Key Strategies for Spotlighting Your Company's Thought Leadership
Creating an Internal Thought Leadership Program to Foster Innovation & Engagement.

In this ebook, we’ll show you how to provide your team with opportunities to challenge themselves and make an impact with their work by establishing an internal thought leadership program.

You’ll see how Stack Overflow for Teams’ interpersonal collaboration features and transparent knowledge sharing platform can support this across all stages, from initial rollout through ongoing curation. It’s an organic, easy, and transparent way for employees to collectively innovate and for the whole company to showcase employee’s impact on the organization.

Stack Overflow for Teams brings the best features of the well-known Stack Overflow developer & technologist platform with features tailored to the enterprise:

- Knowledge captured in bite-size elements as well as long form content
- Knowledge shared and discovered through simple and intuitive content organization structure, proactive alerts, and transparent information for all employees
- Content health is maintained by many instead of one and system is gamified to encourage enrichment
- Effortless async collaboration happens between peers and across teams
  - Distraction reducing integrations with ChatOps, Jira, and GitHub integrations
- Inclusive platform where everyone can contribute and benefit from day 1
  - Knowledge is reused - providing instant scale, value & ROI

Companies need this because shared knowledge and context is the only scalable way to improve technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and communication across entire teams and companies.
Top employees want to work for companies that have innovation in their DNA.

Stack Overflow’s 2020 Developer Survey\(^1\) found that one of the biggest factors that made job-seekers consider a role was the opportunity to embrace new technologies (58% of respondents), second only to compensation. And 20.8% of respondents also said that knowing that their work would have a widespread impact would be a key factor in choosing a job.

Top-tier developers and technical talent will have their pick of roles at the big companies like Apple and Google, with generous compensation packages and perks. So how can smaller companies and startups compete?

By ensuring that your technical team has ample opportunity to participate in innovative projects using novel technologies.

Large enterprise companies often silo employees into specific roles, with minimal opportunities to step outside of the boxes they’re placed in and learn new technologies. While some corporations are able to combat this sense of inertia by enlisting employees to participate in hackathons and providing time and space for them to develop their own coding projects, startups can often gain an advantage by nature of their rapid growth and focus on embracing change and innovation.

Regardless of the size of your company, it’s important to showcase your commitment to innovation to prospective employees. By illustrating your commitment to participating in and learning from the broader developer community and focusing on projects that have a meaningful impact, you’ll be able to attract talented developers who are eager to use their creativity to grow with your company.

So how can you showcase your commitment to providing your team with opportunities to challenge themselves and make an impact with their work? Focus on establishing an internal thought leadership program. This ebook will showcase strategies for curating thought leadership internally and showcasing the value of the work you’re doing to prospective and current employees.

https://insights.stackoverflow.com/survey/2020
What is thought leadership?

Thought leadership refers to the specialized expert knowledge that your company possesses, including both institutional knowledge and individual opinion and perspectives from your internal subject matter experts.

Thought leadership shouldn’t simply spout corporate messaging; it should offer something unique to the world. A survey by LinkedIn and Edelman found that the most effective thought leadership fits these three criteria:

- Explores potential challenges or new opportunities I had not considered before
- Points out things that I had overlooked in thinking or strategizing
- Offers actionable competitive intelligence

Everyone at your company can be involved in thought leadership—not just the C-suite. By providing an open, interpersonal collaborative platform to participate in critical thinking and problem-solving, and showcase industry and internal best practices and solutions, you’ll be able to attract talented new recruits and keep your existing employees highly engaged.

Thought leadership can be shared on internal systems, such as Stack Overflow for Teams, to engage your existing employees, while other content can be shared publicly, helping to attract new talent.
Here are a few ways to generate and promote your internal thought leadership:

Encourage regular cross-departmental knowledge sharing

Often, teams work independently from one another and may not have the opportunity to widely share what they’re working on, except for occasional demo days or all-hands meetings. That means they’re frequently isolated in silos, without the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives in other roles and departments.

One solution to this problem is to democratize access to company knowledge in a knowledge sharing platform, like Stack Overflow for Teams. By encouraging company-wide use of an asynchronous, interpersonal collaboration platform where team members can share their knowledge, respond to and ask questions, ask for feedback, and get information about work-in-progress projects, teams across departments will be able to access and learn more about projects as they’re happening in real time.

This empowers individual employees with the chance to showcase their own thought leadership—the most insightful and valuable ones will be up voted by the group as a whole, with a leaderboard to showcase which employees have made the most valuable contributions over time. In this model, even junior employees who are dedicated to scholarship and being generous with their work are able to get a chance in the spotlight, energizing them with the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and collaborate in discussion with diverse team members.

And subject-matter experts can scale how they share their knowledge. Whether that’s proactively posting institutional knowledge or reactively answering a question that is then easily discoverable by everyone, using Stack Overflow for Teams saves your most tenured employees from having to share the same knowledge again and again for different purposes. Customer-facing and recruiting-focused teams will be able to dig into this content to help them build storylines to share with their respective audiences, with minimal need for further interviews.
Ask open-ended questions, and encourage everyone to chime in

Using Stack Overflow for Teams as your asynchronous communication platform also provides a great opportunity to gain diverse perspectives on company issues, which can be repurposed for presentations, articles, and blog content that you can share with external stakeholders and prospective recruits.

For instance, by asking a question such as, “What’s your favorite project you’ve had the opportunity to work on, and why?”, you can gain deep insights into what’s engaging your existing employees, and use this content to showcase the variety of innovative projects to prospective recruits.

