the structure of the exchange. For example, when less structure on a team existed, developing trust became important to knowledge sharing (p. 630).

Aggregation, domestication, and critical mass. Obviously, users have to first recognize that the site exists before they can participate. This initial recognition is technically called domestication. Domestication and aggregation—or establishing members from nonmembers—were influential factors to adoption of a neighborhood intranet examined by Arnold, Gibbs and Wright (2003, para. 60–67). A third factor was found to be the missing ingredient in this particular case study was critical mass. Critical mass is the evaluation by the user as to whether or not other people are using the tool—especially within the context of deciding if it is worthwhile to contribute. Of course, critical mass takes time to establish. The authors refer to critical mass as a continuous loop in which participants are needed, but ironically few will step forward to participate unless others are doing so.

A conducive culture, training, and rewards. Participation to contribute to voice also can be externally rewarded. Deep inside every organization are employees with answers. Benbya and Van Alstyne (2013) apply experience, surveys, analysis, and testing to the concept of corporations building of so-called “internal knowledge markets.” In this

way, markets become an information highway for employee wisdom to flow outside normal structures up to leadership. “To get these benefits, executives can bring market forces to bear within their companies” so employees can help solve the pertinent problems of the day (p. 66). However, the key is to reward contributors for their contributions, thus creating a “market” to streamline information flow. Wang, Jung, Kang, and Chung (2014) also found a reward system aided participation rates in early enterprise 2.0 platforms and employee adoption (p. 1061). Like Yuan, Fulk, Shumate, Monge, Bryant, and Matsaganis (2005), Wang, Jung, Kang, and Chung (2014) found that a willingness to try new technology – technological competence – led to early adoption (p. 1062).

Increasingly, success is interrelated to a critical level of employee engagement already being present. In fact, certain cultural aspects, such as trust, less hierarchy, and leaders acting as role models, are definitely needed for social technologies to be successfully established, according to Sievert and Scholz (2017, p. 902). And, leaders who champion these tools help in gaining workforce participation. During the disaster relief following the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2005, United Nations leadership identified a crucial need for cultural change (Stoddart 2007). The UN intranet, called iSeek, was converted to a strategic internal communication tool in order to help move the UN’s culture from one of conference hosting to peacekeeping (p. 183). Face-to-face portal training workshops significantly eased UN employee adoption. Stoddart cited the UN’s success hinged on iSeek being perceived as useful, being visible, having senior management recognize the portal, and also engaging the internal community as cocreators (pp. 184-186).

Common ownership and incentives. Ironically, common ownership of portals often leads to social loafing. Beenen, Ling, Wang, Chang, Frankowski, Resnick,

and Kraut (2005) apply the collective-effort model—under which people socially loaf less—as a way to address under-contributions to online communities. Examining behaviors to a movie-rating subscription site, they compared two groups of users: One group was given a specific goal related to their number of postings per week. (For example, site moderators suggested that new members post a eight movie reviews per week). The other group of users was not given a specific goal for postings. Beenen et al. showed that users who reviewed specific goals contributed more movie reviews. They also found that when site moderators told users that their contributions would be a unique addition, those users posted more often (para. 68). Moderator signals to users played a factor in encouraging participation.

Similarly, Mettler and Winter (2016) analyzed two groups of survey participants with various content-sharing scenarios. One group would not receive any incentives for sharing content while another group would not only receive incentives, but also could participate anonymously. The results pointed to the need to incent and reward users in an ESS intranet environment to increase member willingness to share information. Other findings that encouraged member participation were taking privacy concerns seriously and providing anonymity in ratings or comments that could jeopardize relationships (pp. 110–112).

Overall, studies on employee voice and participation in online internal portals point to several necessary factors including (a) social exchanges; (b) privacy and trust; (c) aggregation, domestication and critical mass; (d) conducive culture, training and rewards; and (e) common ownership and incentives. Thus, in an effort to strategically encourage upward employee expression, researchers applied these findings to identify supporting factors on “The Commons,” through user survey data and website analytics.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The methodology used in this study examined the factors needed for individuals within a research organization to share their voice online. The selected methods described here examine a case study of one such intranet referred to as “The Commons.” The Commons is essentially an intranet portal with social features for a scientific research institute at a major research I university.

A concurrent embedded strategy was applied in which both quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected in order to better understand factors that encourage employee voice in an online workplace portal. Interestingly, the quantitative data supported the primary method of qualitative findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the concurrent embedded approach can be used to examine the same question at different levels of analysis (p. 214). The benefits of this strategy are the ability to compare the two sources of data for more useful comparisons.

A survey was administered while The Commons website usage analytics were simultaneously amassed. The survey results and supporting site usage data were expected to complement—and bring additional clues—to the results. Having launched in May 2019, the intranet portal was still in its first year, and usage had been slow. Whereas focus groups would have added a group dimension to this study, the question of factors that support employee expression is rather individual in nature—and, has larger community implications. Both interviews and surveys equally represent individual perceptions of upward voice factors on the site. However, an online survey seemed somewhat more congruous to a website study.

This research aimed to build upon both Welch’s analysis (2011)—that is, of the concept of employee engagement and its communication implications—and also Ruck,

Welch and Menera’s (2017) call for more strategic integration of upward employee voice within internal communications. Both sets of authors mention a lack of research that bridges workplace engagement and voice with communication. Using The Commons as a case study—with data from both a workplace survey and the site’s analytics—the various factors that encourage voice were identified, described, and compared to factors described within the literature. See Figure 2. This diagram shows The Commons intranet within the overall context of internal communications. The data sources—that is, the site survey and site analytics—contribute to a list of intranet elements that is then crosschecked with those cited in literature. These comprise the critical factors needed for upward employee voice within this case study.

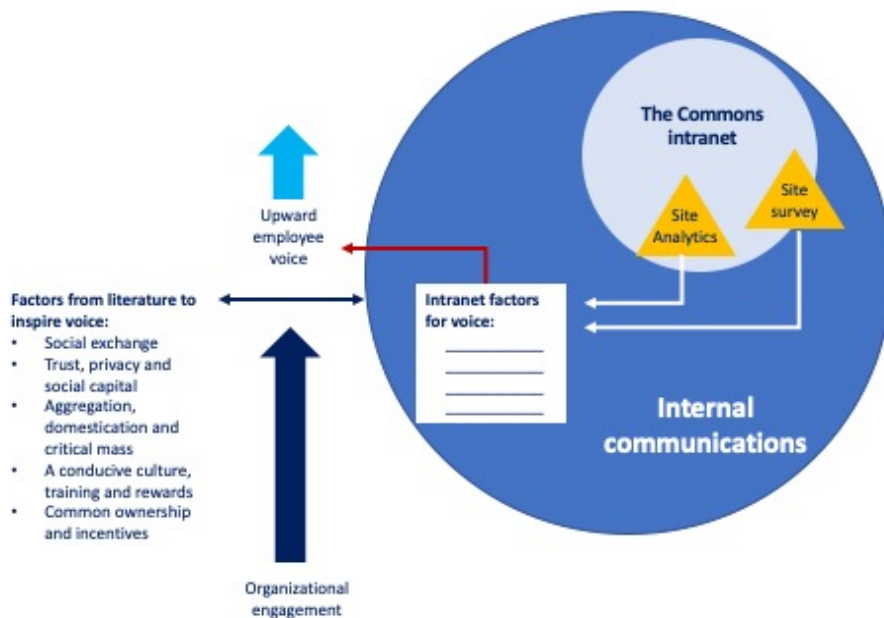


Figure 2: A visual model of the methods to identify factors that influence employee voice.

The Survey

A 24-question survey focused on The Commons and factors supporting voice. It included both open and closed-ended questions.

Participant recruitment. Survey participants were recruited via promotion on the institute’s digital signs, direct emails to the institute-wide distribution list, fliers, and table displays. Those employees who were invited included a 1,130-member team of scientists, supporting staff, and student workers at the research institute. The team includes 144 faculty, researchers, graduate and undergraduate student workers, and support staff—representing facilities, marketing, human resources, research development, finance, and executive.

Procedure. Eight months after the site’s launch, Qualtrics survey software was used to administer the online survey. Qualtrics collected and deidentified the survey data. The collection period was approximately four weeks, from Jan. 13 through Feb. 9, 2020, while the university semester was underway. Survey responders totaled 158—for a 14% response rate—with 124 completing the survey and 34 incomplete responses.

Participants were asked demographic information, including gender, age, and job categories. The survey ended with the opportunity for participants to provide their email addresses so that they could be included in a prize drawing for one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards. Additionally, recruitment descriptions described the opportunity to win. See this survey in the appendix.

Threats to validity. The researcher of this particular study works at the institute in a communications role. Thus, to reduce bias, the survey data was deidentified to ensure that the analysis would not be influenced by personal knowledge of participants or the teams. Moreover, team members who spend more time in the lab than on their computers may be underrepresented. The survey was also voluntary, and those who opted to complete it may have already had a bias toward being socially engaged. An incentive drawing for survey participation was, thus, used to draw in a more balanced sample. Asking employees about the various factors affecting their self-

expression could, unfortunately, have been viewed skeptically or with mistrust, ultimately causing employees to be less open. Introductory text of the survey explained the survey—specifically, the purpose and the thesis context in which it was being collected. Since email addresses may have included identifiable participant information, they were administered separately from the data analysis by these researchers to mitigate bias.

Data analysis. This particular survey had three sections: awareness, influencers, and behaviors. Themes from literature, regarding factors that encourage voice, were reflected in the questions. The “awareness questions” gauged what participants knew about The Commons. The “influencers” section revealed elements that could influence their perceptions about The Commons, and the “behaviors” section asked what, if any, social or personalization behaviors they had taken. The data collected through Qualtrics was reviewed and analyzed by the researchers. Then the survey data was then compared with website analytics and subsequently presented in the findings. Finally, the remaining open-ended survey questions were coded into the literature themes for analysis.

Website Analytics

In empirical support of the survey findings, The Commons user analytics were statistically collected and analyzed. The sources of this user data include Google Analytics, the vendor’s news reporting center, and a variety of demonstratable participatory behaviors.

Participants. In this study, users of The Commons either worked directly for the research institute or were embedded support employees working within the institute but for the research arm of the university (that we call the research office). All of these individuals had access to the site. Some user site access issues included (a) selecting the

wrong role at sign-in (i.e., student instead of faculty/staff/student worker) (b) team members not having Microsoft Exchange accounts, and (c), inadvertently, not all employees were on the list which was used for granting visitor permissions.

Variables. The Google Analytics dataset provided an aggregate of user data, bounce rate, average session duration, new users, number of sessions per user, pages per session, pageviews, and sessions. Other elements relating to participatory activities also came from The Commons reporting center. The reporting center provided user article ratings, user commenting, average article rating, number of users who rated an article, article view by month, article readership, and data about views and readers. In addition to these sources, counts of polls, recognition posts, discussion board, idea center, news and topical tagging, selected job roles, and more were collected by the vendor and researchers.

