Collaboration: A Spark for Innovation

Collaboration can increase knowledge, accelerate learning, and spur innovation. Collaboration allows us to integrate diverse talents and experiences while avoiding duplication. Information technology provides a powerful architecture for collaboration and participation, giving IT leaders a unique collaborative role: they can bring together people, ideas, and technologies—sparking innovation.

But though technology can make a difference, its impact is limited without new models. In their article in this issue of *EDUCAUSE Review*, Robert Sheets and Stephen Crawford argue that technology cannot realize its full potential until it is harnessed by disruptive business models and the value networks that support them. These innovative and collaborative business models can result in more open, more unbundled operations in learning and credentialing, research and development, and business management.

Not all change is external. As Randy Bass notes in his article “Disrupting Ourselves,” the academy is itself a source of disruption. Bass observes that our understanding of learning has outstripped our traditional structures for teaching, leading to innovations and the “post-course era.” He writes: “One key source of disruption in higher education is coming not from the outside but from our own practices, from the growing body of experiential modes of learning, moving from margin to center, and proving to be critical and powerful in the overall quality and meaning of the undergraduate experience.”

We can also “disrupt ourselves” by working together more—by collaborating. We can have more impact collectively than individually, whether through knowledge building, infrastructure development, or service provision. When we face challenges in higher education, perhaps our first question should be: “What do we have in common?” If higher education—as a community with common challenges—truly values collaboration, our mantra today should be: *You don’t have to go it alone.*

You don’t have to go it alone because we know a lot about best practices. We know a lot about what works for some institutions but not others. Not-invented-here shouldn’t stop us. You don’t have to go it alone because across higher education there are many potential collaborators and partners. As Charles Henry and Brad Wheeler advocate in their Viewpoints column: “We must seek intentional interdependence as the default path.” We can no longer focus on isolated, local projects. We should promote large-scale efforts and strong coalitions that bring together institutions to share resources and interests in order to develop open, modular, distributed systems.

Our collaborators need not be only in higher education. In “Connecting Two Worlds,” Elliott Masie reminds us that in addition to the 15 million full-time students in the United States, there are more than 139 million employee-learners who are continuing their education through corporate education, training, and development. With higher education and corporate learners having much in common, “collaboration offers an incredible opportunity for both learning worlds.”
There is a lot we can do together:

- We can share best practices—and practices that don't work.
- We can share data, link data, and identify patterns that can make higher education more effective and efficient.
- We can develop shared infrastructures, expanding our capabilities.
- We can explore new models that are open, multisided, unbundled, and facilitated.

Imagine what we can accomplish if collaboration is the norm. You don't have to go it alone.

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