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Embedded Creativity: Building a Culture of Innovation

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These are challenging times for smaller, private, independent institutions of higher education across the United States. This white paper is intended to share lessons gleaned from the innovative efforts of the University of Charleston over almost 30 years. The lessons come from both successes and failures. The paper is not an attempt to boast and certainly not an attempt to claim perfection for the University of Charleston. Neither is it a claim that the university's innovations are unique or that everything is perfect in Charleston, West Virginia. However, the university is in a very different place now than it was, and the writer's hope is that knowing what happened at a colleague institution may help another college or university move forward more quickly.

While confronting the headwinds of today's higher education environment, many small, private colleges and universities are held back by their own culture and history. Each institution, nevertheless, has the option to change its condition, its actions, and its operational course.

WHY DID THE UNIVERSITY OF CHARLESTON INNOVATE?

The University of Charleston is an innovating institution. The board, donors, faculty, staff, and students all have played significant roles in creating a university that pursues visions, embraces change, and creates new structures, processes, and programs. The difficult and vital triumph of the University of Charleston is that the faculty and staff changed their culture. Changing the culture is the biggest hurdle for any institution seeking to adjust, grow, and innovate.

Thirty years ago, the university was not an innovating institution. Full-time student enrollment had declined by 65 percent. The university had endured 15 years of annual operating deficits and had an audit with an “ongoing concern” statement. There was a \$5 million balloon loan that came due every six months in addition to other long-term debt. There was significant deferred maintenance and the athletic director held fundraisers to buy baseballs. Employees ran to the bank to cash payroll checks before the funds ran out and the comptroller told the president one afternoon that the university would not meet payroll the next day. Morale was low, departments competed against one another for resources, department heads refused to share information with others for fear that it would be used against them, and some faculty members encouraged students to go elsewhere. The university received only short-term reaccreditation with a focused visit and interim reports. The visiting committee noted that the institution did not have clarity or agreement on its mission. The board had a special meeting to decide whether to close the university and voted against doing so.

This is the university that chose to change — and to be innovative. It is tempting for an institution under stress to hunker down and try to save itself by just doing a better job of what it has already been doing. That’s not the best path out of a rut.

WHERE IS THE UNIVERSITY TODAY?

By daring to innovate, the university moved itself forward. Full-time enrollment has tripled since its low point and headcount enrollment has increased 150 percent over the past 10 years. The “ongoing concern” statement was eliminated from the audit 26 years ago and 26 of 27 operating budgets have been in the black. There are nine new buildings; a dozen new programs, including a School of Pharmacy and other graduate offerings; 10 additional intercollegiate sports; new football and softball fields; two off-campus locations; and online programs at the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral levels. The university has been called a national model for integrative learning and for best practices for the first-year college experience. Other than a construction loan covered by pledge payments, there is no short-term debt, and the university has received continuing accreditation for 10 years without qualification.

PREREQUISITE TO INNOVATION: MISSION

Without a clear sense of mission and focus, it is impossible to have creative and potentially risky collective action. The University of Charleston once lacked that shared sense of mission. Some academic programs were focused solely on traditional liberal arts instruction while others were concerned with preparing students for specific careers. Some programs were structured around 18–22-year-old residential students while others were geared toward evening school adult students. When the president asked faculty to take a straw poll on which of several mission concepts were preferred, they refused to participate.

A collaborative faculty-administrative process was used to replace multiple mission statements with a new one. The faculty adopted a statement that went to the board of trustees for its approval, but the board members rejected it because they found it too complex and unclear. Faculty members who had previously criticized board members for a lack of engagement now were surprised by their engagement. The result of the reconsideration, however, was a one-sentence mission statement that most faculty, administrators, and students can now recite: “The mission of the University of Charleston is to educate each student for a life of productive work, enlightened living, and community involvement.” When faculty and administrators started using the mission statement to justify budget requests, it was clear that there was a shared sense of purpose.

