Fostering Innovative Change in the Community College System

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Why Innovate?

Community colleges face more competition now than ever before. Online bootcamps and for-profit schools are providing students with innovative curriculum and pathways into high-skilled, high-wage jobs.

To remain relevant and desirable, community colleges need to foster a culture of innovation in their own system, so that they can offer new programs and curriculum that will ensure student success in a rapidly changing marketplace.

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Advice from Thought-leaders

BrandIQ interviewed top administrators and professors who are 'thought-leaders' on innovation at their universities. All have had experience leading and participating in significant innovative change within their institutions.

They shared best practices, strategies, and tools they believe are fundamental to fostering innovative change. They also shared the road-blocks, and failures they've encountered, so that we can learn from their experiences.

Setting the Stage for Innovation

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Who are we serving?

Ultimately, we are concerned with 'student success,' with a large focus on underserved working adults and young people, and how can we teach our students the skills that will get them hired into high-skilled, high-wage jobs, and ready to cope with a changing economy.

Therefore, innovation and change should always take students into consideration. Since we are serving the students, we must listen to the students, and co-create solutions with them.

Furthermore, when we talk about *why* we want to make changes, student success should drive that conversation. Innovation shouldn't be for the sole benefit of the administration and/or faculty, but for the main stakeholders themselves: the students.

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How should we talk about innovation?

Innovation can be a scary word to some entities on campus. **Reframing how you present innovative projects can help it gain better traction.**

Using language that presents change as **experimental and pivoting**, rather than revolutionary reorganization, can mitigate the stress that conversations about change can produce.

Furthermore, supporting the argument for change with **data and facts** will give the cause more **credibility and legitimacy**.

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Organizational Structure of Innovation

Innovative change in educational institutions are situational and vary considerably in how they are executed.

However, the major theme across all the people we spoke to is that their successful student outcomes have always been driven *by 'administrators and faculty working collaboratively together'*.

Administration has a lot of **resources, connections, and time** to spur innovative change on campus, but they **need buy-in, and active participation and accountability by faculty** to be successful. Innovation is at its best when administrators identify and acknowledge existing strengths, skills and abilities within the faculty organization and build on them, rather than negate them.