Instrumentation and materials. A Google Analytics code was embedded on The Commons pages in November 2019. The Google Analytics 360 software displayed the data and offered several views. The news section of The Commons also had analytics pertaining to the news readership of the site. Other participatory features were viewed by the researcher with help from the vendor. SharePoint software is used to both host The Commons and to provide data in the reporting center. Finally, this data was imported into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

Experimental procedures. A concurrent method was needed to compress the window in order to conduct the study with ample time for the site to accumulate data. Researchers selected site analytics from Jan.13—Feb. 9, 2020, to match the survey period. Google Analytics and Reporting Center data were downloaded into a spreadsheet. The demonstrable behaviors were viewed, tallied, and/or collected from the vendor and put into a spreadsheet format as well.

Threats to validity. Since one researcher had been intimately involved in designing, implementing, and overseeing The Commons as a workplace tool, she posed some internal threat to validity. Rather than evaluating the site overall—in which avoiding bias would be difficult—the emphasis was instead on specific factors needed for voice expression for a more objective analysis. Scientific researchers who spend more time in the lab than on their computers may, of course, be underrepresented. However, this was addressed through direct solicitation of survey participation in the facility’s break areas or lobbies within each of the institute’s three buildings in order to diversify the types of worker participation.

Data analysis. Data from collected variables were sorted into the same literature themes as used in the survey data analysis. Thus, the site data was grouped and reported in the same voice-influencing themes, in order to support the survey analysis.

Integrated Analysis

An inventory of the survey findings related to employee voice was finally reviewed and analyzed for any driving factors that could influence employee expression. Literature, then, indicated the factors that encourage employee voice to include (a) social exchanges; (b) privacy and trust; (c) aggregation, domestication and critical mass; (d) conducive culture, training and rewards; and (e) common ownership and incentives. Viewed from these theoretical themes, both the survey and the user data are reported within the survey findings—supplemented with user behaviors from site analytics.

The set of factors indicated by literature, and supported in the survey, were applied to The Commons. Consequently, the survey provided participant meanings related to the site and their behaviors—while the news reporting and demonstrable action data indicated any inconsistencies or congruous variables. Bringing these streams of data together, this study then examined whether the indicated factors from literature

encouraged participant expression and what users said about expressing voice, compared to what they actually do. This study aimed to fill a gap in research that would bridge workplace engagement and voice, with communication, as a component of strategic internal communication.

CHAPTER 4

Results

In order to examine the factors of voice in this institute’s portal, the researchers in this section reviewed the survey demographics and proceeded to investigate the three areas of inquiry: awareness, influencers, and behaviors. To these findings, website analytics were then applied to shed further light on user behavior during this same period. This analysis definitely indicated a culture of trust for The Commons among a young and technically competent workforce. Hampering adoption, however, was a lack of critical mass and a perception of site usefulness.

Then survey completers were 54% female and 36% male. Most (69%) were between 18–30 years of age, with 19% between 31–43, and 9.8% between 44–68. All of them answered affirmatively to speaking English, which was required for the survey. More than half (55%) were student workers followed by staff (24%), and researchers and faculty (20%). See Figure 3. (Qualtrics, 2020). Most members (81.4%) described

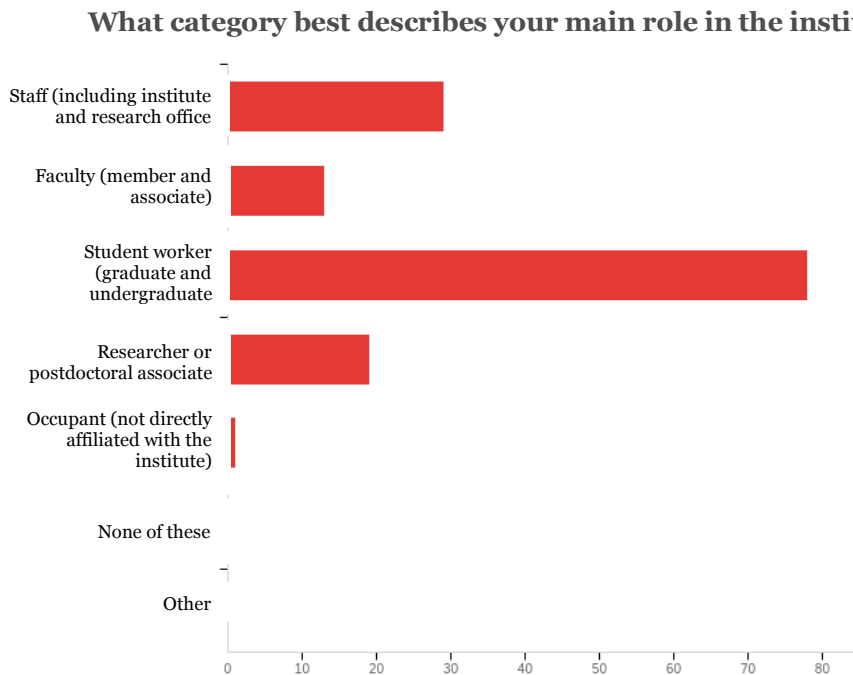


Figure 3: Students and staff were the largest group of survey participants.

themselves as expressing their views at work often, rather than keeping opinions to themselves (10.4%). Importantly, 83.7% had been associated with the research institute for five years or less. Employees were asked to identify how they actually belonged to the institute: 43% responded to residing in the complex, 42.7% as part of a research center, and 11.5% support team. See Figure 4. (Qualtrics, 2020). When asked to describe the way they adopt new technologies, 69.8% self-identified as either technology leaders (who find new technologies to solve problems) or as early adopters—that is, one of the first to use new technologies. A smaller segment (27.9%) admitted to hesitating to use it (until required to do so) or to being late to adopt new technologies.

In what way are you affiliated with the institute?

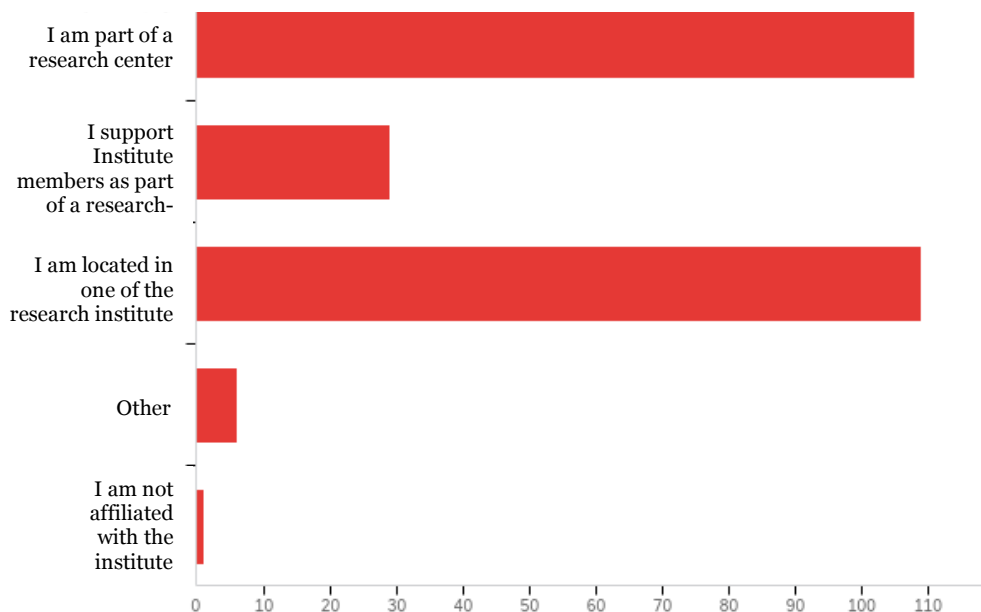


Figure 4: Survey responses indicate most identify as part of a research team or located in the institute complex.

The survey was then segmented into three sections: awareness, influencers, and behaviors. The awareness questions gauged what participants knew about The Commons. A majority (76.42%) had heard of The Commons (or maybe had heard of it); 23.6% had not. Some 65% reported having visited (or maybe havin;

23.6% said they had not visited. See Figure 4. (Qualtrics, 2020). When asked which groups had access to the site, 69.1% of responders answered correctly (institute team members, those in the research complex, or on a support team), 12.2% answered incorrectly (university employees not affiliated with the research institute or the public), and 18.7% said they were unaware.

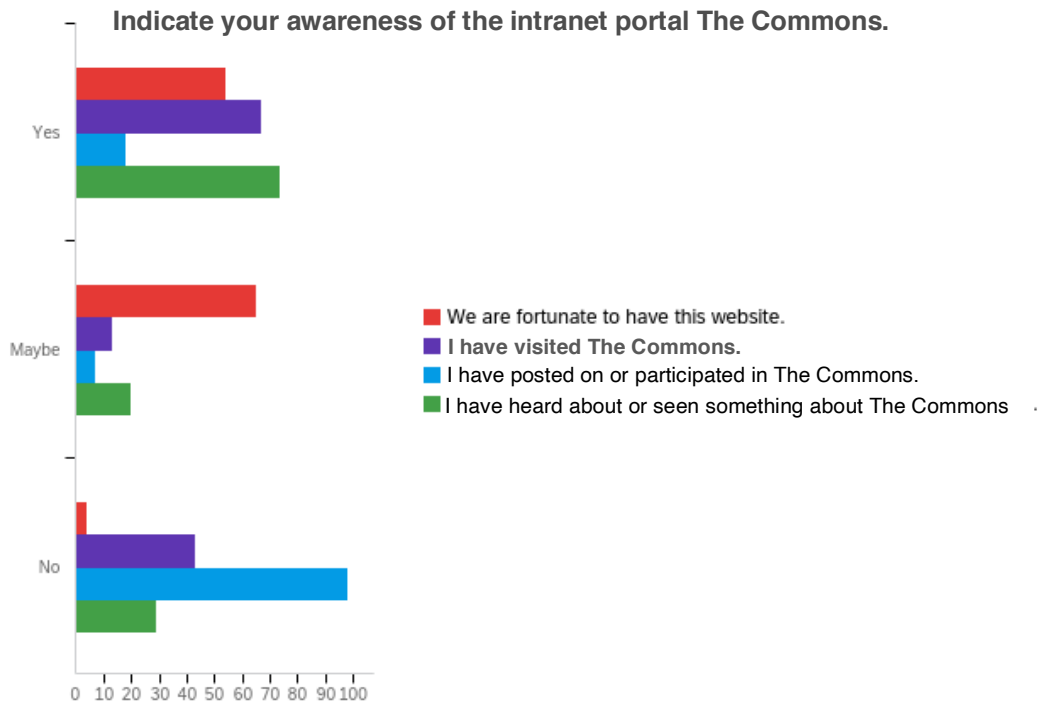


Figure 4: Most responders were aware of the site and positive towards it. Some had visited but few had posted.

As reflected in Google Analytics data (2020) for the same January/February timeframe, 168 users visited The Commons. These users represent 14.9% of the institute team, numbering 1,130 by the institute’s human resources headcount for January 2020. New visitors represented 58.2% of the traffic, with 41.8% returning visitors. There were 1,760 pageviews during this time. Each user had 2.51 sessions, each lasting 6.47 minutes, accessing an average of 4.17 pages. See Figure 5 (Google Analytics, 2020).