Key Takeaway: Moving an institution forward is impossible when people are pulling it in different directions. Having agreement on mission and purpose rooted in shared values is essential. Achieving consensus requires mutual candor, active listening, the rejection of some alternatives, and the recognition that the lowest common denominator is not a basis for inspiring vision and positive movement.

COLLABORATIVE INNOVATION: EIGHT-COLLEGE CONSORTIUM

The Independent College Enterprise (ICE) comprises eight colleges in four states: Alderson–Broaddus College, Bethany College, Davis & Elkins College, Emory & Henry College, Tusculum College, University of Charleston, William Peace University, and West Virginia Wesleyan College. Two additional schools are ready to join. ICE is a 501(c)(3) entity that provides the computing hardware and software for the member institutions.

Four presidential colleagues and friends held the first conversations to initiate ICE in 1997. Computing hardware and software were changing. The schools were spending significant sums on technology, yet students and staff wanted more products and services than the institutions could afford or manage. The University of Charleston had two generalists trying to run its basic business software package, and the school was at least two upgrades behind because of limited staff and a proclivity for customization. (More information about ICE can be found in “Can Colleges Really Collaborate?”, *Trusteeship*, May/June 2008, pp. 22–26.)

The four presidents sought and received funding from three foundations and hired a national consulting firm to lead the planning. Additional administrators from each school were brought into the process. The vendors and the director were selected. Only then did three of the presidents say they could not go forward because the costs were too high. Three weeks before the expirations of the vendors’ contract offers, a fifth president decided to join the consortium and to make it fiscally feasible. Since then, three additional schools have joined ICE. A fourth college joined and then left the consortium.

There are some, but not many, truly collaborative efforts among colleges and universities. ICE is indeed one — and a very successful one. Instead of eight computer centers, there is one. Instead of buying eight sets of computer servers, there is one. Some 120 software systems are hosted. Instead of eight sets of those systems, which individual schools would not be able to afford, there is one. Instead of 24 or perhaps 30 employees, there are eight, and they are specialists, rather than generalists, on the systems they run. Each school saved \$1 million in startup costs and collectively the schools are saving \$3–4 million annually. Additional benefits come from eliminating customization of software and from the synergy of collaborating with other people and schools.

Key Takeaway: ICE is successful while other efforts to replicate it have failed. Collaborative innovations are not successful simply because the participants will save money and increase efficiency. They are successful because presidents drive them, trust one another, and create a process that combines external direction and funding with the steady expansion of internal involvement and ownership. Presidential leadership is the key. One college stayed in ICE because the president fired his IT director who wanted to run his own operation. Another college stayed out of ICE solely because the president let the IT director have his own way.

CONCERTED INNOVATION: CURRICULAR CHANGE

Twenty years ago, a planning group at the University of Charleston adopted the assumption that the university could not continue what it was doing and be successful. Hence, the question they posed was: What must the university change today to be successful 10 years from now? How could the University of Charleston differentiate itself from many of its academic competitors? One possible answer was to become an outcomes-based learning and assessment institution.

In a truly concerted process, that alternative answer was shared with many constituencies. It was debated by faculty members and deliberated by administrators. After several months of nurture, the faculty recommended the shift in direction to the board, which was not convinced the decision was correct. The board established a year-long study of the question while the administration and faculty continued to lay the groundwork for it in case the final decision was to approve the plan. Two major activities brought the community together and generated the enthusiasm and momentum that resulted in a strong positive board endorsement. First, there was a faculty-only retreat that generated the “ah-ha” moment late one night when those present perceived how they could effectively implement an outcomes-focused curriculum. Second, national experts on curriculum and assessment were brought to campus to work with faculty members and others. They brought insight and credibility to the process and to the proposal.

In one faculty vote, without any debate, all the general education requirements were replaced with six categories of specific learning outcomes that had to be embedded in the offerings of every academic department. Departments have to satisfy the six oversight committees that students are successfully demonstrating the required liberal learning skills and knowledge in citizenship, communication, creativity, critical thinking, ethical practice, and inquiry. In implementing the new outcomes, the provost at one point required each syllabus to be articulated in an outcomes-based format before paychecks would be issued.