Although there are examples of **faculty led change**, time, resource restrictions and accountability can be *major barriers*. The most successful instances of faculty led change has incorporated a diverse team, including administrators and students.
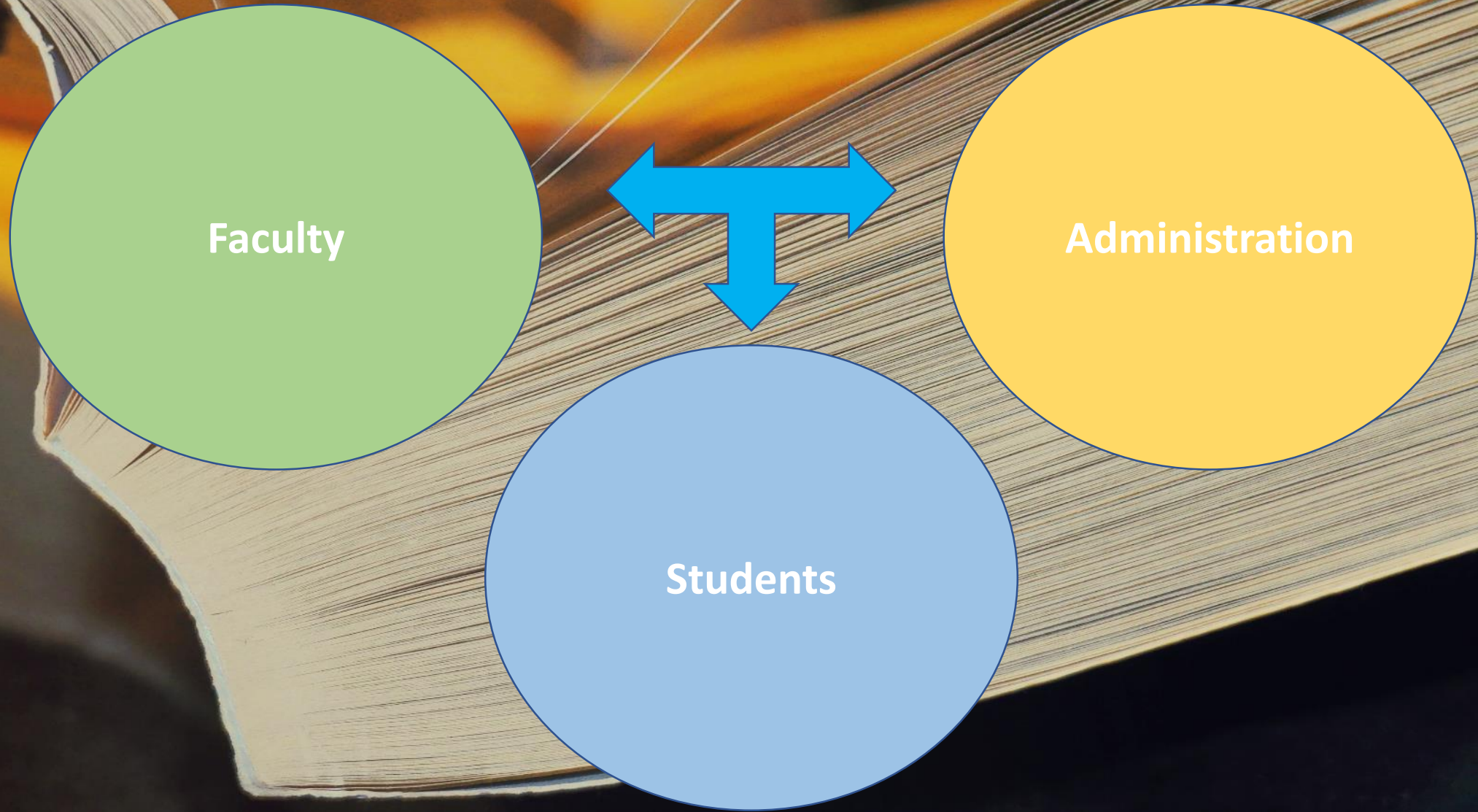
Bottom-up led innovation from students can be witnessed at major institutions across the nation. Their **passion** and ability to unite other students together can gain a lot of attention to their cause, and inspire faculty, administrators, and other stakeholder groups to take them seriously.

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Organizational Structure of Innovation

Mostly driven by 'shared governance'
The sharing in "shared governance" isn't equally distributed, nor does it imply decision-making authority. That authority is held by the leadership, the ones who are accountable for both results and shortcomings.

Faculty

Administration

Students

Faculty's Role

Faculty play an integral role during the innovation process. Without faculty buy-in, participation and enthusiasm, it is very difficult to integrate any changes into the system.

- They deliver the 'product'

- They have **direct contact with the student body**; therefore, they know what is working, what is not, and what must be improved to ensure student success

- They can **inspire students to contribute to the innovation process.** This not only distributes the workload off of the faculty's shoulders, but it can help garner support and funding from the administration and community

They Need: More time, more resources, more accountability

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Administration's Role

Administrators can play a very important role in facilitating innovative change in the community college system.

- They have access to **resources** that can fund projects and innovative changes

- They have **connections** across campus that can build a team of innovators to take on such projects

- They can reach out to industry, faculty, non-profits, stakeholder groups and other universities to help **create pathways** to jobs, and continued education for life-long learning

They Need: Faculty buy-in, Accountability, Commitment from President's and financial support

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Student's Role

Historically, students have not always been part of institutional and/or curricular change, *but they should be*. We have learned that they can be the main influencers for helping a project get funding, buy-in and broader student support

- **Bottom-up change** is happening at campuses across the nation, where students are inspired to take part in constructing and improving their own educational experiences

- **Student passion** for institutional or curricular change can garner a lot of attention from administrators and the local community, helping a project get funding and support from diverse entities

- Student led change can bring **more engaging programs and curriculum** to the campus, which in turn, could increase enrollment significantly

They Need: Mentorship, resources, faculty and administration buy-in and coaching

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Guiding Principles

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How do we become innovative or 'experimental' in the community college system?