Participants indicated their impressions of why The Commons existed. Selections were scattered between supporting workplace culture (21.3%); providing information

Google Analytics Report, Showing Users During the Survey Period.

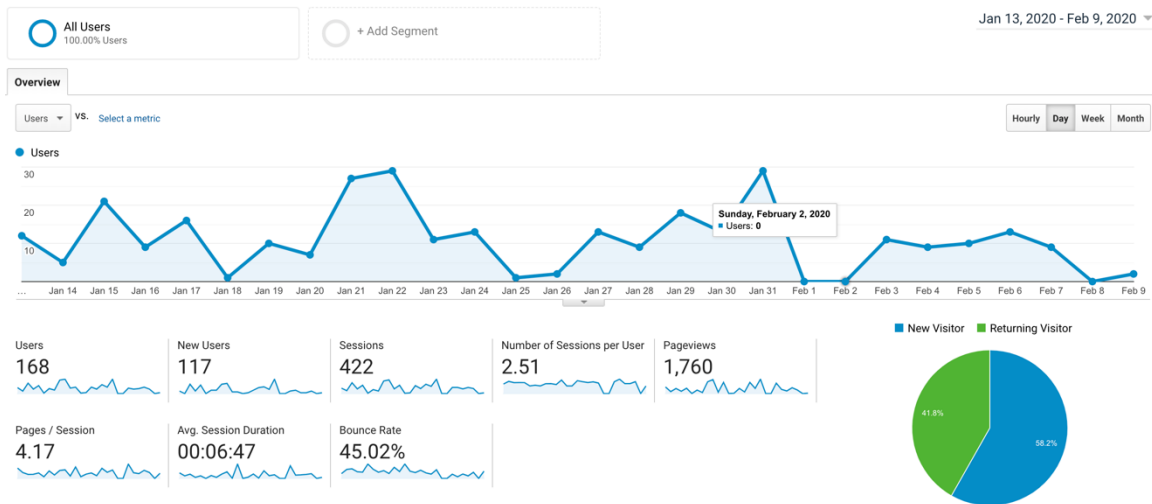


Figure 5: During the survey period, 168 team members visited The Commons, spending 6.47 minutes per session, with an average of 2.51 sessions per user.

from other team members (18.1%); referencing documents, templates, policies and resources (17.8%); providing information from leaders (17.29%); discussing workplace issues (17.5%); and 9% did not know the site’s purpose. Although nearly two-thirds agreed that The Commons had more than a dozen how-to articles to help navigate the site, 7% thought this was false, and 22.8% said the article aids did not apply to them.

The next section of the survey examined elements that could influence user thinking about The Commons. One such factor was the responder’s perceptions as to whether or not their colleagues were site participants. A majority of users (57.7%) were not aware of their colleagues’ participation on the site, 30% reported that some or a few participated, 4% said colleagues visit regularly, and 6.5% did not know. Another potential influencing factor was the perception of whether leaders of the institute were involved with The Commons. Most thought the institute leaders were involved (52.9%) in the site or did not know (45.5%). Only 1.6% doubted leadership involvement.

Survey questions also explored the influence of privacy, anonymity, and rewards. Most participants agreed they could share on The Commons safely and without privacy concerns (75%) or anonymously and without causing concerns from others (68.3%). They were evenly split, however, on their expectations of being rewarded for sharing, with 50.7% agreeing and 49.3% disagreeing. The statement, “I would not share information on [The Commons]” encountered 65.4% disagreement, meaning these responders would be willing to share. See Figure 6. (Qualtrics, 2020).

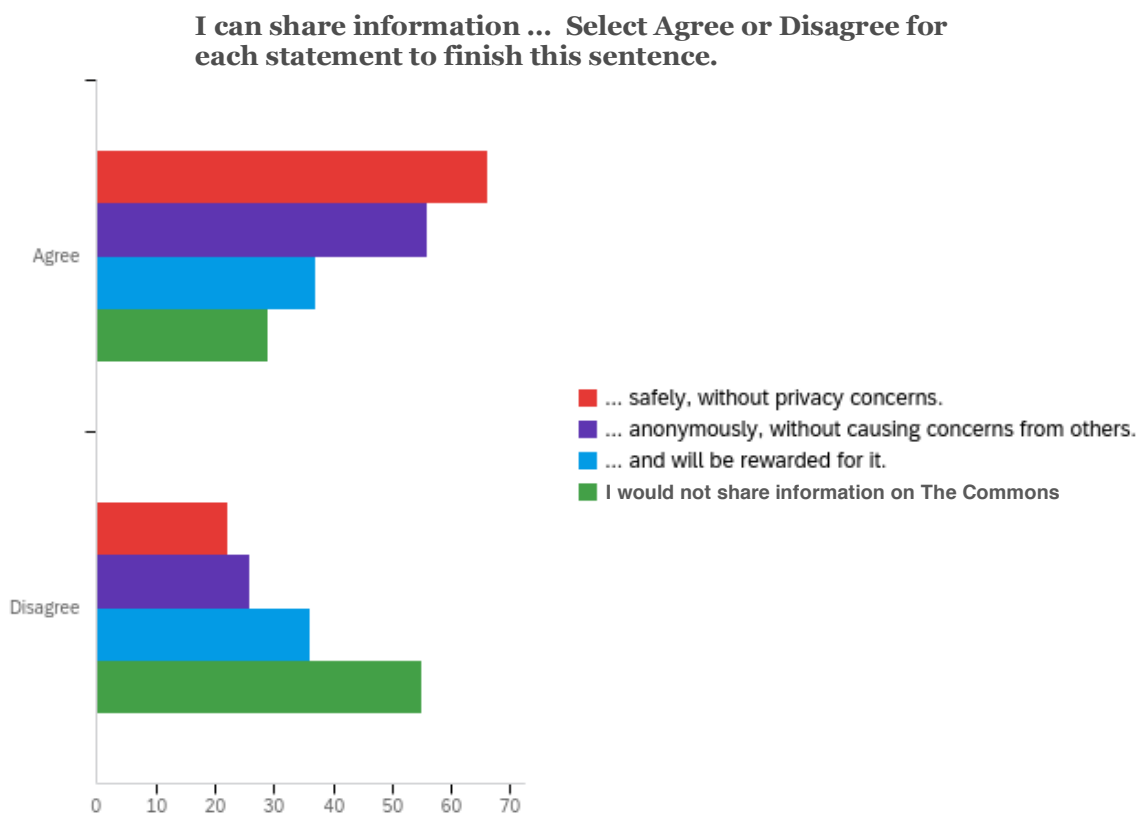


Figure 6: Responses show most agreed sharing on the site was safe and would not cause concern for others and indicated they would share on the site.

Only 30.9% had seen users support one another on the site. Responders thought sharing information or interests on the site served as ... an opportunity to discuss concerns or ideas (42.2%), invigorate workplace relationships (22.1%), were inappropriate (not in my best interest) and risky or not to be trusted (3.25%) or as none

of these (29.2%). Perceptions of rewards for posting on The Commons had little variation, from 8.1–16.6%. Some 64 individuals (16.6%) agreed that they would learn about others and be better informed through site visits. Other rewards elicited less agreement, such as making social connections and becoming better known by colleagues (13.3%), being recognized (12.7%), making the site better (11.2%) and enhancing reputation, or none of these (8.1%).

The behavior questions asked about visits to the site and what, if any, social or personalization behaviors they have taken on The Commons. Responders visited the site daily or weekly at 12.5%, occasionally (once or twice during a semester) at 41.7%, or never at 45.8%. Typical reasons for visiting The Commons were to receive information (38 participants), exchange information (14) and to access resources (12). A handful (5 people) indicated reasons such as either a directive, the need to edit a page, or for a reminder, or for a reward. Some 13 did not know what a typical reason might be. See Figure 7.

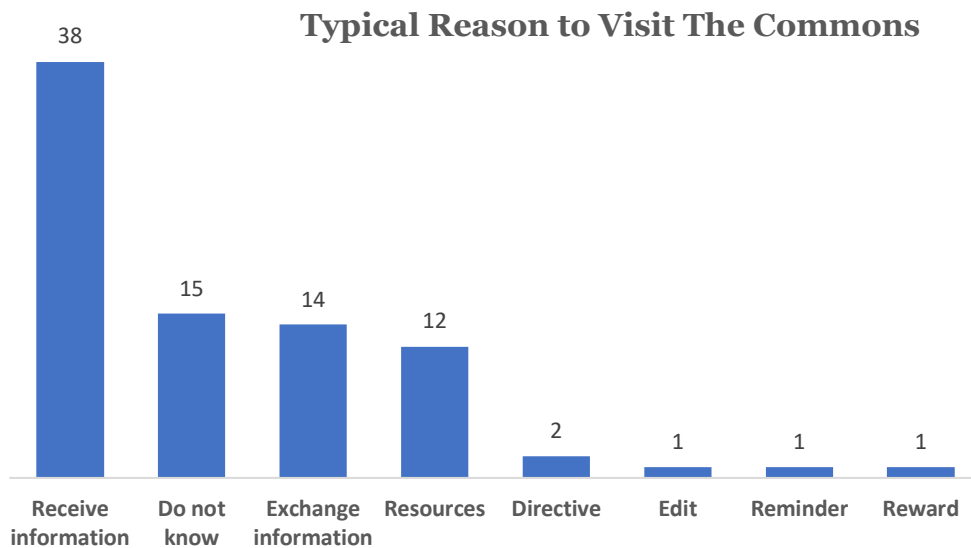


Figure 7: The top reason for visiting The Commons was to receive information.

According to pageviews in Google Analytics during this period, 30% started at the site’s home page (Google Analytics, 2020). Other pages with views included the Travel Scholars page (9.38%)—a program for students to apply for travel scholarships to fund transportation to scientific conferences—and the news page (6.36%). Most participants (73.9%) had never posted or participated on The Commons, although 26.1% had. Expressive activities included rating/commenting (9.7%), contributing an idea (3.7%), submitting an article (5.2%), commenting on the discussion page (6.0%), or taking a poll (1.5%). See Figure 8 (Qualtrics, 2020).

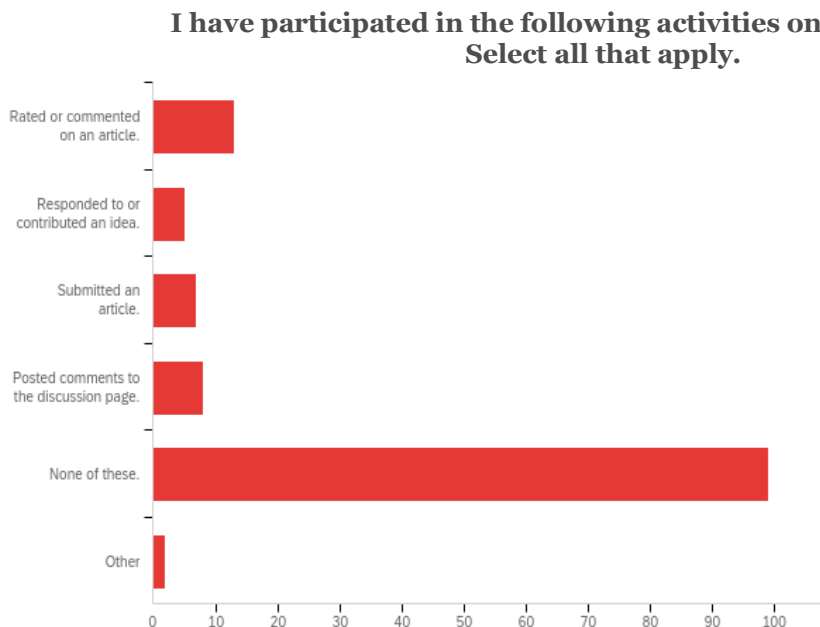


Figure 8: Most participants had not participated in posting on the site.