Early on, the university set up an assessment process based on well-defined rubrics. The structure for competency-based awarding of credit was in place, but the university missed a leadership opportunity by holding back on using this structure to assess the learning of new and transfer students.

Key Takeaway: Significant curricular change requires an open and inclusive process. Administrative leadership, external funding, and knowledgeable consultants are helpful and perhaps essential, but a process that is perceived to be receptive to criticism and change also is necessary. Early adopters need to be supported and trusted. Comments and suggestions should all be heard, helpful ones should be incorporated, and attempts to derail the change should be discredited. The goal is movement through involvement, not paralysis by analysis.

Reactive Innovation: School of Pharmacy

The university realized it was too dependent on traditional-age undergraduate students at a time when there was a continuing decline in high school graduates in the state. A planning committee was formed to focus on the possibility of starting a major graduate school. A study of possible options narrowed to two considerations: a law school and a pharmacy school.

A strong argument was made for the university to react positively to the need for both schools. There is no law school in the state's capital city where most of the state's lawyers live and practice. There was no pharmacy school serving the southern part of the state, which has some of the highest rates of chronic disease in the United States and where rural pharmacies were open for limited hours because of the lack of pharmacists. Data were collected and analyzed. Visits were made to law schools and pharmacy schools. There were internal and external conversations about the choice and conversations with competitor institutions. The university conducted individual and group meetings with donors to seek their counsel and interest. The decision was made to open a School of Pharmacy. The school met the needs of the state and fulfilled an interest of a distinguished alumnus and United States senator, the Honorable Robert C. Byrd.

There were candid conversations about the impact of the new school on the university's culture. The undergraduate science program would need strengthening, disproportionate attention would be given to the new school, salary structures and faculty policies would be different, and there would be an added graduate population on the campus.

It was the right innovation at the right time. There were countless applicants and filled classes. Graduates got jobs and signing bonuses. The challenge was to hire qualified faculty members. Then, a large nearby public institution decided to start its own pharmacy school. The excessive number of new schools in the United States eliminated the pharmacist shortage. There were no signing bonuses or filled classes. The School of Pharmacy continues as a wonderful asset, but one that has to be managed wisely.

Key Takeaway: The inclusion and cultivation of donors is critical to innovations that will change a university. Potential donors, both within and outside of the board, need to be included in the visioning process. Their comments should be clearly heard and carefully incorporated. They will be on board with the project before the idea is formed. Donors articulate their interests and reflect the needs of the greater community, thus helping the school to find the magical match between its needs and the desires of its constituents.

Opportunistic Innovation: Teach-Out

In the spring of 2012, the University of Charleston completed a strategic planning process that determined the institution should expand its enrollment toward 2,500 students, add new academic programs, move into online education, gain economic efficiencies through the better use of technology, reduce per student operational costs, and focus on the recruitment of West Virginia students. Little did the university know how quickly those goals would be realized.

Mountain State University (MSU) was located in Beckley, West Virginia, less than one hour from the University of Charleston. MSU ran into difficulties with accreditors. The concerns had to do with operational effectiveness, not with finances. The state nursing board placed the nursing program on probation and then the institution was placed on "show cause" status by the Higher Learning Commission. The University of Charleston reached out to MSU offering assistance as it struggled to address accreditation issues. MSU was unresponsive because it believed it could successfully challenge the Higher Learning Commission. When the final loss of accreditation decision was announced, the University of Charleston agreed to "teach out" current MSU students. All board members knew of the conversations with MSU, and the Executive Committee followed them closely. Then, a special meeting was quickly arranged. All members, in person and on the phone, were fully informed of the alternatives and voted to move forward.