To produce successful change, one must:

- Create An External Entity
- Expand Horizons: construct a team of diverse innovators
- Campaign for Change: you must convince others that it is beneficial
- Faculty working with Administrators
- Administrators working with Faculty
- Working with Students
- Do the Hard Work
- Set Reasonable Goals
- Ensure Project Longevity
- Consider an Innovation Campus

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Create An External Entity

You only get one shot, so build a bridge for the gap existing between administrators and faculty, allowing for more streamlined collaboration for change

- Make the case for change, but don't try to change the system
- Pseudo startup company – "Skunkworks unit" Innovation Platform
- Runs outside hierarchy of the administration and faculty academic system
- It must be 'self-sustaining' in the long term – this can be donor driven
- Make it ok to be innovative to work with faculty, administrators, and students
- Build external/internal enabling organization that makes it ok to make changes
- Find a place that innovation could take hold
- Identify obstacles early on
- Shared Governance with cross functional team – early dialogue between admin and faculty
- Presidents need to provide the support to create better student success

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Expand Horizons

Most change in school systems is met with some resistance; therefore, it helps to have a diverse team of passionate people who are willing to do the work to make it happen.

"Getting the kind of people in charge that the faculty respect is absolutely essential."

DON'T WORK WITHIN A SILO, BRING DIVERSE DISCIPLINES AND DEPARTMENTS TOGETHER THAT DON'T NORMAL CO-EXIST

HAVE SOMEONE INFLUENTIAL ON YOUR TEAM THAT OTHERS RESPECT AND TRUST, WHO CAN COMMUNICATE THE NEED FOR CHANGE

ENLIST PASSIONATE PEOPLE THAT WANT TO BE PART OF THE PROCESS. GIVE THEM THE RESOURCES TO HELP MAKE THE PROJECT FLOURISH

INCLUDE STUDENTS! STUDENT SUPPORT CAN BRING POSITIVE ATTENTION TO THE PROPOSED CHANGE, HELPING IT GET FUNDING

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Campaign for Change

It is not always easy to sell the idea of change. Like a politician, one must work hard to get others on board.

Hold meetings with faculty, administrators, industry, students, and other stakeholders. Find the champions and early-adopters and let them run with it

Convince others that change is beneficial

Provide data and facts that show why change is necessary

Remain in contact with stakeholders throughout the process and celebrate the achievement of small improvement targets

Be transparent and communicative, even if things are not going well: run blogs, have open office hours, interact with student groups

Remain humble and authentic

Faculty Working with Administrators

Faculty might have amazing ideas for innovation, but they are usually lacking the resources and time to take on such projects. Administrators might have the resources, but they need faculty participation. Therefore, they must work together to bring about positive change.

- Lack of time is always an issue for faculty, that's why it's very important to create a team to distribute workload

- Because of faculty's close relationship with students, they can enlist students to help with their cause

- With faculty and students working together, the cause for change can gain attention, momentum, support, and funding

- Approaching administration with an argument for innovative change, with a team of diverse entities, including students, makes the argument more robust and immediate

- Having a plan for the project's longevity and self-sustainability is important. This shows that it will become an integral part of the institution and won't drain resources

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Administrators Working with Faculty

Faculty are often very resistant to top-down change because it usually means more work and less resources for them. To get faculty buy-in, administrators must collaborate with faculty and provide them with much needed resources.