Slightly more (30%) reported to have customized their website experience by selecting a role, tags, or adding links. Topping the list of what factors would make them more comfortable to share information on The Commons were privacy and trust (18 participants). Many said that no site elements would make them comfortable (16). Several pointed to the factors such as the ability to have social exchanges (10), to receive incentives (9), to know that most employees were on the site (critical mass) (7 people) or

being aware of the site’s existence (domestication) (7). Few indicated technological incompetence (or 3 people) or aggregation (i.e., knowing who is on the site) (2 people).

The user interaction statistics for this same time period show participation activities. See Table 1. Among the possible user actions, viewing news articles was the most popular (179 views). Posting accolades was the second highest (51), followed by topic tagging (12), and quick poll participation (10). Note, accolades posted during this

User participation Jan/Feb 2020	Count
News articles viewed	179
Accolades contributed	51
Topics tagged	12
Polls taken	10
Pages pinned	4
Calendar personalized	4
My links added	2
Article commenting	1
Idea commenting	1

Table 1: Viewing articles was a popular activity among users.

time were contributed by student workers paid to help manage the site.

A closer examination of the news article views by date ranges from daily counts from 2–25. Figure 9 shows the daily article views. Additional content

was posted Jan. 20 and Feb. 3. Those featured in the articles were notified upon posting. The institute all-team meeting was held Jan. 28, 2020. Also notable is the increased views on Fridays, when accolades were posted and team members were notified. The days following these three activities marked higher views per date: Jan. 21 had 15 views, Jan. 29 had 19 views, and Feb. 3 marked 25 views.

Interestingly, upticks in website traffic occurred the day after a biannual employee town hall meeting and on days that weekly email notifications were sent to those who received a recognition posting or who had contributed to new content added that week. See Figure 10.

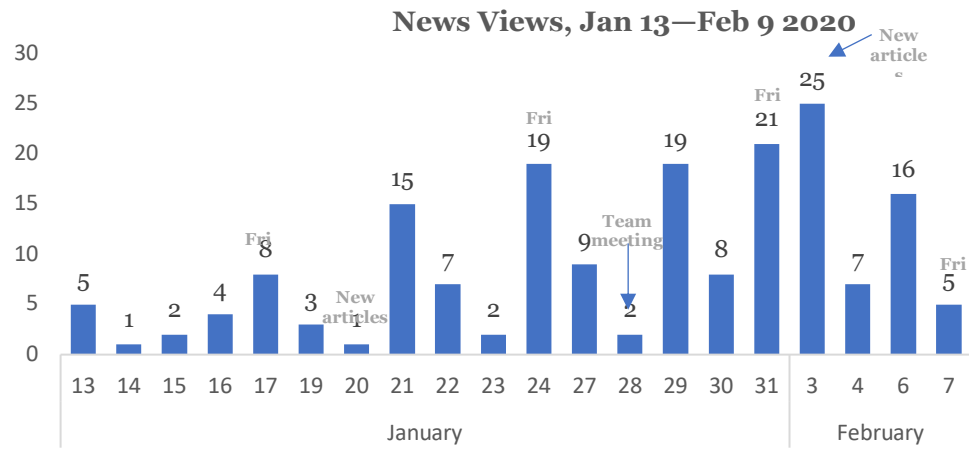


Figure 9: Article views by date show increases on or after the team meeting, on Fridays and when new articles were posted.

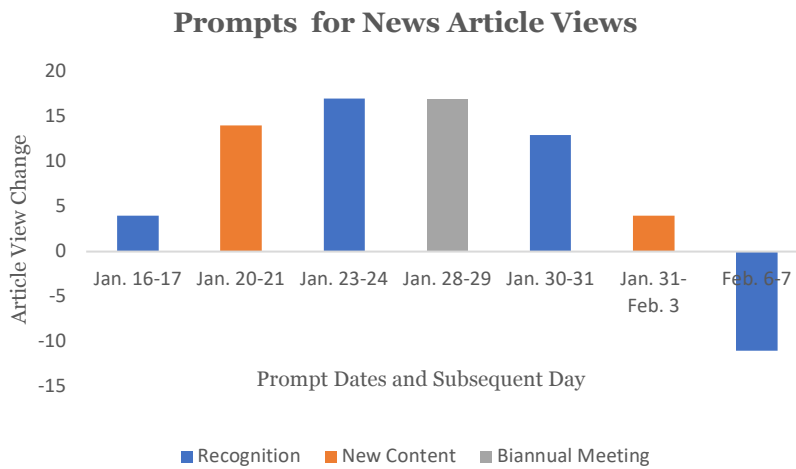


Figure 10: The difference in article views one day after event or moderator action. Posting employee recognition had the most impact, resulting in 39.7% more views

Overall those surveyed were aware (76.4%) and positive about The Commons. They trusted sharing information on the site without privacy concerns (75%) and thought sharing there would not cause concern for others (68.3%). Most (57.7%), however, were not aware of their colleagues being active on The Commons and only 17.6% thought it would help them learn about others or be more informed. The main reason for visiting The Commons was to receive information (30.6%), but most had not posted to the site (73.9%). Echoing slow adoption, website analytics indicate only 14.9% of the team visited the site during the survey period. Surprisingly, the most popular activity was to read a news article (179 people). Viewership increased the day of, or the day after, key events or moderator activities. Of moderator activities the most response occurred after posting and alerting recipients of specific recognition. Indeed, this fueled 39.7% more views than other activities.

This analysis indicates a culture of trust for The Commons among a young, technically competent workforce. However, hampering adoption was an unfortunate lack of critical mass and perception of the site's usefulness.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The Commons was launched in May 2019 by the institute’s marketing team based on a highly collaborative approach. The platform’s goal was to support a sense of community and intellectual collaboration, internally, as the institute grew—not only locally, but also nationally and globally. Objectives for the site were to (a) enhance the institute’s workplace culture during a time of rapid growth, (b) provide clarity of expectations to an ever-changing team, (c) ensure that the organization was responsive through a forum for two-way communication, (d) foster site adoption by building trust, (e) recruit employees as brand evangelists to further marketing efforts, and (f) help create a culture of giving.

A formal needs analysis was, however, not conducted. Nevertheless, website planners did collect a variety of input from several internal and external sources. An intranet advisory council—comprised mainly of 30 administrative and finance staff members from many of the institute’s research centers—helped to (informally) identify needs and uses for the new portal. The group met bimonthly starting in June 2017 to discuss replacing the existing (static) intranet site. Members provided insightful feedback into the entire process regarding the site’s parameters. Their contributions included sharing perspectives related to site requirements, completing a survey, and participating in a wider pilot test of the platform. Likewise, the marketing staff tried out various ideas with the council regarding functionalities and considered how these might be used and accepted. Other important consultant partners were from the research office’s human resources and information technology teams—as well as the institute’s student leaders.

Due to an anticipation of the ongoing costs for the support similar portals across several units, the initial in-house Word Press intranet was scrapped by the research office in favor of an off-the-shelf, vendor-supported platform. This added time to site planning and implementation. The institute's executive committee finally approved the intranet launch as an experiment in September 2018, which was shared with research directors in December 2018, and was ultimately unveiled at an all-employee meeting in February 2019. Page managers were recruited and trained to manage page content. A group of 40 team members, who serve in a variety of roles, were invited to test the website. The testers were grouped into two teams. Each group was asked to perform 6-7 functions. Feedback went immediately into troubleshooting and tweaking the site prior to its launch. A mix of various institute teams helped to provide both input and counsel in the planning and launching this experimental site.

However, planning for The Commons drug out nearly two years. This seemed to stymie the project's initial momentum. By the time of launch, all of those who served on the intranet advisory council had been reorganized—that is, repositioned under the research office. Although still embedded at the institute, this sudden change of reporting structure—for many of the council members—shifted their focus away from institute's original internal communication to one that now incorporated other research teams. Thus, several months after launch, the site usage and acceptance appeared to be low. It is in this context that the researchers began to more closely examine how the site supported employee expression and two-way communication.

With the combination of both survey and supporting site analytical data, this study examined the major drivers of voice experienced on The Commons during the survey period of Jan. 13 and Feb. 9, 2020. Literature identified voice-supporting factors, which include (a) social exchange; (b) trust and privacy; (c) aggregation, domestication

and critical mass; (d) conducive culture, training and rewards; and (e) common ownership and incentives. Therefore, results for each element is described in order.

Social exchange. The opportunity to share employee concerns or ideas was seen as a benefit and a contribution to the site by nearly half of those surveyed (42.2%). A smaller group said it was a chance to invigorate workplace relationships (22.1%). As noted by Flynn (2005), moving toward such relational orientations, and away from self-interested ones, can heighten coworker attachments and enhance group cooperation (p. 727). Only 11.5% selected that participation would make the site better. Although they are a minority, this group appears to have a collective social orientation, meaning that they consider the needs of the group over their own needs. One obstacle to relational or collective orientations—especially at the academic research institute—may be the short tenure of those surveyed, with 83.7% having been associated with the organization for five years or less. Indeed, this is likely a reflection of student workers who make up more than half of the respondents.

Another social factor that can spur employee voice is the impression that sharing expertise will lead to a user's enhanced reputation within the community. According to Wasko and Faraj (2005), the user's perception of gaining reputation—by sharing non-anonymously—can be a major driver for many users. At the institute, however, this did not seem to be a driver for most as only 13.3% saw becoming better recognized by colleagues, faculty, or leadership as a benefit of site participation.

Trust and privacy. The institute appears to have two strongly opposing views regarding site trust and self-expression, with a majority leaning toward trust. Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed trusted the site as a place for self-expression and doing so anonymously, without concern for causing harm to others (68.3%). Reinforcing findings of trust was a 65.4% disagreement to the statement, "I would not share

information” on the site. Another segment of those surveyed were less trusting (18.2%). When asked what would make them more comfortable sharing on the portal, this group said that no elements could ease their concerns. Even so, feelings of trust outweighed these concerns.

According to Bennett and Gadlin (2012) who examined highly successful and failed scientific collaborations, trust is critical to interdisciplinary efforts in science. They found the absence of trust within teams significantly risked team deterioration (768 respondents). Contrasting organizational structures of siloed specialists, the research institute’s emphasis on multidisciplinary teams requires a much looser structure. Such loosely structured organizations are more task-dependent and tend to elevate trust as a critical ingredient for knowledge sharing, according to Staples and Webster (2008, p. 631). These findings underscore how essential trust and the communication are for teams such as this research institute.

