DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR TRUSTEES

BOARDS CAN SERVE AS 'MISSION-FOCUSED ADVISORS' AS THEIR INSTITUTIONS MODERNIZE TECHNOLOGY.

BY KEITH MYERS

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, THE DEFINITION OF A "traditional" student has expanded to include a college's adult, part-time, and remote learner populations — most of whom are native multitaskers incapable of recalling life before the connectivity of smart phones and 3G. But despite this new normal, a majority of institutions continue to maintain the status quo, relying on decades-old processes and technologies that are ill-equipped to support the 21st century needs of today's students.

Facing Reality

We live and operate in an age of fantastic technological advancement. The expectation is that community colleges, like others, will leverage technology to improve student outcomes, innovate academic offerings, and prevent sophisticated cybersecurity threats regardless of deep, sustained cuts to funding. To do so, they must embrace the concept of digital transformation.

Commonly understood as an integrated, coordinated series of shifts across the institutional landscape (from culture to workforce to technology and everything in between),

digital transformation seeks to optimize all operating and delivery models, transforming the institution by realigning its execution to its stated mission, strategic direction, and unique value proposition.

Sounds simple, right? Just reengineer all processes so constituents are operating in the best interest of the college and its students. Okay, but guess what? All those processes and people are typically supported by a single, operational platform that was implemented between ten and twenty years ago: the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. That's right, one system powers the completion of vital student functions like registering for classes and applying for financial aid and also makes sure employees receive their paychecks and HR benefits. And so, your path to digital transformation must begin by evaluating the alignment between your institution and its goals, its students, and the ERP.

As a trustee, you will play a critical role in this complex process: that of mission-focused advisor. I've broken the transformation process down into three phases, providing guidance on what to look for along the way.

Laying the Groundwork for Success

Just as you wouldn't build a house without pouring the proper foundation, nor should your college attempt to transform without first laying a solid groundwork. In the case of digital transformation, a solid foundation is built through engaging your campus community and giving them a voice in the process. This work should bring together faculty, staff, administrators, leadership, trustees, and students to co-create a shared vision for success. This vision will serve as a charter, guiding future decisions and reimagining and redesigning the college's business processes to realize it.

Process Reimagine & Redesign (PRR) work empowers campus stakeholders to become innovators by teaching them about industry best practices and technical advances in the ERP market. It's designed to open their minds to new possibilities and more efficient ways of working and learning. Inherently collaborative, this work facilitates buy-in across the organization and allows stakeholders to see their voice become part of the process, which is essential when it's time to implement new processes and technology.

During the preparation phase, trustees should be asking:
- *What are the college's ultimate goals and expectations of this transformation? How do they support our strategic priorities?*
- *Are we engaging the key stakeholders who are impacted by the business processes we're reimagining and redesigning? Do students have a voice in this process?*
- *Are we planning for the future?*

Selecting a New ERP Solution

The decision to adopt a new ERP system will reach the farthest corners of your institution and will likely be accompanied by a multimillion-dollar price tag. During the ERP evaluation and selection process, the college must investigate multiple solutions and conduct a competitive bid process. If the college has completed its requisite planning, the selection process will naturally lead the group to the solution that best meets the institution's needs.

As a steward of the college's future, trustees can help ensure that the new solution is selected with long-term success and longevity in mind. During this phase, trustees should be asking:
- *Can the provider clearly articulate how its solution is poised to respond to our challenges?*
- *How can the provider help our institution turn data into information in order to address problems?*
- *Is the provider's business sustainable to ensure continued partnership well into the future?*

Achieving Transformation

Technology projects are often deemed successful if they are delivered "on time" and "on budget." While these indicators can certainly help gauge a project's future success, it shouldn't be a measure of transformation because it doesn't account for the deeper organizational changes that need to take place. Ensuring that the new technology is accompanied by organizational transformation is critical to success. Without it, problems and challenges from the past will persist.

To ensure the college achieves long-lasting, meaningful transformation, trustees should be asking:
- *Has the college evaluated whether the organization is ready for change?*
- *How is the college supplementing existing workloads to ensure it has the resources necessary to implement the new ERP system and redesigned processes?*
- *How is the college helping stakeholders embrace change?*

Final Thoughts

As a mission-focused advisor, trustees should also collaborate with outside parties to bring valuable insights and best practices to the organization. Connect with trustees at peer institutions which have undertaken similar initiatives in order to explore what worked well, what didn't, and what they wish they would have known earlier. These lessons can save your college valuable time and money by avoiding costly missteps.

If digital transformation is in your college's future but you're not sure where to start, consider working with an independent transformation partner.

Digital transformation can be a long, complex journey. Trustees who maintain a big-picture perspective, ask the right questions, and contribute valuable insights which can help keep the project on mission and achieve the desired transformation.

To learn more about CampusWorks' approach to ERP evaluation and selection, listen to "ERP for the Mindful Trustee" with Keith Myers on ACCT's In the Know, available at www.acct.org/in-the-know or through Apple and Android podcast apps..

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