Over the course of about three months, the University of Charleston acquired permission from the Higher Learning Commission and subject-specific accrediting agencies to offer 10 new programs so they would continue to be available to students in southern West Virginia. The university hired 90 former MSU employees and added 550 new students to its rolls. At the end of the one-term “teach out,” the university graduated 416 former MSU students who would otherwise not have had a clear path to complete their degrees. The university acquired the equipment and educational materials to support its new programs, received permission to offer programs in two new locations, created an online presence that it did not have, and dramatically expanded its presence across West Virginia.

Initially, the University of Charleston did not want to replace the leadership programs that MSU had been offering. The university felt that the academic quality of those programs needed to be enhanced in addition to incorporating the institution’s liberal learning graduation requirements into the programs. Would a largely online, military audience be willing to adjust to such changes? The university chose to test the waters with a redesigned curriculum offering programs at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels. That trial was successful, and the university now has 1,000 students in leadership programs with the forecast of significant increases. It is a privilege for the university to assist military personnel who serve their country, including more than 550 Navy Seals who have graduated or are currently taking courses.

Key Takeaway: When opportunity knocks, jump quickly and study thoroughly. Presidents and board leaders should always be scanning the horizon for possible changes. Opportunity plans and contingency plans should be identified so the institution is ready to move more quickly than competitors and more thoughtfully than those just beginning to consider their options. University of Charleston leaders had developed their thoughts and made connections with MSU officials months before MSU lost its accreditation. The University of Charleston turned down another significant opportunity because it wanted to keep open the option of assisting MSU and its students.

Structural Innovation: Board of Trustees

In the middle of a board of trustees meeting, the president was surprised by the announcement that he was being given a new, longer-term contract. His response was, “I appreciate the offer, but I cannot accept it at this time because I am not satisfied with the level of board engagement.” That unrehearsed response, led to the first of a series of innovations to increase the engagement and effectiveness of the board.

First, the board decided to add a fourth meeting — an off-campus, overnight retreat — to its annual calendar. Board members would pay for the additional meeting. The board also decided to add targeted educational sessions to each board meeting.

Second, the board decided that if it was to exercise its oversight responsibilities as effectively as possible, changing the committee structure would be helpful. When the committee structure mimics the division of duties among vice presidents, the board is inclined to see itself as monitoring the work of vice presidents rather than overseeing the university’s fulfillment of its mission.

The board moved to focus on four standing committees. The Quality Committee oversees the quality of the entire student experience from day of admission to graduation. How well is the university serving its students? Are students learning what they need to know to be successful? How effectively are faculty teaching?

The Vitality Committee accepts responsibility for the viability and health of the institution. It is concerned with how the university is doing on admissions and retention, because enrollment is the biggest driver of revenues. Are contingency and depreciation budgets adequate? Is financial aid being allotted properly? Is the university recruiting the right students?

The Outreach Committee focuses on the relationship between the university and its external constituencies. What is the quality of relationships with the external community? Are alumni engaged and giving? Is the university's brand being properly promoted?

The Governance Committee oversees the running of the university. Are board members fulfilling their responsibilities? What talents are needed from new board members? Is the president fulfilling his or her duties? How satisfied are faculty and staff with their work and their environment?

Third, the university uses questions to focus the attention of board members. The board agendas have questions to help members know what they should be looking for in a report or presentation — for example, are there any findings in the audit that cause you concern? As reflected in the description of board committees above, each committee has a series of questions to guide its work between the extremes of monitoring and micromanaging. Some questions persist from year to year while others focus on short-term issues.

Fourth, the board of trustees has taken note of the increasing responsibilities and expectations that are being placed on all boards. Following a more corporate model, the board has reduced its size by one-half and increased its meetings by one-half. The board now comprises 18 to 20 individuals who meet six times a year. Board members can no longer think that if they are not there or are not prepared, someone else will take care of it. Each board member's engagement through presence and voice is critical.

To compensate for the reduced size of the board of trustees and to assure a larger group of institutional supporters, the university has created a board of advocates. Members will provide counsel and feedback to the administration through two annual meetings and will provide a link to all the advisory boards across the institution.