Aggregation, domestication, and critical mass. As noted earlier, communication on an intranet requires website awareness or domestication. And, this site-awareness is a crucial for adoption of any workplace portal. In the case of The Commons, domestication did exist, with most team members surveyed reporting site awareness. Despite this recognition, however, 87.5% said they were not active users. Site analytics during this time confirm a low adoption rate, with 168 users visiting The Commons in a workforce of 1,130, or 14.9% of the team. In looking at aggregation or awareness of who is in the group, a majority of users (69.1%) correctly identified who could access the site.

Hence, site awareness is often not enough. User participation increases if (and, perhaps, if and only if) individuals perceive their colleagues are active on the site. This perception, called critical mass, appears to be lacking in this particular case. Among

those surveyed, 57.7% were not aware of colleagues using The Commons, 30% said some or few participated, 6.5% did not know, and a minority 4% said colleagues visited regularly. Thus, this definitely points to an absence of critical mass—or the perception of a large number of participants—on The Commons. As this is undoubtedly considered by potential users in evaluating whether or not to invest their time, critical mass feeds into a continuous loop of inactivity. This, in fact, is similar to what was described by Arnold, Gibbs and Wright (2003) in their study of a neighborhood portal. Paradoxically, critical mass appears to require participants, but few will step forward until others do (para 60-67). It must also be noted, in The Commons survey, those who thought colleagues visited regularly combined with others saying that some or few participated, amassed to 34% who perceived their colleagues were somewhat active on the site. Indeed, this perception of collegial site activity was more than double compared to the percentage of actual users during this time. This indicates that the signaling such a critical mass may not require a large number of users. Despite strong aggregation and domestication, however, critical mass was not sufficiently perceived to support voice on The Commons.

Conducive culture, training, and rewards. Factors supporting voice on The Commons did include the research institute’s existing structure, culture, and leadership involvement. A significantly flatter organizational structure, such as what exists at the institute, was one of several cultural factors supporting social technology success, according to Sievert and Scholz (2017, p. 902). In our case study, the institute leaders have an average of between 7–67 direct-reports, with typically no more than one midlevel manager. The workforce is spread between 15 research directors who oversee 144 faculty; faculty each manage an average of 7 people in their labs; and the remaining 112 staff and administrators are in eight support departments, averaging 14 staff members per team.

In addition to these flat organizational hierarchies, trust also plays a role in a culture conducive to voice. Self-expression at work requires a trusting environment. And, as discussed earlier, the majority of those surveyed said they trusted sharing on The Commons. Beyond this, the workforce culture seemed generally trustful, as well. A large majority (81.4%) admitted to commonly sharing their ideas with others at work, confirming a trust-based environment at the institute. Thus, sharing happens whenever trust exists.

Beside the issues of trust, we know from both Sievert and Scholz (2017) and Stoddart (2007) that leaders who champion and/or role model the use of intranet portals also help to gain adoption and participation (p. 902, p. 184-186). During the survey period, however, only one leadership editorial was posted. Still, among the research institute team, a slight majority (52.9%) thought that institute leadership was involved in The Commons. This narrow majority shows the team's uncertainty as to leadership involvement with this site.

Technology competence also can drive participation leading to voice. Both studies by Yuan, Fulk, Shumate, Monge, Bryant, and Matsaganis (2005) and Wang, Jung, Kang, and Chung (2014) found that when users are technologically competent, early adoption is much more likely. Here, The Commons is based on a SharePoint Microsoft platform. This software is at least somewhat familiar to those who use Microsoft Office software. In fact, the broader university research office uses a SharePoint platform for a more traditional intranet, housing various forms and documents.

In addition, many of The Commons' users are scientists who are on the forefront of discovering novel applications, properties, and technologies. Workers commonly use, design or adapt technologies to enable their cutting-edge research. This technology orientation is confirmed by 69.86% self-identifying as technology leaders or early

adopters. As noted in an early study of age and technology adoption, Marquié, Thon, and Baracat (1994) show that in contrast to older and higher-seniority employees, younger workers have more drive to engage in using these technologies (p. 139). And, in this case study, half of the research institute's team members are under 30 years of age.

For those who are less enthusiastic about new technologies, training can bring understanding, skills, and increased usage. For The Commons, site owners hosted group and one-on-one sessions for page managers, charged with keeping assigned page content up to date. While there were no organized trainings for general users, 14 articles were tagged as "site how-to" articles, with topics ranging from how to upload a profile image, to how to recognize someone using the recognition form. User data reveals 17 views of how-to articles, representing 9.4% of all news article views during the survey period. And, two-thirds of those surveyed knew the how-to articles were on The Commons to help navigate the site.

The study also examined user rewards as a potential motivator of voice and found it clearly lacking. In an analysis of users with and without incentives in an employee social-system intranet environment, Mettler and Winter (2016) identified such incentives and rewards as increasing member willingness to share information. Those surveyed were split as to whether they anticipated reward for participating, with 50.7% expecting rewards and 49.3% not expecting rewards. Thus, rewards did not appear as a factor or were not apparent to users.

Common ownership and incentives. A group of 34 page owners have site editing permissions to be able to update and change content on assigned sections of the site. The intranet council was instrumental in soliciting site features and buy-in and site moderators send weekly emails to those featured in new content or recognized on the home page. Even with such collaborative efforts, less than a quarter of those surveyed

(17.6%) believed site participation would help them learn about others and be better informed about their workplace. According to Huang, Barbour, Sun, and Contractor (2013), workplace communication can help colleagues establish transactive memory, or who-does-what knowledge and establish why these relationships are important (p. 553). Team members can also draw on these relationships, so each does not have to serve in the expert roles that are already established. This communication with and about colleagues leads to better group efficiencies. Even with these benefits available, the majority of team members (73.9%) reported that they had not posted on The Commons. Only 30% had customized their site experience, as can be done through electing to follow news tags, pin pages, add links, and select calendar view options. Looking at actual user activity on the site during the survey timeframe (January and February 2020), site traffic showed 179 views of 50 news articles, averaging between 2–25 article views per day. For context, 74 articles were posted during this time period, meaning 67.5% of posted articles were viewed.

Generally, social motivation to self-express on The Commons was adequate. Although such domestication existed, apparently there was not enough critical mass, social exchange, demonstrative leadership role modeling, or relational information to push members to further action.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The Commons was launched in May 2019 by the institute’s marketing team based on a highly collaborative approach. The platform’s goal was to support a sense of community and intellectual collaboration, internally, as the institute grew—not only locally, but also nationally and globally. Objectives for the site were to (a) enhance the institute’s workplace culture during a time of rapid growth, (b) provide clarity of expectations to an ever-changing team, (c) ensure that the organization was responsive through a forum for two-way communication, (d) foster site adoption by building trust, (e) recruit employees as brand evangelists to further marketing efforts, and (f) help create a culture of giving.

A formal needs analysis was, however, not conducted. Nevertheless, website planners did collect a variety of input from several internal and external sources. An intranet advisory council—comprised mainly of 30 administrative and finance staff members from many of the institute’s research centers—helped to (informally) identify needs and uses for the new portal. The group met bimonthly—starting in June 2017 to discuss replacing the existing (static) intranet site. Members provided insightful feedback into the entire process regarding the site’s parameters. Their contributions included sharing perspectives related to site requirements, completing a survey, and participating in a wider pilot test of the platform. Likewise, the marketing staff tried out various ideas with the council regarding functionalities and considered how these might be used and accepted. Other important consultant partners were from the research office’s human resources and information technology teams—as well as the institute’s student leaders.

Due to an anticipation of the ongoing costs for the support similar portals across several units, the initial in-house Word Press intranet was scrapped by the research office in favor of an off-the-shelf, vendor-supported platform. This added time to site planning and implementation. The institute's executive committee finally approved the intranet launch as an experiment in September 2018, which was shared with research directors in December 2018, and was ultimately unveiled at an all-employee meeting in February 2019. Page managers were recruited and trained to manage page content. A group of 40 team members, who serve in a variety of roles, were invited to test the website. The testers were grouped into two teams. Each group was asked to perform 6-7 functions. Feedback went immediately into troubleshooting and tweaking the site prior to its launch. A mix of various institute teams helped to provide both input and counsel in the planning and launching this experimental site.

However, planning for The Commons drug out nearly two years. This seemed to stymie the project's initial momentum. By the time of launch, all of those who served on the intranet advisory council had been reorganized—that is, repositioned under the research office. Although still embedded at the institute, this sudden change of reporting structure—for many of the council members—shifted their focus away from institute's original internal communication to one that now incorporated other research teams. Thus, several months after launch, the site usage and acceptance appeared to be low. It is in this context that the researchers began to more closely examine how the site supported employee expression and two-way communication.

With the combination of both survey and supporting site analytical data, this study examined the major drivers of voice experienced on The Commons during the survey period of Jan. 13 and Feb. 9, 2020. Literature identified voice-supporting factors, which include (a) social exchange; (b) trust and privacy; (c) aggregation, domestication

and critical mass; (d) conducive culture, training and rewards; and (e) common ownership and incentives. Therefore, results for each element is described in order.

Social exchange. The opportunity to share employee concerns or ideas was seen as a benefit and a contribution to the site by nearly half of those surveyed (42.2%). A smaller group said it was a chance to invigorate workplace relationships (22.1%). As noted by Flynn (2005), moving toward such relational orientations, and away from self-interested ones, can heighten coworker attachments and enhance group cooperation (p. 727). Only 11.5% selected that participation would make the site better. Although they are a minority, this group appears to have a collective social orientation, meaning that they consider the needs of the group over their own needs. One obstacle to relational or collective orientations—especially at the academic research institute—may be the short tenure of those surveyed, with 83.7% having been associated with the organization for five years or less. Indeed, this is likely a reflection of student workers who make up more than half of the respondents.

Another social factor that can spur employee voice is the impression that sharing expertise will lead to a user's enhanced reputation within the community. According to Wasko and Faraj (2005), the user's perception of gaining reputation—by sharing non-anonymously—can be a major driver for many users. At the institute, however, this did not seem to be a driver for most as only 13.3% saw becoming better recognized by colleagues, faculty, or leadership as a benefit of site participation.

Trust and privacy. The institute appears to have two strongly opposing views regarding site trust and self-expression, with a majority leaning toward trust. Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed trusted the site as a place for self-expression and doing so anonymously, without concern for causing harm to others (68.3%). Reinforcing findings of trust was a 65.4% disagreement to the statement, "I would not share

information” on the site. Another segment of those surveyed were less trusting (18.2%). When asked what would make them more comfortable sharing on the portal, this group said that no elements could ease their concerns. Even so, feelings of trust outweighed these concerns.

According to Bennett and Gadlin (2012) who examined highly successful and failed scientific collaborations, trust is critical to interdisciplinary efforts in science. They found the absence of trust within teams significantly risked team deterioration (768 respondents). Contrasting organizational structures of siloed specialists, the research institute’s emphasis on multidisciplinary teams requires a much looser structure. Such loosely structured organizations are more task-dependent and tend to elevate trust as a critical ingredient for knowledge sharing, according to Staples and Webster (2008, p. 631). These findings underscore how essential trust and the communication are for teams such as this research institute.

