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Smart Change

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The constant in higher education is change. The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) regularly posts *Trends in Higher Education*, an environmental scan of the forces at play based on changes in demographics, the economy, environment, global education, learning, politics, and technology. The changes, however, are now more powerful than ever: these include intense competition among traditional institutions, expansion of for-profit institutions, technological advances, globalization of colleges and universities, and the overall shift toward restructuring higher education as a marketplace rather than a regulated public sector (Newman 2004, xi).

Whether one is a senior administrator or department chair, faculty or staff member, student or stakeholder, one is caught between two centuries, poised between two worlds—termed the monastery and the marketplace by Cantor and Schomberg. Twentieth century organizations according to Rowley, Lujan and Dolence in *Strategic Choices for the Academy*, were characterized by stability and predictability, size and scale, top-down leadership, organizational rigidity, control by rules and hierarchy, closely guarded information, quantitative analysis, need for certainty, reactivity and risk aversion, corporate independence, vertical integration, a focus on internal organization, sustainable advantage, and capacity to compete for today's markets. In contrast, 21st century organizations are characterized by discontinuous change, speed and responsiveness, leadership from everybody, permanent flexibility, control by vision and values, shared information, creativity and intuition, tolerance of ambiguity, proactive and entrepreneurial initiatives, corporate interdependence, "virtual" integration, focus on the competitive environment, constant reinvention of advantage, and the creation of tomorrow's markets (Rowley et al. 1998, 110).

The critical question surrounds us: How can a higher education institution create the capacity to move from monastery to marketplace without losing its traditional role as keeper of the wisdom and core values of society? (Cantor and Schomberg 2003) We approach this question by assuming that what needs to change is how we work together as members of an educational organization to accomplish our goals. We will still engage in scholarship; we will still offer educational programs and support the advancement and application of knowledge. What will change is *how* we do these things and with *whom*. We contend that to create such capacity involves a new approach to change. "Most present-day organizations are confining, are not necessarily rewarding of creativity, and are stifling of innovation. Organizations seeking to fit better with new market forces are moving from being guided by the bottom line to being open to ideas linked with new horizons." (Magsaysay, in Rowley et al. 1998, 109.) So, creating capacity involves learning how to cast off control as the guidance system of an institution and introducing shared learning instead; it involves elevating ideas above status and replacing orthodoxy with creativity. In addition, we believe that every higher education institution requires, now more than ever, a well-understood framework for spearheading change.

Such a framework must allow for broad involvement so as to become responsive, adaptive, entrepreneurial and flexible in an ever increasing market-based environment. If we can learn to work in this way, we will be modeling the same qualities and assets that society itself will need

for life and work in the 21st century. Furthermore, we will be drawing on the essential character of our institutions—we are designed to promote learning. We can draw on our own learning capacity to prepare ourselves for a new era!

While most institutions have undergone some form of strategic planning or strategic positioning over the past few decades, the majority of these change efforts have not resulted in transformative change (Dolence and Norris 1995, Rowley et al. 1998, Kanter, 2001; Newman et al. 2004). Likewise, although numerous publications and perspectives exist regarding change in higher education, this also has not resulted in transformative change; namely, deep, pervasive and consistent changes in how we function as educational institutions. And in some cases, the planning processes have become extremely cumbersome, often resulting in cynical faculty and stymied administrators, each blaming the others for our lack of shared progress.

In the following essay we promote “smart change” as a simple yet powerful means to help administrators, faculty, staff, and stakeholders better understand the issues surrounding change initiatives at their institutions. We begin by describing and comparing three approaches to change: routine, strategic, and transformative. We then elaborate on how each approach to change affects the planning process at various stages including problem solving, planning focus, change mechanisms, leadership and corresponding core competencies, overall engagement, the learning environment and accountability. We conclude by sharing three examples of our use of the “smart change” framework and issuing a call for institutions to cast off “control” as their main guidance system and begin to practice a broader understanding of change, i.e., *smart change*. (Baer, Duin and Ramaley, 2006)

Approaches to Change

To be *smart* in one’s approach to change in higher education requires an understanding of when and how to employ each of three types or approaches to change (see Table 1). Each of these approaches may be in use simultaneously at different levels of an organization and in response to different needs. Some challenges can be addressed by using well-practiced approaches to familiar problems (*routine change*). Other issues require planned out approaches (*strategic change*). In contrast, complex demands require approaches that are invented “as you go”; these require a significant expansion of core individual and institutional capacities and new ways of working together (*transformative change*).