Key Takeaway: To have the wisdom, agility, and capacity for innovation, boards and presidents need to trust one another and work together closely. Yes, boards need to provide input and feedback to their presidents. It is also critical that presidents have the opportunity and the self-confidence to lead the board in reflecting on its performance, structure, and composition. The president has information and perspectives that must assist the board in fulfilling its duties for oversight and decision making in leading the institution to excellence.

Visionary Innovation: Innovation Center

The university had thought that outcomes-focused learning might become the differentiation between the University of Charleston and many of its competitors. That did not happen. The search for some value-added competitive edge led to talk about entrepreneurship and its related concepts. Testing the alternative concepts led to the selection of "innovation" as the focal point.

The president talked about innovation for a couple of years, but there were no funds to propel the initiative forward. Then two foundations inquired about ways in which they might help the university. They took the lead and many individuals followed in creating the Russell and Martha Wehrle Innovation Center. The \$20 million project included the facility that houses a MakerLab, 3D printers, a 3x3 video wall, and a littleBits transistor laboratory. The center hosts classes, sponsors competitions, and serves as a resource for every

student and faculty member. Each academic department is embedding the skills and knowledge in its curriculum. There is an annual I-3 event that features presentations by students and faculty on their creative ideas, inventions, and innovations. Last year, more than 200 students presented, and the rooms were filled with other students eager to hear the reports. Community judges evaluated the presenters for monetary prizes. It was a genuine celebration of learning. This year, 172 students wrote 128 business plans for a statewide competition, the largest number ever submitted by any college or university.

The university is seeking to brand itself as an “innovation destination.” It is not enough to teach students about the world that was or even the world as we know it today. To be sufficiently educated, students must know how to create the world of tomorrow.

Key Takeaway: When an institutional innovation is a significant and vital change, it should consume the university. It should command the attention of faculty and administrators. It should shape budgets and marketing. A leader and other champions in the institution, on the board, among the alumni, and in the community need to support it. The innovation might even become an institutional brand that brings distinction to the university.

Curricular Collaboration: Mathematics

Several schools came together to talk about ways to collaborate on course delivery. The university obtained grant funding and brought in a consultant to meet with schools individually and then hold a group meeting to facilitate the development of a plan complete with implementation steps. Five colleges followed through with a commitment to have a shared basic mathematics course. An instructor was hired to teach the course online, but students from only three schools were enrolled.

What could be simpler than sharing a pre-algebra course for entering students? One mathematics department said the sequence of topics in the collaborative course was different from its sequence. A faculty member at one college told students how terrible the course would be and another school decided early in the term it had to have an in-seat class instead of a hybrid.

The course was offered over two terms and 170 students successfully completed it. However, the collaboration was discontinued after one year because of inadequate interest and support.

Key Takeaway: Collaboration on the delivery of learning is extremely difficult. It requires cooperation on the core of the institution’s mission. Presidential and vice presidential leadership is fundamental, but it also requires more than faculty involvement. It requires faculty ownership. It requires genuine collaborative decision making by individuals who may be accustomed to deciding on their own what and how they teach. Today’s pressures, ranging from student expectations to competitive pricing to governmental oversight, are narrowing the latitude of independence and turf protection that faculty members have enjoyed.

Administration Collaboration: Human Resources

The university acquired a three-year grant to support the sharing of a human resources director among participating schools. Two other colleges decided to participate. None of the three schools had professionally trained human resource officers. They hired a very accomplished director and an office assistant who performed the wide range of human resource functions for each of the three campuses. They rewrote the staff handbooks, completed a thorough redefinition and reclassification of staff positions, upgraded the skills of supervisors in employee evaluation and support, directed employee recruitment and termination processes, and assured that institutional behaviors and procedures fully conformed to state and national laws. The director was housed at the University of Charleston but spent much time providing on-site support to each institution.

