

## Leading Change: An Exploratory Process

*An organization is a system, with a logic of its own, and all the weight of tradition and inertia. The deck is stacked in favor of the tried and proven way of doing things and against the taking of risks and striking out in new directions.*

—John D. Rockefeller III, *The Second American Revolution* (1973)

In 2006, change is a reality. If those of us involved with higher education have learned anything through the process of embracing and integrating technology, it is that we are in a constant state of evolution as organizations and as a culture. Philosophically, most of us can agree that change is both a necessity and an opportunity, but a great deal of discipline is required to explore all the aspects of change. Changing the sacred—space, service, course, curriculum, pedagogy—can be difficult and contentious.

Where are we today, and where do we want to go tomorrow? What are the strategic plans for our higher education institutions? How should the organization of the institution contribute to these goals? These are the questions of vision and mission that must be addressed in order to initiate change and improvement at colleges and universities.

### Innovation and Inspiration

“How innovative do you want to be?” In answer to this question, most leaders in higher education, and their staff, will say “Very!” However, the process for achieving innovation in the culture of higher education is complex and is directly influenced by the typical human response to change: to question it, to challenge it, and to slow it down. Change is required

for all organizations to become and/or remain vital. The drivers for change—technology, competition, recognition, economics—are ones that most members of higher education institutions will agree on, but the *process* for implementing reorganization and redesign has been less frankly discussed.

As I look back at organizations that have worked hard to merge, integrate, and evolve their structures and environments, I see organizations that have very deliberately created a *we* out of *us* and *them*. This type of alignment is reached through a conscious process of developing vision goals and implementation.

I want to underscore that all successful change is *led*—whether led by individuals, by groups, or by coalitions. Inspiring others with great ideas is the first step on the path to change, growth, and improvement. Sometimes the clarity of the vision exists at the beginning of the process, and sometimes it is discovered along the way, but recognizing the “big idea” is required, and communicating that idea to others is absolutely necessary. Leaders who can inspire an organization will allow change to happen, growth to occur, and improvement to continue.

### Reengineering: Purpose and Process

As architects and campus planners, my colleagues and I work as facilitators with

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higher education clients to help support their missions and goals with specific market research to better understand their users’ needs. We try to go beyond the abstract user and instead find the authentic voice of the freshman, the undergraduate, the PhD student, or the faculty member. We utilize scenarios to try on new ideas before committing to them. We use the process of exploration to help colleges and universities get comfortable with change; they are encouraged to become part of the “idea” of change and to share their concerns, frustrations, anxieties, hopes, and fears. This process of exploration is an important aspect of

creating a culture that is committed to sustained improvement and evolution. The following steps are all part of this exploratory process:

- Develop the coalition, those who will lead the process and “dream”
- Set specific goals—and prioritize them
- Address the realistic and the aspirational
- Organize efforts, creating alignment on process
- Gather broad input about the future

*Looking forward and looking back:* organizations that can look critically at what they do, putting everything on the table for evaluation and creative discussion, can discover surprising opportuni-

ties. There may be things they should stop doing because users' needs have changed. There may be services that can be delivered in new and better ways. The discourse, the discussion, and often the rich disagreement are an important part of the process that leads to concrete ideas and goals.

*Looking internally and looking externally:* institutions that can organize an effort to gather input from a rich cross-section of constituents, users, providers, and peers will be able to break down both the barriers and the assumptions that

*thesis:* Institutions need to ask themselves: What have we heard? What have we learned? What will the future need to look like? How will we get there? Who will be responsible? Answering these questions will allow an organization to explore, with greater detail, how to "become what we want to be." This is the planning stage in which department heads, departments, and individuals begin to understand their roles and responsibilities in achieving the larger vision. Answering these questions will also create the next level of alignment necessary to implement changes.

other. Changing the patterns of discourse is a very important aspect of leading a process of organizational change. If different results are expected, they will not be achieved by going through the same old processes. Creating the time and the place to interact differently leads to new ideas and opportunities. To achieve success, institutions need to nurture several human factors:

- *Championship*—identify those leaders who can articulate ideas and inspire others to participate.
- *Ownership*—encourage all staff to buy in to the process that will be used to identify goals, objectives, and implementation plans, so that they can participate in the change.
- *Satisfaction*—show that efforts will be valued and that frank discussion will lead to a defined direction.
- *Accountability*—ensure that the group, at all levels, has the commitment to pursue its ideas and the resources to achieve its goals.
- *Responsibility*—follow through on the implementation, monitoring, communication, and continuous feedback.
- *Fulfillment*—celebrate the contributions and achievements of the organization and its members.

### Feedback and Evolution

In our fast-paced and ever-changing world, defining feedback loops that allow for continuous adaptation, adjustment, and improvement will allow higher education institutions to shift the organizational culture from one that is based on knowing to one that allows for learning. Change need not be feared: it is an inherent part of our natural condition and technological environment. Continuous evolution is built on the values of commitment, honesty, trust, participation, communication, and the ability to honor achievements. These are attributes that have served higher education well in the past and that will continue to guide us all into the future.



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have contributed to the current "way we do things." Hearing the non-hierarchical voice of students, staff, and faculty also brings new information and a broader range of ideas.

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### Alignment: The Human Factors

Some organizations create opportunities to share ideas across the institution, whereas others are so busy keeping the organization running that they never stop to really assess or to talk with each