Table 1: Approaches to Change in Higher Education

	Routine Change	Strategic Change	Transformative Change	Smart Change
Problem Solving	Applies routine expertise to well defined problems; answers clear questions; works to correct errors; is incremental and is unlikely to spread from an initial focus.	Applies specific expertise to improve productivity or clarity of something through redesign or reengineering; it rewards specific behaviors and is likely to be applied in multiple areas.	Applies adaptive expertise to emerging challenges; seeks solutions when there are no clear answers; results in significant expanding of core capacities; involves working together differently; adds value and sweeps out in	Applies the targeted type of change as needed for the situation. Understands that problem solving requires multiple types of change and employs the balance as needed. Focuses on scenarios over environmental scans.

			all directions.	
Planning focus	Focuses on the linear process, is paper-intensive, and lacks an expanded understanding of the cultural context of the organization.	Also focuses primarily on a linear process, but includes formalized, employee involvement through reengineering, business transformation, and continuous quality improvement.	Focuses on transformation of programs, services, practices, and policies; is future-oriented, flexible, innovative, and based on organizational intelligence.	Identifies and deploys the appropriate change type at the right stage of the planning process to achieve maximum value in the strategic efforts.
Change Mechanisms	Conforms with policy; change is built into policies and procedures based on existing structure and operations; examples include course designator change or training mandates.	Focuses on quality: examples include Total Quality Management, Key Performance Indicators, and other continuous improvement indicators.	Focuses on cycle of innovation and adaptive change: examples include complete redesign of undergraduate curriculum (goals, philosophy and student experience); portfolios vs. grades; new uses of faculty roles and expertise.	Targets the change approach to simultaneously sustain the routine as needed, support the reform and navigate the transformation required in times of rapid and frequent deep change.
Leadership & Core Competencies	Sees leadership as solo (classic hierarchy); Core competency is generalist thinking.	Sees leadership as a team (horizontal organization); Core competency is specialist thinking.	Sees leadership as shared (hologram organization); Core competencies include globalist thinking, i.e., synthesizers, adapters, cultural translators, boundary spanners.	Leadership skills and competencies are strong in adaptive, flexible scenario-based problem solving. Strategy leads to action. Campus-wide professional development opportunities focus on the critical and often disruptive nature of change.
Engagement	Views engagement as solo.	Views engagement as bridging.	Views engagement as integrative or blurred.	Engagement is understood, embraced and celebrated to accomplish more than can be accomplished alone.
Accountability	Focuses on standard operating procedures and policies; Does not require leading indicators.	Focuses on system or unit based analytics; Uses performance scorecards or similar metrics that may include leading indicators.	Focuses on enterprise wide analytics; Uses scorecards but also requires leading indicators and clear measurable outcomes.	Measurement, assessment, analysis and accountability are integral to campus planning. Assessment linked to action is the foundation of smart change.

Those who understand these types of change and employ them appropriately are practicing *smart change*. In all cases, the smart change framework approaches change as a core asset and prepares for the future through a focus on principles over practices, data analysis over myth, leadership over management, continuous over episodic improvement, communication over sound bites, the system over silos, and partnership over competition.

More specifically, *routine change* is the application of routine expertise to well defined problems. It is discrete, requires generalist thinking, and is largely discipline focused. It applies to clear questions where there are well known answers. It corrects errors, is incremental, and the change itself is not likely to spread from the initial focus. As such, routine change does not require leading indicators as it is focused largely on sustaining the *status quo*. In this case, leadership is a solo model (classic hierarchy), and engagement with other entities is also largely a solo (one on one) model. Unfortunately, routine change can lead to a “blame” culture where people learn to just “keep their mouths shut” about difficulties with current policies and procedures. As such, it does not empower people to be part of either strategic or smart change because it does not regularly foster honesty and openness.