Aggregation, domestication, and critical mass. As noted earlier, communication on an intranet requires website awareness or domestication. And, this site-awareness is a crucial for adoption of any workplace portal. In the case of The Commons, domestication did exist, with most team members surveyed reporting site awareness. Despite this recognition, however, 87.5% said they were not active users. Site analytics during this time confirm a low adoption rate, with 168 users visiting The Commons in a workforce of 1,130, or 14.9% of the team. In looking at aggregation or awareness of who is in the group, a majority of users (69.1%) correctly identified who could access the site.

Hence, site awareness is often not enough. User participation increases if (and, perhaps, if and only if) individuals perceive their colleagues are active on the site. This perception, called critical mass, appears to be lacking in this particular case. Among

those surveyed, 57.7% were not aware of colleagues using The Commons, 30% said some or few participated, 6.5% did not know, and a minority 4% said colleagues visited regularly. Thus, this definitely points to an absence of critical mass—or the perception of a large number of participants—on The Commons. As this is undoubtedly considered by potential users in evaluating whether or not to invest their time, critical mass feeds into a continuous loop of inactivity. This, in fact, is similar to what was described by Arnold, Gibbs and Wright (2003) in their study of a neighborhood portal. Paradoxically, critical mass appears to require participants, but few will step forward until others do (para 60-67). It must also be noted, in The Commons survey, those who thought colleagues visited regularly combined with others saying that some or few participated, amassed to 34% who perceived their colleagues were somewhat active on the site. Indeed, this perception of collegial site activity was more than double compared to the percentage of actual users during this time. This indicates that the signaling such a critical mass may not require a large number of users. Despite strong aggregation and domestication, however, critical mass was not sufficiently perceived to support voice on The Commons.

Conducive culture, training, and rewards. Factors supporting voice on The Commons did include the research institute’s existing structure, culture, and leadership involvement. A significantly flatter organizational structure, such as what exists at the institute, was one of several cultural factors supporting social technology success, according to Sievert and Scholz (2017, p. 902). In our case study, the institute leaders have an average of between 7–67 direct-reports, with typically no more than one midlevel manager. The workforce is spread between 15 research directors who oversee 144 faculty; faculty each manage an average of 7 people in their labs; and the remaining 112 staff and administrators are in eight support departments, averaging 14 staff members per team.

In addition to these flat organizational hierarchies, trust also plays a role in a culture conducive to voice. Self-expression at work requires a trusting environment. And, as discussed earlier, the majority of those surveyed said they trusted sharing on The Commons. Beyond this, the workforce culture seemed generally trustful, as well. A large majority (81.4%) admitted to commonly sharing their ideas with others at work, confirming a trust-based environment at the institute. Thus, sharing happens whenever trust exists.

Beside the issues of trust, we know from both Sievert and Scholz (2017) and Stoddart (2007) that leaders who champion and/or role model the use of intranet portals also help to gain adoption and participation (p. 902, p. 184-186). During the survey period, however, only one leadership editorial was posted. Still, among the research institute team, a slight majority (52.9%) thought that institute leadership was involved in The Commons. This narrow majority shows the team's uncertainty as to leadership involvement with this site.

Technology competence also can drive participation leading to voice. Both studies by Yuan, Fulk, Shumate, Monge, Bryant, and Matsaganis (2005) and Wang, Jung, Kang, and Chung (2014) found that when users are technologically competent, early adoption is much more likely. Here, The Commons is based on a SharePoint Microsoft platform. This software is at least somewhat familiar to those who use Microsoft Office software. In fact, the broader university research office uses a SharePoint platform for a more traditional intranet, housing various forms and documents.

In addition, many of The Commons' users are scientists who are on the forefront of discovering novel applications, properties, and technologies. Workers commonly use, design or adapt technologies to enable their cutting-edge research. This technology orientation is confirmed by 69.86% self-identifying as technology leaders or early

adopters. As noted in an early study of age and technology adoption, Marquié, Thon, and Baracat (1994) show that in contrast to older and higher-seniority employees, younger workers have more drive to engage in using these technologies (p. 139). And, in this case study, half of the research institute's team members are under 30 years of age.

For those who are less enthusiastic about new technologies, training can bring understanding, skills, and increased usage. For The Commons, site owners hosted group and one-on-one sessions for page managers, charged with keeping assigned page content up to date. While there were no organized trainings for general users, 14 articles were tagged as "site how-to" articles, with topics ranging from how to upload a profile image, to how to recognize someone using the recognition form. User data reveals 17 views of how-to articles, representing 9.4% of all news article views during the survey period. And, two-thirds of those surveyed knew the how-to articles were on The Commons to help navigate the site.

The study also examined user rewards as a potential motivator of voice and found it clearly lacking. In an analysis of users with and without incentives in an employee social-system intranet environment, Mettler and Winter (2016) identified such incentives and rewards as increasing member willingness to share information. Those surveyed were split as to whether they anticipated reward for participating, with 50.7% expecting rewards and 49.3% not expecting rewards. Thus, rewards did not appear as a factor or were not apparent to users.

Common ownership and incentives. A group of 34 page owners have site editing permissions to be able to update and change content on assigned sections of the site. The intranet council was instrumental in soliciting site features and buy-in and site moderators send weekly emails to those featured in new content or recognized on the home page. Even with such collaborative efforts, less than a quarter of those surveyed

(17.6%) believed site participation would help them learn about others and be better informed about their workplace. According to Huang, Barbour, Sun, and Contractor (2013), workplace communication can help colleagues establish transactive memory, or who-does-what knowledge and establish why these relationships are important (p. 553). Team members can also draw on these relationships, so each does not have to serve in the expert roles that are already established. This communication with and about colleagues leads to better group efficiencies. Even with these benefits available, the majority of team members (73.9%) reported that they had not posted on The Commons. Only 30% had customized their site experience, as can be done through electing to follow news tags, pin pages, add links, and select calendar view options. Looking at actual user activity on the site during the survey timeframe (January and February 2020), site traffic showed 179 views of 50 news articles, averaging between 2–25 article views per day. For context, 74 articles were posted during this time period, meaning 67.5% of posted articles were viewed.

Generally, social motivation to self-express on The Commons was adequate. Although such domestication existed, apparently there was not enough critical mass, social exchange, demonstrative leadership role modeling, or relational information to push members to further action.

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APPENDIX A
THE SURVEY

Title of research study: Factors encouraging upward employee voice in an online workplace portal: A case study of an academic research institute

Principal investigator: Barry Maid, barry.maid@asu.edu

Co-PI: Julie Kurth, jsturth@asu.edu

Survey link:

https://asu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_olBwoeSnQ2WHU1L

A Survey of The Commons Intranet Users

This study is exploring factors that encourage self-expression in an online workplace portal.

We are looking for subjects to participate in this short survey who (1) speak English, (2) are 18 years of age or older and (3) are affiliated with the institute at Arizona State University. Participants must have access to the SharePoint site. Taking the survey is voluntary and will be kept confidential. It should take 10 minutes to complete. You can stop at any time. Thank you.

Tell us about you:

1. In what way are you affiliated with the the Institute?

Select all that apply

- I am part of a research center.
- I support Institute members as part of a research-office embedded team.
- I am located in Institute buildings one, two or three.
- None of these.
- Other: _____

2. How long have you been associated with the institute?

Choose 1.

- 0–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16–20+ years

3. What category describes your main role in the institute?

Choose 1.

- Staff (including the institute and research office)
- Faculty (member and associate)
- Student worker (graduate and undergraduate)
- Researcher or postdoctoral associate
- Occupant (not directly affiliated with the institute)
- Other: _____

4. Select the range that best describes your age.

Choose 1.

Note, participants must be 18 or older. Indicating you are either under 18 or would prefer not to indicate your age will disqualify you from participating.

- Under 18
- 18–30
- 31–43
- 44–68
- 69 or older
- I prefer not to say

5. Do you speak English?

Choose 1.

Note, this survey is in English. Choosing answers other than yes will disqualify you from taking the survey.

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to say

6. Indicate your gender.

Choose 1.

- Male
- Female
- Other: _____
- I prefer not to say

7. At work, do you commonly share your thoughts and ideas with others?

Choose 1.

- Yes. I express my views often.
- No. I keep my views to myself.
- I do not know.
- I prefer not to say.

8. Which best describes the way you adopt new technologies?

New technologies may include mobile devices, software upgrades, applications, new tools or ways of doing things.

Choose 1.

- I am a technology leader. I find new technologies to solve problems.
- I am an early adopter. I am one of the first to use new technologies.
- I hesitate to use new technologies. I use new technologies only when required to do so.
- I am a late adopter. I am one of the last to use new technologies.
- I refuse to use new technologies.
- I prefer not to say.

Awareness

9. Indicate your awareness of the intranet portal The Commons.

Select Yes or No for each item:

- Y/N We are fortunate to have this website.
- Y/N I have visited The Commons.
- Y/N I have posted on or participated in The Commons.

- Y/N I have heard about or seen something about The Commons.

10. Who can access The Commons?

Select all that apply.

- University employees (not affiliated with the institute).
- The institute team members.
- Those housed in an institute building.
- Research office employees.
- The public.
- Other: _____

11. Why does The Commons exist?

Select all that apply.

- Building culture.
- Discussing workplace issues.
- Reading information from leaders.
- Reading information from other team members.
- Referencing documents, templates, policies and resources.
- All of the above.
- I do not know.

12. The Commons has more than a dozen how-to articles to help navigate the site and its features.

Choose 1.

- True.
- False.
- This is not applicable to me.

Influencers

13. Which is a true statement?

Choose 1.

- Most of my colleagues visit The Commons.
- Some of my colleagues visit The Commons.
- Few of my colleagues visit The Commons.
- I do not know.

14. Institute leaders are involved with The Commons.

Choose 1.

- True.
- False.
- I do not know.

15. I can share information ...

Select Yes or No for each to finish this sentence.

- Y/N safely, without privacy concerns.
- Y/N anonymously, without causing concerns from others.
- Y/N and will be rewarded for it.
- Y/N I would not share information on The Commons.

16. I have seen users provide information or support to one another on The Commons.

Choose 1.

- True.
- False.
- I do not know.

Behaviors

17. How often do you visit The Commons?

Choose 1.

- Daily.
- Weekly.
- Occasionally (once or twice during a semester).
- Never.

18. I have participated in the following activities on The Commons:

Select all that apply.

- Rated or commented on an article.
- Responded to or contributed an idea.
- Submitted an article.
- Posted comments to the discussion page.
- None of these.
- Other: _____

19. I have customized my experience on The Commons in the following ways:

Select all that apply.

- Selected a job role.
- Selected news or topic tags to display.
- Added links or pinned a page.
- I do not know how.
- None of these.
- Other: _____

20. I consider sharing information or interests on The Commons to be ...

Select all that apply.