Each year, the participating institutions had to increase their support for the collaboration. After two and a half years, two schools decided that they could no longer fund the director and office assistant and preferred to return to in-house services. The University of Charleston was unable to identify other partners, so the collaboration ended.

Key Takeaway: Institutions are understandably driven by self-interest. When collaborations are free, they are attractive. When collaborations require investments, they are suspect and easy to reject. To have a sustainable collaboration among institutions, it may be necessary to have an exit penalty to assure that institutions will give careful thought and deliberation before choosing to end a relationship on which others rely.

Innovation Pivoting: Tuition Pricing

What is the best strategy to find the ideal price point to maximize net tuition revenue and enrollment? In 2000, the university chose to freeze or fix tuition for its students. That is, the tuition that students paid when they entered the university was the tuition rate they would retain as long as they were full-time university students. The motivation was to attract students whose families were fearful of unexpected or extravagant tuition increases and to increase retention because the real cost of tuition vis-à-vis the cost of living would be decreasing each year.

After four years, the university ended the plan. Neither undergraduate recruitment nor retention had increased. To make fixed tuition work, the institution needs to have a higher initial price to offset the inability to raise tuition during the student's enrollment. This places the institution at a competitive disadvantage for recruiting new students. At the same time, the school is not able to pick up additional revenue by increasing the price each year.

For the 2011–2012 academic year, the university's board reduced tuition by 22 percent for entering students. The goal was to reduce sticker shock, keep college affordable, and make the price statement that a private college education is not out of reach for middle-class families. After the national economic recession from 2008 to 2011, the high-cost, high-aid strategy was thought to have outlived its usefulness.

The changes attracted more middle-class students and more high-need, low-ability students. Undergraduate enrollment and net student revenue both decreased slightly. The university lost new students to a competitor that was providing more financial aid and thus was perceived to value those students more. The university discovered that its audience tended to look first at financial aid and placed more value on the high-cost, high-discount strategy. So the university reversed course and raised both tuition and financial aid significantly for three years.

Each tuition change brought adjustments in the university's processes and messages. Each change brought some confusion and second-guessing. Although the university decided to stop its experiments with frozen tuition and lowered tuition, there is no evidence to show that the experiments or the reversals harmed the university.

Key Takeaway: Every college or university has its own audiences and best practices for tuition and financial aid. Very few schools have successfully frozen tuition while more colleges are experimenting with the lower tuition, lower financial aid model. Each institution needs to study its own situation and choose what path it believes will best serve its current student population and its desired or aspirational student body.

What additional innovations did the university undertake?

- Twenty construction projects, from moving the university's entrance to building residence halls, academic facilities, and athletic venues
- Adena Ventures, a program of assistance to startup companies to address the economic needs of the region
- A collaborative school in cooperation with the county Board of Education to meet the needs of talented yet underperforming students in grades 9-12
- An integrated Student Solutions Center to provide one-stop registrar, financial aid, and business office services to students
- The introduction of football after a 45-year absence to expand student recruitment, enrich the "student experience," and provide a beginning-of-the-year focal point
- A Colleague Scholarship Program to recruit engaged and serving students who would assure an active, service-oriented campus environment
- A broad first-year experience program incorporating peer educators, first-year seminars, residential communities, and an honors college
- An American history professor from another campus utilized for a hybrid learning experience
- An Institute for Government Studies to provide a link to state government (the Capitol is directly across the river), including an orientation program for new legislators
- A restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum so most students can either graduate or move on to graduate school in three years or less
- A weekend associate degree in nursing program to serve working adults
- A startup of men's volleyball with membership in a league with Princeton, Harvard, Penn State, and four other universities
- The addition of 10 new sports and doubling the number of student athletes

What has the University of Charleston learned about innovation?