Strategic change involves the design and reengineering to improve the productivity, clarity, or quality of activities or outcomes. It is incremental, requires specialist thinking, and is largely inter-disciplinary focused. Recent examples include improvement initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other management practices used to develop processes that are stable and predictable and are therefore used to improve quality, productivity and efficiency. Strategic change uses metrics such as performance scorecards to document progress and reward behavior. In this case, leadership involves teams; however, the change is largely spearheaded from the top (horizontal organization), and engagement takes the form of bridging across departments or areas of specialization (one to one). Strategic change helps to identify problems, but people often do not feel personally responsible; that is, it can lead to a “planned change” culture where people compare their situation to existing data but, unless they are designated as the “change agent”, are less likely to be part of smart change because they lack personal ownership in the enterprise or an avenue to express their ideas.

In contrast, *transformative change* is systemic and focuses on the application of adaptive expertise to emerging challenges. In cases where there are no clear answers, one needs to employ the aggressive understanding and application of change management principles – including integrative engagement, shared leadership and the implementation of transformative goals – to develop institutional capacity and create systemic change. It is exponential, requires global or big picture thinking, and is largely trans- or multi-disciplinary focused. It is imperative for finding solutions when there are no clear answers. It results in significant expanding of core capacities as it demands that people work together differently. It employs next generation technologies that infuse and integrate academic and administrative support, enabling better decision making. Examples include the use of portfolios versus grades, complete redesign of curricula, and new uses of faculty expertise. Transformative change uses performance scorecards but also requires leading indicators and clear measurable outcomes. In this case, leadership is shared (hologram

organization) one that is intricately networked and connected, and engagement is integrative or blurred (many with many). Transformative change results in proactive detection of problems largely because of shared leadership and thus shared accountability. It results in a “culture of inquiry” where individuals share insights with communities of practice. In this case, anyone can be a change agent; the assignment goes to everyone, and people are empowered to be part of the change process. It is aided by new technologies that anticipate needs and support the innovation.

In the next sections, we describe in more detail specific change characteristics—innovation, shared leadership, integrative engagement, and shared accountability--that we have found most vital to fostering transformative change.

Planning to Foster Innovation

Much of day-to-day organizational operations reside in the routine change category, and it is an approach that sustains the existing organizational structure and maintains the *status quo*. However, as organizations became more bureaucratic and complex in the past century, a higher dimension of change was required. And higher education began to look at output and productivity measures. According to Mark Milliron:

Much like the larger corporate world, the education field has been on a journey of transformation over the past 25 years. In fact, some called *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the 1983 report from the newly formed U.S. Department of Education, a shot across the bow to educators nationally and internationally. The authors claimed that the U.S. was suffering from a ‘rising tide of mediocrity’ that threatened to make the country a non-player in an increasingly connected, knowledge –driven world. The report triggered reform efforts at all levels of education. Educators soon began borrowing change strategies from the business world. They followed TQM, CQI and reengineering. A cursory look at education conference programs from the late 1980s through the mid-1990s will turn up session after session detailing change initiatives in education that would be hard to differentiate from those at GM or GE. (Milliron 2006, 2)

Indeed, in the mid-1980s to 1990s, planning was becoming more widespread throughout higher education. However, strategic planning was often characterized as too linear, only relying on available hard information, creating elaborate paperwork mills, and for being too formalized and structured which, in essence, ignored the organizational context and culture. This approach discouraged creativity and positive change (Dooris, 2002-2003, 2). Yet, this planning framework met the increasingly bureaucratic structure and accountability expectations of this decade.

By the mid 1990s the call for more strategy in strategic planning was evident. Higher education was being called to focus more on performance and responsiveness. As with other sectors of society, responsiveness to stakeholders became more important in higher education including employees, students, and employers. And by the late 1990s and early 21st century, higher education planning had moved to themes of reengineering, business transformation, and continuous quality improvement. It was becoming more apparent that, “If you spend your time

solving problems and resolving crises, you will have little time for innovation. The tendency to race headlong into the future while looking in the rearview mirror (how it was done in the past) and side windows (how the competition is doing it) has proven unproductive over the long haul.” (Ashley and Morrison 1996, 10).

In addition, George Keller, a long time planning leader in higher education, stresses the need for transforming business processes:

Strategic planning is now increasingly about organizational learning and creativity, with the recognition that college and university leaders need to challenge assumptions and consider radically changing existing structures and processes. Relatively recent conceptions of strategic planning focus more than earlier approaches on dynamism, the future, flexibility, organizational intelligence, and creativity, and about moving from strategy to transformation. (as quoted in Dooris 2002-2003, 2-3).