Ensure that employees across departments are encouraged to actively use Stack Overflow for Teams to ask and answer questions, and vote on the most useful content. The most compelling content will be surfaced for easy visibility, so that your customer-facing teams can easily curate relevant stories and quotes for their own content initiatives, such as blog posts and employee spotlights.

Capture institutional knowledge

In some cases, only certain subject-matter experts have comprehensive knowledge of a key subject area—so it’s important to engage them in your thought leadership efforts to capture their institutional knowledge and disperse it throughout the company.

Capturing senior leadership’s knowledge in Stack Overflow for Teams provides a rare and valuable opportunity to dig deep into their expertise and gain new insights on why things are done the way they are. Encourage your leadership team and senior developers to share foundational documents on the platform and participate in Q&As, in which any team member can share their own questions to gain new perspectives on issues.

By doing this, you can ensure that if a valuable team member leaves for another job or retires, that knowledge doesn’t depart with them. It provides the opportunity for other employees to engage more deeply with your subject-matter experts’ work, and in turn, offer new perspectives to help your expert inform their strategy for future work.
Create public-facing content to attract new recruits

The value of your thought leadership isn’t limited to your existing team—it can also be a valuable tool in recruiting new team members. By developing high-quality, analytical content that can be shared on external platforms, you can attract talented new recruits who are intrigued by the work that you’re doing.

This content can include technical content, such as case studies that document how a project came together. You can also encourage your development team to share their thought leadership in public forums where engineers frequent, such as in Stack Overflow’s public Q&A forums, and to share their code publicly on GitHub.

It can also include more traditional articles and ebooks, including op-eds for external publications or engineering-focused articles written on your company blog, Medium, or LinkedIn. Work on growing a subscriber base for an email newsletter, where you can distribute your blog content once or twice a month. Your subscriber base may include prospective recruits as well as prospective customers.

Video content is valuable as well: Consider creating video Q&As to spotlight your employees, in which an interviewer can ask them about their favorite projects, how they solved technical challenges, and what they enjoy about the company culture and growth opportunities.

Also, consider hosting a company podcast. Your podcast can bring on internal thought leaders to discuss projects your company is working on, as well as inviting in external experts in your field. This will help you to grow an audience of developers who may be interested in job opportunities at your company, while increasing your brand reputation more generally in the industry.

Salesforce, for example, hosts the show IT Visionaries, featuring interviews with CIOs, CTOs, and technology leaders at Fortune 1000 companies. By developing content that’s useful and informative to people working in IT and engineering fields, they’re able to capture a large audience base of prospective employees.

By being open and transparent about your development work and the technical challenges you’re solving in your thought leadership content, you’ll be able to attract engineers who are interested in the programming languages and frameworks you’re using. Those engineers might consider your open positions over those of better-known competitors because they can envision themselves having the opportunity to do the kind of work they find most rewarding at your company.
Develop content about the job-seeking process at your company

Your existing employees can help you by sharing their perspectives on the process of interviewing at your company, and the questions and challenges they faced along the way. Pose questions in Stack Overflow for Teams about the recruiting and interview process, and use them to inform your recruitment-focused content.

The tech software company Atlassian, for instance, has a section of its website dedicated to the job-seeking process, with detailed articles such as “How to nail your engineering interview,” which includes links to examples of coding prompts used in past interviews. The section also includes content such as “A day in the life of an associate product manager,” which talks the reader through the benefits and growth potential of Atlassian’s associate product manager program for recent grads.

Share best practices for new employees to improve onboarding

As your thought leadership efforts start working to help you bring on talented new recruits, it’s important to give them the information they need to hit the ground running. Stack Overflow’s 2018 survey found that it typically takes a developer at least a month to begin delivering value to the organization. However, that ramp-up time can be reduced if your new engineers have access to high-quality resources and tools right at their fingertips.

Rather than just providing them with a standard onboarding workflow, it can be useful to curate the best thought leadership from your team about the tools and techniques they’ll need to adapt to.

Use Stack Overflow for Teams to share curated insights and FAQs from your subject-matter experts that will provide your recruits with actionable advice to help them ramp up quickly. You can also use it to collect technical documentation and code snippets, creating a toolkit for new recruits. New employees can ask questions within the Stack Overflow for Teams platform to get further clarification, which will be archived so that other new recruits will have access to the same content.
The impact of effective thought leadership

If you do your part to collect, curate, and share your employees’ best insights widely with relevant audiences—including potential customers and partners, current employees, and prospective recruits—the impact can be powerful.

The LinkedIn/Edelman survey found that 89% of business leaders said that high-quality thought leadership had a positive impact on their perception of a brand. And 47% of executives said that they have shared their contact details after reading thought leadership, creating a powerful networking channel for both sales and hiring.

Creating relevant and timely thought leadership content is a compelling way for your company to showcase its unique knowledge and value propositions. By leveraging technology in Stack Overflow for Teams and using strategies for quickly repurposing existing content, you can build an arsenal of high-quality thought leadership that will help your brand gain credibility and trust among prospective employees and keep your current team engaged for the long run.
About Stack Overflow for Teams

The future of enterprise asynchronous collaboration, from a company that’s perfected it over 12 years

Stack Overflow revolutionized large scale asynchronous collaboration and knowledge sharing 12 years ago and Stack Overflow for Teams is doing the same for asynchronous collaboration and knowledge sharing within companies every single day.

Stack Overflow for Teams is a private web-based collaboration and knowledge sharing platform for companies who need to increase productivity, decrease cycle times, accelerate time to market, and protect institutional knowledge.
Take a tour to learn more