- an opportunity to share concerns or ideas.
- invigorating to our workplace relationships.
- inappropriate or not in my best interests.
risky and not to be trusted.
- none of these.

21. Rewards for posting on The Commons include:

Select all that apply.

- Being recognized.
- Enhancing my reputation.
- Becoming better known by colleagues, faculty or leadership.
- Learning about others.

- Making social connections.
- Being better informed.
- Making the site better.
- None of these.

22. Use a short phrase to describe a typical reason you might visit The Commons:

23. What would make you feel comfortable sharing information on The Commons?

24. If you wish to be entered into the drawing to win one of two \$50 gift cards, provide your email address:
<include email verification>

APPENDIX B

IRB: SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL PROTOCOL

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete each section of the application keeping in mind that based on the nature of the research being proposed some sections may not apply. Those sections can be marked as N/A. As you complete this application, remember that the IRB is concerned with risks and benefits to the research participant and your responses should clearly reflect these issues, if any. You (the PI) need to retain the most recent protocol document for future revisions. Questions can be addressed to research.integrity@asu.edu. **PIs are strongly encouraged to complete this application with words and terms that someone not specialized in a specific field can comprehend.**

IRB: 1. Protocol Title: Factors that encourage upward employee voice in an online workplace portal: A case study of an academic research institute

IRB: 2. Background and Objectives

- 2.1 List the specific aims or research questions in 300 words or less.
- 2.2 Refer to findings relevant to the risks and benefits to participants in the proposed research.
- 2.3 Identify any past studies by ID number that are related to this study. If the work was done elsewhere, indicate the location.

TIPS for streamlining the review time:

- ✓ Two paragraphs or less is recommended.
- ✓ Do not submit sections of funded grants or similar. The IRB will request additional information, if needed.

Response:

2.1 Employee intranet portals have many features that encourage employees to express themselves to colleagues at all levels of the workplace. This expression, called employee voice, is a result of workers feeling engaged in the workplace.

The researchers aim to explore in this study the factors that are needed for employees to share their voice online. Current literature suggests such factors. These will be used to examine a case study of an intranet called Biodesign Commons.

Biodesign Commons is an enhanced SharePoint intranet portal with social features for a scientific research institute at Arizona State University. This case study will examine Biodesign Commons as a vehicle for organizational engagement and crosscheck participation to evaluate adoption by the workforce. To do so, the Co-PI will collect data via an online Qualtrics survey to Biodesign Institute faculty, staff and student workers.

The Co-PI will use an embedded research model with survey data supplemented by a Google Analytics dataset, collected November 2019 through January 2020. Other elements relating to participatory activities will come from the Biodesign Commons reporting center. The reporting center provides user article ratings, user commenting, average article rating, number of users who rated an article, article view by month, article readership and data about views, readers. In addition to these sources, the researcher will count participatory activities, such as polls, recognition posts, discussion board, idea center, news and topical tagging, selected job roles and more. The vendor may be able to provide some of this information.

2.2 N/A

2.3 N/A

IRB: 3. Data Use - What are the intended uses of the data generated from this project?

Examples include: Dissertation, thesis, undergraduate project, publication/journal article, conferences/presentations, results released to agency, organization, employer, or school. If other, then describe.

Response:

The Co-PI will use this data primarily for a master's research thesis for completion of Technical Communication (MS) in the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts. Data will be shared with the thesis committee and those attending the Co-PI's thesis defense. It may also be made available to current and future graduate students in the Technical Communication program and Biodesign Institute and Knowledge Enterprise leadership, including the Biodesign Commons Governance Council. The site governance council is comprised of Knowledge Enterprise service team executives that serve the Biodesign Institute. These individuals include the executive director of marketing, the senior director of finance, the director of human resources, and senior director and chief of staff for the chief innovation officer. The Co-PI may also use results of this study for publications and conference presentations.

IRB: 4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

4.1 List criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final sample.

Indicate if each of the following special populations is included or excluded:

- Minors (under 18)
- Adults who are unable to consent
- Prisoners
- Native Americans
- Undocumented individuals
- Non-English-speaking individuals.

4.2 If not obvious, what is the rationale for the exclusion of special populations?

4.3 What procedures will be used to determine inclusion/exclusion of special populations?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Research involving only data analyses should only describe variables included in the dataset that will be used.
- ✓ For any research which includes or may likely include children/minors or adults unable to consent, review content at:
<https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/spec>
- ✓ For research targeting Native Americans or populations with a high Native American demographic, or on or near tribal lands, review content at:
<https://public.azregents.edu/Policy%20Manual/1-118-Tribal%20Consultation.pdf>
- ✓ For research involving minors on campus, review content at:
<https://cfo.asu.edu/minors-campus>

Response:

4.1. Participants will be a stratified sampling of the 1,100-member team of scientists and supporting staff and student workers at the research institute. The team includes 150 faculty and their supporting research staff, graduate and undergraduate student workers who work in the offices and laboratories. Support staff includes those who provide services such as facilities, marketing, human resources, research development, finance and executive.

Those included:

- Faculty (including core and associate), staff (full and part-time), postdoctoral research assistants and student workers (graduate and undergraduate) on the Biodesign Institute email distribution list populated by PeopleSoft.
- Those housed in Biodesign C who are not part of the institute, including some members from the School of Molecular Sciences, the Wrigley Institute and Engineering.
- Staff from Biodesign-embedded Knowledge Enterprise support teams on email distribution list populated by PeopleSoft.

The survey will be administered in English, so non-English speakers will be excluded. Minors, prisoners and those unable to consent are not the target populations for this study. Biodesign volunteers, external collaborators and VIPs affiliated with Biodesign in some capacity may not have access to Biodesign Commons, so will not be included in the study.

4.2. See above.

4.3. N/A

IRB: 5. Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of individuals you expect to recruit and enroll. For secondary data analyses, the response should reflect the number of cases in the dataset.

Response: The Co-PI will recruit an estimated 550 participants for the survey. Secondary data aggregated via Google Analytics and the site reporting center will represent 450 users of the site. 100 users involved in demonstrable expression will be analyzed. The secondary data are estimates depending on the number of users the site has attracted by February 2020.

IRB: 6. Recruitment Methods

- 6.1 Identify who will be doing the recruitment and consenting of participants.
- 6.2 Identify when, where, and how potential participants will be identified, recruited, and consented.
- 6.3 Name materials that will be used (e.g., recruitment script, assent)
- 6.4 Describe the procedures relevant to using materials (e.g., consent form).

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Upload one attachment, dated, with all the materials relevant to this section. Name the document: `recruitment_methods_dd-mm-yyyy`

Response:

6.1. The Co-PI will recruit and consent survey participants. The Co-PI has access to and can distribute through Biodesign email distribution lists, digital signs, Biodesign Commons and newsletter content.

6.2. The Co-PI will recruit survey participants from within the Biodesign Institute. Most team members work in a research complex of three buildings – Biodesign A, B and C – on the ASU Tempe campus. The Co-PI will make the survey accessible via a survey link circulated in the institute’s weekly events newsletter, fliers, digital slides and via direct emails to the institute-wide distribution list.

6.3. Recruitment materials will include: a digital sign, event newsletter blurb, flier, email, participant online consent form.

6.4. The Co-PI will upload the digital sign to the Fourwinds players at Biodesign. She will also provide recruitment text to the events coordinator for inclusion in a weekly newsletter and upload the recruitment text as a story on Biodesign Commons. The Co-PI will ensure that fliers are replicated and placed in breakrooms and lobbies of the institute. The survey will begin with a consent form. Survey participants will be asked demographic questions pertaining to the participant’s age category and whether the participant speaks English or not to help validate the participant to take the survey. See materials attached.

IRB: 7. Procedures with Consented Participants

7.1 List every research procedure to be performed (e.g., interventions, surveys, focus groups, observations, lab procedures, secondary data collection, accessing student or other records for research purposes, and follow-ups).

7.2 For each procedure listed, describe who will be enacting it, when it will be performed, how long is participation in each procedure, and how/what data will be collected in each procedure.

7.3 Report the total period and span of time for the procedures (if applicable the timeline for follow ups).

7.4 For secondary data analyses, identify if it is a public dataset (e.g., AdHeath). If not, describe the contents of the dataset, how it will be accessed, and attach data use agreement(s) if relevant.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Ensure that research materials and procedures are explicitly connected to the articulated aims or research questions (from section 2 above).
- ✓ In some cases, a table enumerating the name of the measures, corresponding citation (if any), number of items, sources of data, time/wave if a repeated measures design can help the IRB streamline the review time.
- ✓ Upload one attachment, dated, with all the materials relevant to this section. Name the document: supporting documents dd-mm-yyyy

Response:

7.1. Qualtrics survey (see attached), analysis of site user data (Google Analytics analysis, site Reporting Center, demonstrable behaviors).

7.2. The Co-PI will administer an online survey using Qualtrics survey software in January and February 2020. Qualtrics will collect and anonymize survey data. Participants will be asked demographic information. Based on gender, age and general job categories, respondents will be categorized to ensure a valid sample is represented. The statistical significance of the number of respondents for the population size will be reported.

Site user data: While user data accumulates on the site, a sample survey will be administered. Collecting ample site analytics will take a several months (data from November 2019 through February 2020). The Google Analytics dataset will provide an aggregate of user data, bounce rate, average session duration, new users, number of sessions per user, pages per session, pageviews and sessions. Other elements relating to participatory activities will come from Biodesign Commons reporting center. The reporting center provides user article ratings, user commenting, average article rating, number of users who rated an article, article view by month, article readership and data about views, readers. In addition to these sources, the researcher will count participatory activities, such as polls, recognition posts, discussion board, idea center, news and topical tagging, selected job roles and more. The vendor may be able to provide some of this information. The Co-PI will analyze the data in spreadsheet format.

7.3. Timespan, all procedures: Receipt of IRB approval through April 2020.

7.4. Secondary datasets: Google Analytics (Biodesign account), Elevate Point reporting center and site pages (see contract).

IRB: 8. Compensation

8.1 Report the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.

8.2 Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants.

8.3 Justify that the compensation to participants to indicate it is reasonable and/or how the compensation amount was determined.

8.4 Describe the procedures for distributing the compensation or assigning the credit to participants.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If partial compensation or credit will be given or if completion of all elements is required, explain the rationale or a plan to avoid coercion
- ✓ For extra or course credit guidance, see “Research on educational programs or in classrooms” on the following page: <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations>.
- ✓ For compensation over \$100.00, review “Research Subject Compensation at: <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations> for more information.

Response:

8.1. Drawing prizes will be two, \$50 gift cards from Amazon. The drawing will be completed after the close of the survey no later than April 2020.
8.2. The Co-PI will personally fund the gift cards.
8.3. Taking 10 minutes out of a workday for participants may represent an interruption to their day and delay other tasks requiring their attention.
8.4. Once email addresses are viewed in a spreadsheet, the Co-PI will note the count. This range of participant numbers will be entered into random.org to fairly select two winners, one for each prize. The site will select one random participant at a time. The procedure will be repeated.