In another case, well known Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter advocates that an organization approach strategy development as improvisational theater; i.e., when exact outcomes are not known, an organization should run an improvisational theater where a general theme is identified to develop different scenarios. Because it is impossible to know which model, which standard, which concept will prevail, Kanter promotes the launching of many small experiments so that an organization might learn from the results of each – a hallmark of improvisation. In effect, “Change is not a decision but a campaign” (Kanter 2001, 11).

More recently, Scott Anthony, Matt Eyring, and Lib Gibson suggest that in order for organizations to be successful in the ever changing marketplace, they must chart a path that produces successful innovations time after time. They advocate that an organization should build an innovations game plan by creating a short list of innovative ideas for its target market. Here the focus is on creating specific opportunities, focusing on patterns over numbers, on execution and adaptation, and through understanding how to change employee roles to support innovative changes (Anthony et al. 2006, 7).

Shared Leadership / Shared Learning

At its root, smart change is about substituting shared leadership and shared learning for the more traditional define-assign, command-control functions of traditional organizational design. As organizations move from machines with leaders at the top who control the process to living, dynamic systems of interconnected relationships, new models of leadership begin to emerge. These new models “conceptualize leadership as a more relational process, a shared or distributed phenomenon occurring at different levels and dependent on social interactions and networks of influence” (Fletcher and Kaufer 2003, 21). Simply put, “shared leadership is a process through which individual team members share in performing the behaviors and roles of a traditional, hierarchical team leader” (Houghton, Neck, and Manz 2003, 124).

Models of shared leadership focus on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy. They articulate leadership as a social process that

occurs in and through social interactions, and they focus on the skills and ability required to create conditions in which collective learning can occur. Shared leadership has many names including partnership-as-leadership, distributed leadership, and community of leaders. For shared leadership to be successful, there needs to be balance of power, shared purpose and goals, shared responsibility for the work, respect for each person, and a willingness to work together closely on complex, real-world situations (Maes and Moxley 2006).

A conversation about a shared vision marks the beginning of a shared leadership / shared learning process. Similar to the need for integrative engagement to begin with one's individual assessment of how involved one is in learning, shared leadership begins with the change and growth that takes place within each person. People do not invest in the vision of a current or past leader; they invest in their own vision. Reaching a shared vision can only be accomplished with a language and process that promotes inclusion and connection of everyone concerned (Woodbury 2006).

New kinds of leadership competencies are required for shared leadership to succeed. Routine change relies on generalist thinking and classic hierarchical expertise, and strategic change requires more specialists thinking where quality management, assessment directors and continuous quality scorecards are used to map the environment of productivity. In contrast, as the demands of society change and as we recognize the challenges of a global marketplace, it is evident that global or big picture thinking and associated competencies are required. They exhibit "versatilist" thinking which is characterized as the application of "depth of skill to a progressively widening scope of situations, experiences, gaining new competencies, building relationships and assuming new roles. Versatilists are capable not only of constantly adapting but also of constantly learning and growing." (Friedman 2007, 289.) In effect, transformative change requires leaders who are great collaborators and orchestrators, synthesizers, explainers, leveragers, adapters, passionate personalizers, cultural translators, and boundary spanners (Friedman 2006).

For many of today's leaders in higher education, shared leadership and its associated core competencies are foreign concepts. As such, it takes great resolve to build capacity for it at individual, group, and institutional levels. However, for transformative change to be possible, higher education must become adept at shared leadership. We must foster and develop shared leadership at all levels of the organization, and we must protect and promote those who engage in such effort.

Integrative Engagement

According to the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, "Engagement is transformative partnership for discovery and learning with shared expectations, resources, expertise, and values, and mutually beneficial results" (2003). In addition, other initiatives such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, see <http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, see <http://www.ccsse.org/>) work to improve quality of learning and service to students. In these cases whether the idea of engagement is focused on institutional behavior or on student involvement in learning, engagement is reciprocal, it requires the creation of a shared agenda, and it must be mutually beneficial to all participants.

Furthermore, it generates social and intellectual capital and builds a strong sense of shared purpose and community while enriching the student experience and deepening the scholarly interests of both faculty and students in the problems presented by the community experience. It also permits an institution community to model the behaviors of a democratic society.