In addition to the key takeaways noted above, here are some lessons the University of Charleston has learned from its experiences with innovation:

1. **Be willing to inflict pain.** There is a natural desire to want to please people and to seek the relatively easy middle road. Sometimes the answer “no,” rather than the middle road, is the proper path. One president told his board that he could not accept a new contract without changes in the board’s behavior. Another president fired a good IT director because he did not support a team decision. At one point, the University of Charleston stopped taking MBA students and at another delayed beginning leadership programs until changes were made in the programs. These actions hurt individuals and generated pushback from groups, yet they led to significant changes for their institutions.

2. **Be willing to pivot.** If something isn’t working, change it. This is particularly important for long-term presidents who, if they want to continue to serve, have to be willing to stop programs that they started. They can either declare victory and say the program has served its purpose or admit failure and reduce the losses. It’s a lesson all institutions can learn. The University of Charleston twice reversed its course on tuition decisions and closed a student-focused program named after its president because it had fulfilled its purpose. If colleges are not making mistakes, they are not innovating enough.

3. **Be willing to risk a little more than you think reasonable.** Caution and self-protection are written into the human DNA. Overcoming that caution is necessary to lead real change. If a college is going to innovate, it may as well innovate on a major project that will produce significant change. Time and energy is often wasted on small, incremental changes. The University of Charleston faculty voted in one meeting to replace the institution’s entire general education program with a new concept. How often have faculties labored for months about how many credits to give for laboratory courses or the definition of independent study? When Mountain State University failed, the University of Charleston chose to start 10 new programs and hire 90 people rather than simply “teach out” one major.

4. **Be willing to collaborate.** Presidents and boards of many private colleges and universities are so consumed with the month-to-month work of staying healthy that they do not have time to reach out and collaborate with other institutions. Current consortia and other collective organizations are challenged to attract the time and attention of college leaders to maintain or grow their cooperative work. Yet the times of stress for institutions call out for ways of conserving resources and expanding services that can be provided through collaboration. The Independent College Enterprise (ICE) is an ideal success model that has been difficult to expand and little replicated. There is indeed strength in partnerships, and colleges can be stronger together than alone.

5. **Be willing to champion and promote teamwork.** Moving an institution from lethargy to action, from tradition to innovation, requires a change of culture. It requires that almost everyone be open to supporting the new and different because just a few naysayers or opponents can stop innovation before it is begun. All constituencies need to accept a little risk, give new ideas a little time, and not stand in the way. The institution needs to celebrate the innovators and champions of change even when something they attempt may not succeed.

What Is Innovation?

Innovation is “embedded creativity.” “Innovation” and “creativity” are often used interchangeably, but they are distinctly different concepts. Creativity is developing a new idea, method, or product. Innovation is embedding that new idea or thought, that new method or process, or that new product or item into the current environment. The environment may be static or dynamic. The “new” idea, method, or product must overcome the inertia of perpetuating what has been — and is. The successful embedding of a creative idea, method, or product can change the institution — and the world.

In *The Innovator's DNA*, Jeffrey Dyer, Hal B. Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen articulate that the spark of creativity can come from: (1) asking questions — why do we do it the way we do?; (2) observation — how many students are taking online courses?; (3) associative thinking — what does the decline of facility-based businesses say about the future of higher education?; (4) networking — what can we learn from hospital boards about assessing and improving quality?; and (5) experimentation — which tweaks to retention strategies are making a difference?

Most higher education institutions are gigantic balls of inertia — slowly rocking in place, fueled by historic policies and practices — with occasional thoughts of change. As one academic department proclaimed, “We are going to keep doing what we have been doing, and our work cannot be evaluated for 15 to 20 years when we see how our graduates do.” That department was not about to collect the data necessary to make that judgment 15 or 20 years later. Juxtapose that still-present attitude with these facts: Most of the students who come to many academic departments to earn a degree do not get it. The department fails most of the time. How long will departments be allowed to do so? How long will the unsatisfying, failing status quo be tolerated?

The world around us is changing rapidly. Institutions that are changing less quickly than their environments and constituencies will fall behind and may fail. Innovation is indeed an answer.

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