- Administrators must engage collaboratively with faculty

- Prioritize Incentive Structure: offer financial support, teaching relief, and invest in their program, so faculty have the time and resources to participate in innovate projects

- Solve a problem the faculty knows is a problem

- Innovate something that benefits the faculty and students

- Be understanding of faculty time constraints and their financial situation

- Convene faculty with futurists, curriculum designers and industry, while educating them on trends

- Champion the faculty that take part in change and make them rock-stars
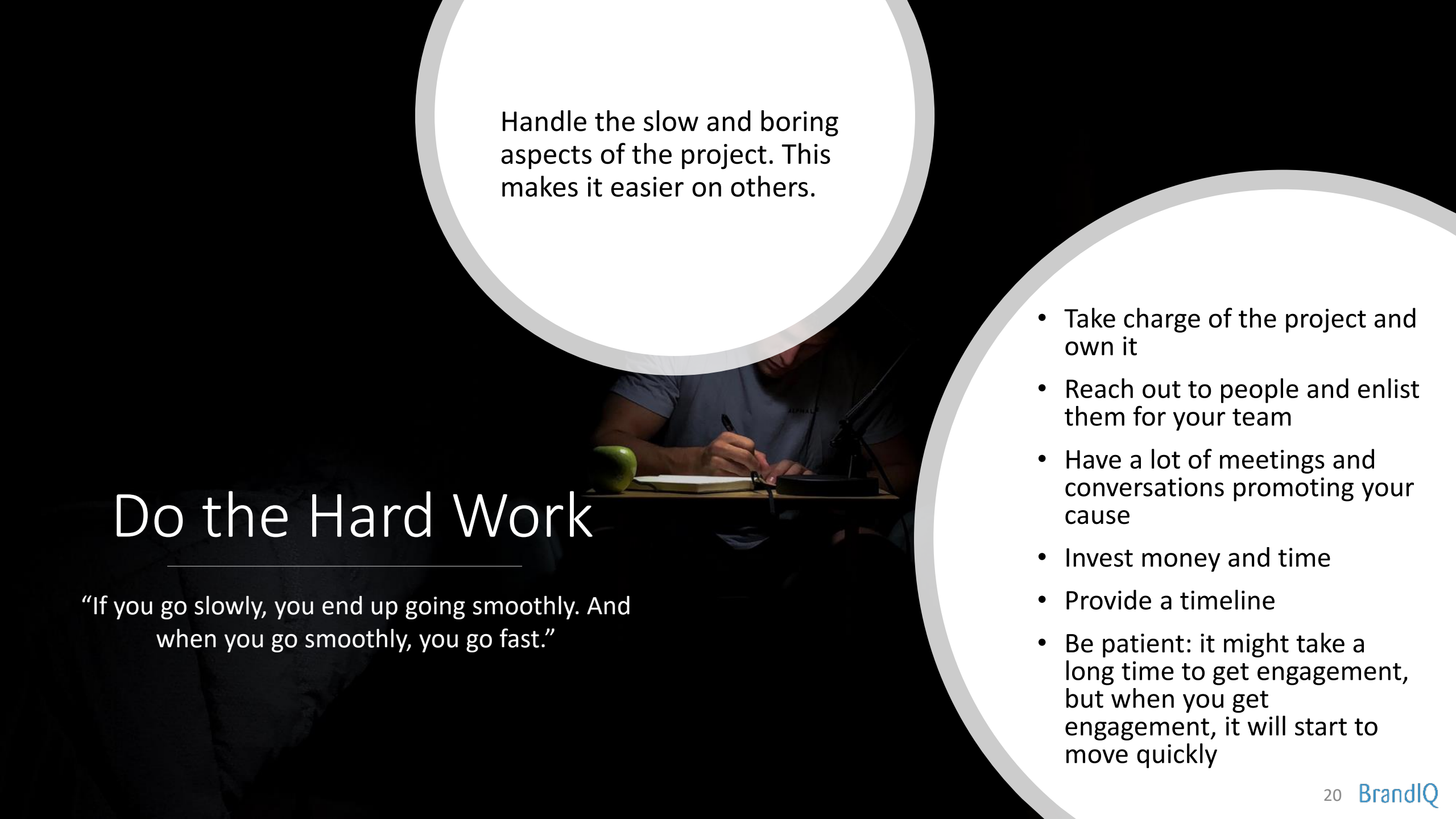
- Listen to their critiques

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Working with Students

Students can be integral partners in helping with innovative change. Their participation and passion in the learning environment can drive change and inspire others to come on board.