Transformative change requires a value-added definition of integrative engagement. At an individual level, this means identifying and assessing how involved one is in learning. At an organizational level, this means identifying and assessing how we work together and the extent to which we share expectations, goals, resources, and risk and benefit with other participants. And at a community level, this means identifying and assessing how well we use campus and community resources to achieve the mission of a campus and to build and support strong, democratic communities. In short, to begin the transformative change process, one must engage the organization and community, develop trust and foster exchange of information, implement a process for gaining input for continuous innovation, and use both campus and community resources in a productive and leveraged way.

Shared Accountability

Within routine change, day-to-day management controls accountability. Often tasks are repetitive with many offices signing off on decisions. Again, ultimate authority resides at the top of the classical hierarchy. Students succeed or fail on their merits and the extent to which they engaged in the learning enterprise. Planning in the routine approach often does not serve the current needs of faculty, students, staff, and stakeholders as plans are often vague or rely on generalities that purport to be all things to all people.

As part of strategic change, accountability and performance scorecards were established. Student learner outcomes were in vogue and higher education began to use tests and outcome measures to document results. An increasing reliance on test scores became the foundation for the No Child Left Behind legislation. Performance scores will continue to be published, and teachers and school leaders will continue to be held accountable for student achievement as measured by standardized tests.

In contrast, dynamism is key to transformative change. Because of the demands of new and diversified stakeholders as well as ever expanding competition, higher education must identify, build and sustain new change mechanisms within the organization. Transformative change efforts involve the use of leading indicators to assess whether conditions are in place for these new efforts. Such leading indicators include access to global networks, demonstrated value of programs, simulation capabilities, and life long learning support. In addition, leading indicators for developing the capacity for future transformation include seamless educational pathways; flexible and personalized curriculum, delivery modes and services; flexible policies and practices and anticipating the new generation of integrated and fused technologies in academic and administrative support (Dolence and Norris 1995).

The public will no doubt continue to focus on return on investment from higher education. This can mean several things. Are our institutions efficient? Have our graduates learned what they need to know? Is it taking too long to complete a degree or a credential? Are too few of our

students successful in completing their educational goals? Are we contributing to economic development and job creation? Challenges to the performance of education have become routine, and stakeholders regularly ask about the return on the large and growing investments required to maintain higher education. The accountability craze has resulted in hundreds of indicators as part of tracking higher education's efforts. Examples of lagging indicators include seat time, student credit hours, cost per FTE, average GPA, number of degrees awarded, number of parking spaces, and tuition rate (Dolence and Norris 1995). Unfortunately, transformative change rarely results from this massive tracking effort, in part due to the use of these lagging indicators that focus mainly on maintaining or improving upon the *status quo*.

In contrast, to be *smart* in one's approach to change in higher education requires an understanding of when and how to employ each of three types or approaches to change. The call for more innovation and entrepreneurial characteristics pushed higher education into a new arena; one more like the for-profits and private providers that reside squarely in the marketplace of society. Here "learning organization" (Senge, 1990) and system theories reflect the image of a dynamic, ever changing environment which requires higher education to be highly adaptive in response to constant challenges and competition. There are no clear answers and with every solution tried, the organization learns and adapts, and becomes more ready for the next challenge. This requires constant expansion of the core capacities of the organization across all levels and units. It involves working together differently and in more systemic fashion. Value is added as relationships, collaboration and partnerships leverage outcomes, product quality or time to completion of tasks.

Thus, a focus on developing leading indicators for transformative change solutions provides teams with a framework to transcend the traditional boundaries within higher education and broaden the leverage and reach of change to more engaged, integrated and lasting solutions (Duin, Baer, and Ramaley 2007). Leading indicators provide an essential tool for building the case for change, building needed capacity, and sustaining the change process.

Illustrations of Smart Change

To be *smart* in one's approach to change in higher education requires an understanding of when and how to employ each of three types or approaches to change. Here we provide three examples to illustrate how each of us has used the smart change framework in our daily work. The first example, Winona State University in Minnesota, illustrates integrative engagement as well as planning to foster innovation; the second, the University of Minnesota, illustrates the use of shared leadership and shared learning during the course of a mandated collegiate merger; and the third, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities--a system of public technical, community and state universities--highlights shared leadership and accountability across this broad system for higher education. Together these examples indicate, in large and small ways, that smart change is about how we work together, how we enhance shared leadership and the development of shared vision, and how we evaluate our progress and determine resulting action.