IRB: 9. Risk to Participants

List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ Consider the broad definition of “minimal risk” as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research that are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.
- ✓ Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.
- ✓ If there are risks, clearly describe the plan for mitigating the identified risks.

Response: While analyzed data will be anonymized, email addresses may include identifiable information, such as names, fragments of names or ASUrite IDs. To separate this information from the main survey data, the Co-PI will administer a separate survey to collect email addresses from participants. The main survey will be analyzed separately from the email addresses. Since employee participants may feel obligated to complete the survey or fear negative consequences for not participating, the consent statement explains that participants can refuse to complete or stop participating at any time. No other direct risks, discomforts or inconveniences are foreseen for participants. Neither will there be psychological, social, legal or economic risks. Responses are anonymous and only aggregate results will be present.

IRB: 10. Potential Benefits to Participants

List the potential benefits that individuals participating in the proposed study will experience from taking part in the research. If there are risks noted in 9 (above), articulated benefits should outweigh such risks. These benefits are not to society or others not considered participants in the proposed research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do not include compensation as a benefit.

Response: Self-reflection about their experience on Biodesign Commons, perceptions of the site and what may influence them to express themselves on the site may help the participant learn/think about his/her own behaviors and attitudes. The survey information could teach participants about the site or be used to make site improvements or contribute to the decision to continue the site. The participant could have positive feelings about contributing views to a research study.

IRB: 11. Privacy and Confidentiality

Indicate the steps that will be taken to protect the participant's privacy.

- 11.1 Identify who will have access to the data.
- 11.2 Identify where, how, and how long data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets).
- 11.3 Describe the procedures for storing, de-identifying, and destroying data.
- 11.4 Describe any special measures to protect any extremely sensitive data (e.g. password protection, encryption, certificates of confidentiality, separation of identifiers and data, secured storage, etc.).
- 11.5 Describe how any audio or video recordings will be managed, secured, and/or de-identified.
- 11.6 Describe how will any signed consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured and how long they will be maintained. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data.
- 11.7 Describe how any data will be linked or tracked (e.g. master-list, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.). Outline the specific procedures and processes that will be followed.
- 11.8 Describe any and all identifying or contact information that will be collected for any reason during the course of the study and how it will be secured or protected. This includes contact information collected for follow-up, compensation, linking data, or recruitment.
- 11.9 For studies accessing existing data sets, clearly describe whether or not the data requires a Data Use Agreement or any other contracts/agreements to access it for research purposes.
- 11.10 For any data that may be covered under FERPA (student grades, etc.) additional information and requirements is available at <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations>.

Response:

- 11.1. Those with access to the study data will include: the PI, the Co-PI, thesis committee members and those on the website governance council.
- 11.2. The Co-PI will store data on Qualtrics and Dropbox accounts licensed by the university.
- 11.3. Qualtrics can anonymize the data for the Co-PI. Survey answers will be stored in the Co-PI's Qualtrics account. Downloads of the survey data will be saved on Dropbox. Demographic information will be kept with the final reporting, but no additional personal identifiers will be collected or published in the research. After June 2020, data will be destroyed.
- 11.4. No sensitive data is anticipated, with the exception of asking participant age range. This information will be de-identified.
- 11.5. N/A
- 11.6. A consent statement will be integrated into one of the first screens of the survey. This will be separated from the study data and destroyed after June 2020.
- 11.7. Demographic information will be used to ensure the respondents are stratified to represent the Biodesign team member population.
- 11.8. While analyzed data will be anonymized, email addresses may include identifiable information, such as names, fragments of names or ASUrite IDs. The email addresses will be collected via a separate survey from the main survey data. The main survey data will be analyzed separately from the email addresses.
- 11.9. A data use agreement is not needed. As part of UTO granting Elevate Point access to systems to install the site on university systems, user data from the site belongs to ASU.
- 11.10. N/A

IRB: 12. Consent

Describe the procedures that will be used to obtain consent or assent (and/or parental permission).

12.1 Who will be responsible for consenting participants?

12.2 Where will the consent process take place?

12.3 How will the consent be obtained (e.g., verbal, digital signature)?

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in their preferred language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. For translation requirements, see Translating documents and materials under <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>
- ✓ Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is version of all relevant materials are approved. Alternatively, submit translation certification letter.
- ✓ **If a waiver for the informed consent process is requested, justify the waiver in terms of each of the following: (a) The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects; (b) The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (c) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and (d) Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation. Studies involving confidential, one time, or anonymous data need not justify a waiver. A verbal consent or implied consent after reading a cover letter is sufficient.**
- ✓ ASU consent templates: <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/forms> are encouraged.
- ✓ Consents and related materials need to be congruent with the content of the application.

Response:

12.1. Researchers will be responsible for ensuring participants receive a consent statement before taking the survey.

12.2. The consent statement will be delivered in the initial screens of the Qualtrics survey.

12.3. Signing the consent is not needed, since the survey data will be anonymized by the survey tool.

IRB: 13. Human Subjects Certification from Training.

Provide the names of the members of the research team.

ASU affiliated individuals do not need attach Certificates. Non-ASU investigators and research team members anticipated to manage data and/or interact with participants, need to provide the most recent CITI training for human participants. Certificates are valid for 4 years.

TIPS for streamlining the review time.

- ✓ If any of the study team members have not completed training through ASU's CITI training (i.e. they completed training at another university), copies of their completion reports will need to be uploaded when you submit.
- ✓ For any team members who are affiliated with another institution, please see "Collaborating with other institutions" under <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/special-considerations>.
- ✓ The IRB will verify that team members have completed IRB training. Visit <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/training> for details on how to complete IRB CITI training through ASU.

Response: Barry Maid (PI), Julie Kurth (Co-PI)

General Tips:

- Ensure that all your instruments, recruitment materials, study instruments, and consent forms are submitted via ERA when you submit your protocol document. For templates recommended, see <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/forms>
- Submit a complete protocol. Don't ask questions in the protocol – submit with your best option and, if not appropriate, revisions will be requested.
- If your study has undeveloped phases, clearly indicate in the protocol document that the details and materials for those phases will be submitted via a modification when ready.
- Review all materials for consistency. Ensure that the procedures, lengths of participation, dates, etc., are consistent across all the materials you submit for review.
- Have all members of the research team complete IRB training before submitting.
- Only ASU faculty, full time staff may serve as the PI. Students may prepare the submission by listing the faculty member as the PI. The submit button will only be visible to the PI.
- For information on how and what to submit with your study in ERA, see <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>. Note that if you are a student, you will need to have your Principal Investigator submit.
- For details on how to submit this document as part of a study for review and approval by the ASU IRB, visit <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>.

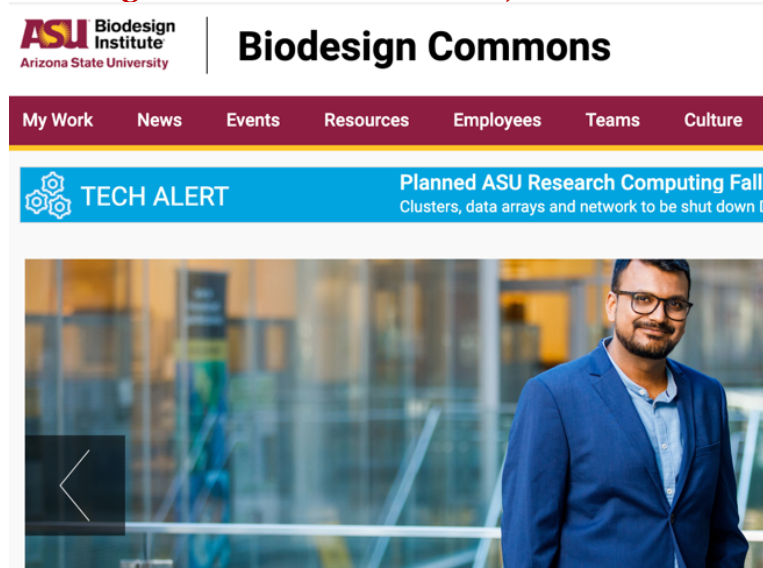
Title of research study: Factors that encourage upward employee voice in an online workplace portal: A case study of an academic research institute

Principal investigator: Barry Maid, barry.maid@asu.edu

Co-PI: Julie Kurth, jskurth@asu.edu

Participant Recruitment. Survey participants will be recruited via a link circulated in the institute's weekly events newsletter, fliers, digital slides and via direct emails to the institute-wide distribution list. Participants will be a stratified sampling of the 1,100-member team of scientists and supporting staff and student workers at the research institute. The team includes 140 faculty and their supporting research staff, graduate and undergraduate student workers and support staff from facilities, marketing, human resources, research development, finance and executive.

Biodesign Events Newsletter text, direct emails and website story:



Lend your voice: A Biodesign Commons user survey

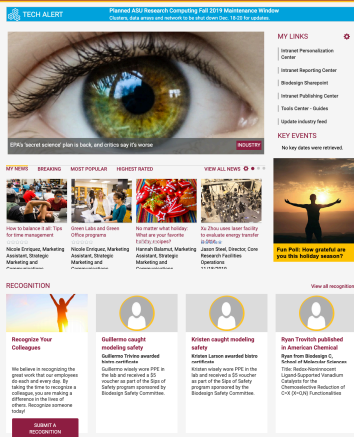
Biodesign Commons is what we – at Biodesign – have in common. It is a community portal where we can share, personalize and discover. Share a little about you, and your thoughts and experiences on the site. What do you know about Biodesign Commons? What would it take to get you to express yourself on the site for others to see and enjoy? For participating in the 10-minute survey, participants can enter a prize drawing for two \$50 gift cards. Take the survey today: <SURVEY LINK>

Digital sign



Biodesign Commons

- My Work
- News
- Events
- Resources
- Employees
- Teams
- Culture



A user survey

<SURVEY LINK>

What do you know about Biodesign Commons? What would it take to get you to express yourself there?

For participating in the 10-minute survey, **be entered for a prize drawing** for two \$50 gift cards.

Flier



Biodesign Commons

- My Work
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Title of research study: Factors that encourage upward employee voice in an online workplace portal: A case study of an academic research institute

Principal investigator: Barry Maid, barry.maid@asu.edu

Co-PI: Julie Kurth, jskurth@asu.edu

CONSENT STATEMENT

I am a graduate student under the direction of Barry Maid, professor of interdisciplinary humanities and communication, in the ASU College of Integrative Sciences and the Arts. I am conducting a thesis study to explore factors that need to be present to encourage employee expression on Biodesign Commons, an intranet portal. Note, this survey is being conducted in partnership with the Biodesign Commons Governance Council.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve a short survey to be completed online. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If you are an ASU employee or student, your participation will have no impact on your current status. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

You will have the opportunity to include your email address to be entered to win one of two \$50 gift cards for Amazon for your participation. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

The survey data will be maintained on my ASU Qualtrics account and saved to my ASU Dropbox folder maintained by the ASU Research Technology & Support staff. Your survey responses will be confidential. Email addresses will not be part of the analysis and will be collected for the prize drawing only. The results of this study may be used in my thesis paper, reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team Co-PI at Julie.Kurth@asu.edu or (480) 727-9386. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.