- Allow students to have influence over their learning environment

- Work with students to create engaging programs and curriculum that they want

- Understand student needs and their diverse goals to supplement ANY degree

- Give budgets to students leading innovative projects

- Create a community of mentorship, helping students reach their potential for acting on their own ideas

"The best way to get curriculum change is to get hundreds of students together who think it's a great idea."

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Handle the slow and boring aspects of the project. This makes it easier on others.

Do the Hard Work

"If you go slowly, you end up going smoothly. And when you go smoothly, you go fast."

- Take charge of the project and own it

- Reach out to people and enlist them for your team

- Have a lot of meetings and conversations promoting your cause

- Invest money and time

- Provide a timeline

- Be patient: it might take a long time to get engagement, but when you get engagement, it will start to move quickly

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Set Reasonable Goals

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- Don't try to change the system: find a place where innovation can take hold and thrive

- Be ok with small wins. Celebrate small improvements and make analysis and iteration part of the process.

- Shut down the project if it is not working

- Consider scaling down the project, so it can be tested out on a smaller scale

- You are never going to make everybody happy, so you have to concentrate on the people who are willing to work with you

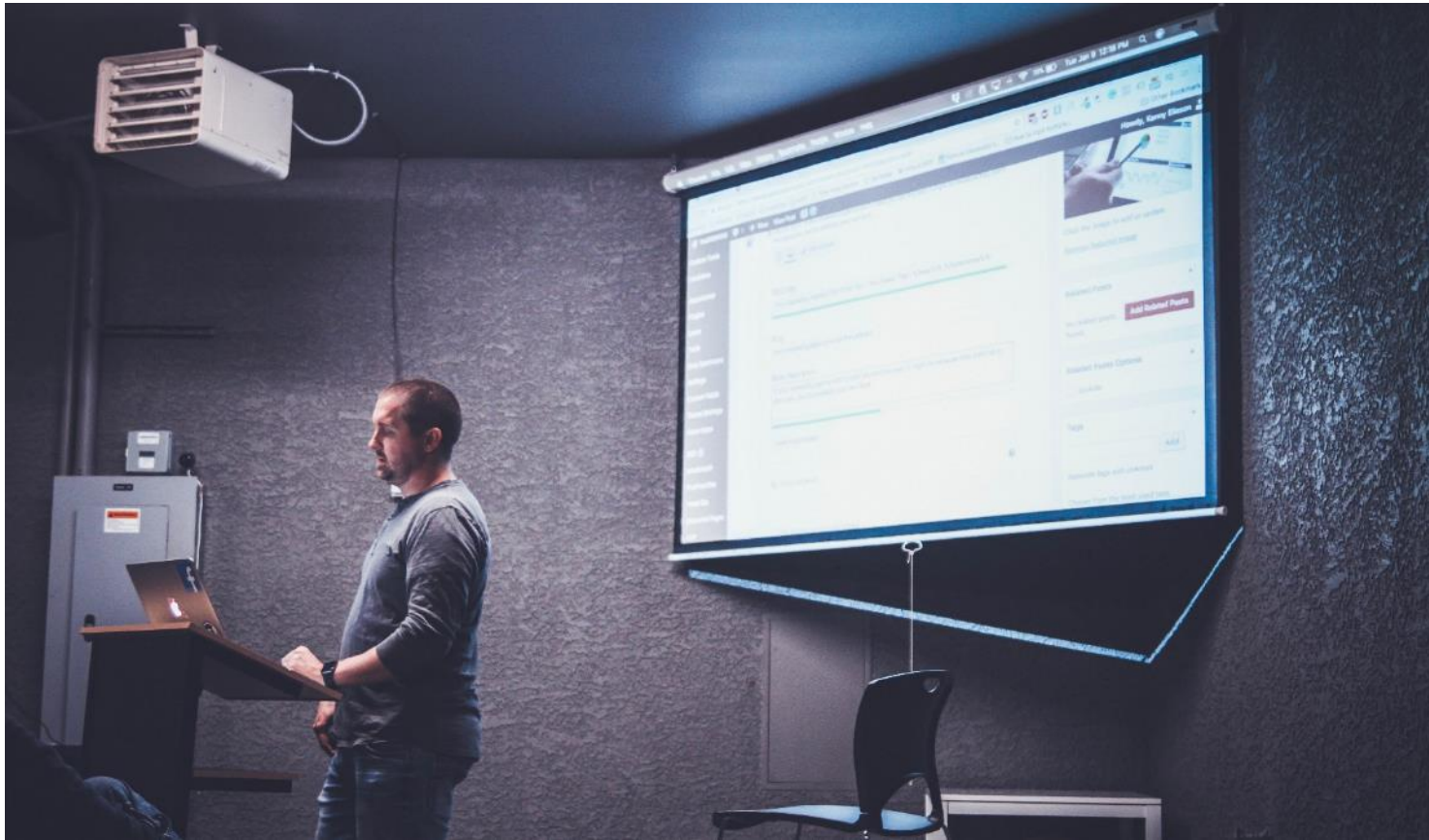BrandIQ

Funding the Project

Administrators have a lot of power over resource allocation for innovative change. Responsible distribution of funds is key.

- Administrators should invest in faculty and students that are leading innovative changes
- Administrators should provide resources to faculty members working on innovative projects and are being held accountable, providing teaching relief, which would help free their time to pursue innovative projects
- Innovators should design a project that has long term potential and is self-sustaining
- Positive attention for the project could garner more interest from the community and the institution, inspiring entities to donate resources

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Project Longevity

Once change takes place, efforts must be made to ensure its continued success