Winona State University

Winona State University (WSU) began its exploration of what it would mean to be a next generation or 21st Century University by launching a two-year process of study and

experimentation in 2004. To support this phase, small groups were set up to examine a number of critical issues ranging from the need for integrative academic support services to promote student success to an examination of what it would mean to become a fully engaged university. In 2005, these studies culminated in the beginning of a series of implementation strategies designed to continue the process of creating the capacities of a next generation institution able to adapt to new environments and demands, able to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and apply the resulting insights creatively and productively, and able to work together differently across disciplinary, organizational and inter-institutional lines.

In the past two years, the University has reorganized its administration to create new capacity to support innovation and the implementation of Learning for the 21st Century (L21). New integrative support functions have been designed and set in place that bring together (a) research, graduate studies, assessment and planning, (b) student support services ranging from advisement to tutoring to financial aid, (c) integrated health care, wellness and fitness and counseling services, and (d) strategic planning, accountability and planning functions. By bringing these related functions together, the institution has begun to build capacity for the kind of innovation and change that will allow WSU to become a 21st century institution. This work is supported by an Innovation Fund that represents approximately 1% of the base budget. In addition, plans are underway to develop a different approach to faculty and staff professional and career development that will expand the institution's commitment to the scholarship of learning and teaching and to university-community engagement and partnership.

Through the introduction of new ways of gathering, interpreting and using data generated by the workings of the institution, WSU is moving toward a working model of academic analytics based on more extensive use of leading indicators that provide a portrait of its growing capacity to integrate research, education and the enhancement of professional practice and to promote student success. The result is an institution that is increasingly supporting learning differently, working together differently and instantiating its mission as “a community of learners improving our world.”

University of Minnesota

As stated earlier, complex demands require approaches that are invented as you go; these require a significant expansion of core individual and institutional capacities and new ways of working together (*transformative change*).

As part of a system-wide strategic positioning effort, on July 1, 2006, the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, went from 20 colleges to 17. The new College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences was the result of a merger of two colleges and a part of a third. Based on the principles of smart change – engagement, shared leadership, and transformative goals – the two associate deans for instruction from the colleges proposed two initiatives: a series of cross-collegiate faculty and staff lunches, and a set of 20 cross-collegiate working groups to begin the hard work of creating the programs, management, and overall relations associated with the new college. For both initiatives, the purpose was to help people get acquainted and develop trust, share and compare various programs and processes, locate best practices across the University and nation, and develop recommendations for the new area, program, or service being

developed. During a busy and tense time, over 120 faculty attended the lunches, and over 260 faculty, staff, and students volunteered to be part of the working groups.

In this case, smart change was about substituting shared leadership and shared learning for the more traditional define-assign, command-control functions of traditional organizational design. Over the course of the merger, major personnel and budgetary challenges demanded shared leadership. The associate deans approached problem solving from a transformative change position; i.e., they applied adaptive expertise to emerging challenges and sought solutions where there were no clear answers. They worked to sustain routine change as needed, respond to and support six strategic reform mandates from Central, while also navigating the implementation of transformative change through integrative engagement of multiple faculty, staff, students, and constituencies in the development of the new college. (Duin 2006)

In this two-year process, it was clear that faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders want to be part of smart change. They want to be part of a shared leadership process; they want to be engaged with the development and implementation process; and most want to be part of transformative change. This case illustrated that people will be part of smart change if we preserve foundational tenets of the past, maintain critical mission and services in the present, and create a well-defined process for moving into the future. People will communicate and “trust the process of smart change” if we seek, value, and act on their contributions.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) determined that educational program offerings, student services and administrative operations would move towards a seamless model on behalf of learners. Students were attending more than one institution within the system at the same time, and many were at more than two at the same time. Seamless operations would allow for similar, often transparent academic and student service experiences for students. This meant that course transfer between and among the campuses would be accomplished. Student services would appear similar and compatible. Administrative services would begin to allow for seamless admissions, calendars, learning platforms and other support services.

This example reflects the sense of smart change that applies the targeted type of change as needed for the presenting situation. This endeavor required an understanding that problem solving requires the multiple types of change and sought to balance the need for routine, strategic and transformative change models simultaneously depending upon the situation.

In order to accomplish a seamless model, the system established a shared leadership team of presidents, campus academic, student service, IT and finance personnel, and system office staff. The problem solving approach delineated three categories of change that would be required for system wide change: routine changes that were a matter of minor business practices or affected only a few campuses operated in one manner; strategic reform often required major procedural changes; and transformative change was required to develop system level policies in order to bring more innovative and adaptable services to students.

Engagement of cross functional teams began to move each function from a siloed approach within units to a cross unit function. Campuses, through the use of technology, are streamlining the activities and functions to accomplish seamless operations.

At this level of accomplishment the measurement consists of campus compliance with new policies and procedures; student outcomes in relation to improved transfer, retention and graduation; increased development of articulated and transferable courses; and improving the learner outcomes particularly among the underserved student population. The Board of Trustees for MnSCU has adopted a strategic plan with targeted goals for the system and the individual campuses that will be displayed and evaluated within a public scorecard model.

A Call to Action

Higher education faces unprecedented challenges as it works to respond to a rapidly changing world. These challenges require fundamental and transformative structural change throughout our institutions. These challenges require new models of leadership and new models of operation and responsiveness. We issue this call to action:

1. Institutions must develop operating models that draw on the strengths of both the traditional public environment and the market-based environment.
2. Patterns of institutional change need to move from routine or even strategic to transformative.
3. Accountability measures must include leading indicators as a basis for outcomes.

For most higher education institutions, creating meaningful change is not easy. Other sectors of the economy have shifted towards market-based environments pushed by global competition and a rapidly growing need for access to useful knowledge. **This shift in thinking requires a new approach to skilled leadership and organizational mastery of change.** Strategic plans must be clear and specific enough that they can be implemented and visionary enough that it will matter if they are implemented.

The need today is for each institution to create and implement a “smart change” plan that captures the innovation and creative spirit which is foundational in the Knowledge Age. This will require the constant monitoring of performance against the plan, not only to build its own capacity to respond to changing demands, but also to prepare its own graduates for a world of rapid change across all sectors of society.

Higher education leaders need to understand the fundamentals of change management: routine change for supporting minor improvements to day-to-day operations; strategic change for targeted initiatives to improve quality, productivity and efficiency of larger systems and processes; and transformative change for spearheading initiatives to become a responsive, adaptive, entrepreneurial and flexible organization in a market-based environment where the most valuable assets are knowledge and the use of adaptive expertise.

The capacity to embrace transformative change requires more of leaders: more capacity to foster innovation, share leadership, truly engage with multiple stakeholders to better meet the increasingly diverse and life long learning needs, and share accountability. Technology also provides capacity for smarter tools for complex decision making, scenario development and forecasting, and improved accountability frameworks based on leading indicators. A decade

ago, Ashley and Morrison (1996) labeled these “anticipatory management tools for the 21st century:

Setting one’s future agenda can only be done with sophisticated intelligence techniques, new models, and practical accountabilities. To survive and prosper in the future, you will have to perfect your outside-in thinking skills by relating the information from a strategic intelligence system about developments in the external world to what is going on inside your organization. In this anticipatory management decision process model, a decision process is established. There are a number of tools that may be used to identify emerging issues and where they are in their life cycle: scanning and monitoring processes, challenging assumptions, conducting issue vulnerability audits, and scenarios. (Ashley and Morrison 1996, 2).

Boldly leading into an unknown future requires significant leadership skills and structural changes within the organization: transformation of programs, services, practices, and policies. These include enabling future-oriented, flexible response tools as well as developing enterprise-wide intelligence systems for decision making and accountability.

How can campus leaders take large complex campuses and move them beyond a reliance on routine change? The vast majority of current higher education organizations are vertically integrated; i.e., they are control based and hierarchical. Knowledge is compartmentalized by function, and information is often classified on a need-to-know basis. It is compounded by the need for consensus and often long deliberation on decisions. This kind of organization is mired in routine change.

The difference is about learning to cast off control as the guidance system of the organization and introducing learning instead. By utilizing the smart change framework in planning, higher education can determine ways to move beyond routine change and strategic change to transformative change. Smart change can provide the basis for the structural transformation that will be required for higher education to remain responsive, relevant, adaptive and competitive. At its core, smart change is about using learning as a core asset and a guidance system for institutional change.

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