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- The project must be self-sustaining, without the need for continual resource aid

- Make it become part of the DNA of the institution, independent of its founders

- Build an infrastructure that supports the project: dedicated office and staff that manage it

- A big ramp up of people and funding might be needed to start the project, but resources can be scaled back once it is institutionalized

- Create a baseline so that you can measure success, results, and identify opportunities for improvement

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Consider an Innovation Campus

"The campus that's on death's door, that has no other choice but to change: that is literally the story of Southern New Hampshire University. They went to the community and said, if we don't pivot, we will plummet, and that gave them an innovation platform to come up with new ideas, and they did it beautifully."

- Turn one campus or building into the "innovation" campus, where exciting change is encouraged and supported

- This place can inspire others to make changes in their own institutions, and set guidelines on best practices

- Create one culture of innovation, which will attract others to follow

- Consider doing this at a school that is struggling. This institution can be an example of how positive change can produce successful outcomes

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Examples of Innovative Projects

- Create different course pathways for different career paths

- Work and Learn programs, where students gain real world experience while earning credits (Northeastern)

- Student-led courses (Berkeley)

- Emergency Aid for students experiencing sudden financial hardships (hospitalization, car repairs)

- optiMize (Michigan), which fosters a community of mentorship and sponsors student-led change

- Diversifying majors, which will offer a broad educational experience

- Short-term credentials

- Embedding credentials into degree programs

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Meet the Experts

From top-left to right:

Michael Rutter, Sr. Advisor for Communications (MIT)

Holly Zanville, Strategy Director for The Future of Learning and Work (Lumina Foundation)

Chris Mallet, Chief Operating Officer (Northeastern University)

Jeffrey Sorensen, Director of the LSA Social Innovation Program (University of Michigan)

Steven Mintz, Professor of History (University of Texas, Austin)

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