

An Entrepreneurial Shift in Workforce Development

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The changing economy is transforming the way individuals work and the expectations of the work being conducted. Given recent changes, both domestically and globally, it is vital for community colleges to recognize their potential in helping strengthen the economy.

Community colleges may just be in the best position to successfully meet the workforce development needs of the transforming labor market.

Instead of simply following orders, workers are now expected to identify problems quickly and establish viable solutions. Employers will continue to find ways to provide opportunities for professional development, but it is up to the workers themselves to take ownership of what they need to advance and where they can go to get it.

Community and technical colleges of today are experiencing tremendous challenges in implementing the necessary actions that are needed to respond to these extensive changes. Economic shifts, advancements in technological endeavors, and global demands have compelled community colleges to develop a more anticipatory structure that enables them to meet these changing demands.

What is clear, it can't be business as usual for the field of education. The implementation of an innovative, entrepreneurial, proven business model adapted for continuing education would help community colleges be proactive in meeting these training demands.

Why Continuing Education Administrators Need To Play a Role in Governance

When educational operational decisions have to be made, governance becomes a critical factor in the process. As non-credit curriculum demands continue to rise, it is necessary for continuing education administration to play an active role in governance.

The leadership of continuing education must exert influence by giving input that shapes a successful future for the college. The necessary shift can draw on available resources causing a movement in the same strategic direction in support of a new entrepreneurial model.

Tax dollars can provide a large portion of the operating budget for the division of continuing education, but there is also the possibility of sustaining continuing education services through alternative revenue sources.



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A capitalistic approach influences community colleges to become more focused on outcomes, more competent with available resources, and more intent on accountability of productivity. As a result, community colleges can become more reactive to the needs of the business sector and the unique demands of workforce development training.

Continuing Education Needs To Remain a Separate Unit

Given the uniqueness of the operations, continuing education should remain a separate, viable operational entity, allowing for integration with curriculum credit courses and programs when necessary. With the movement towards “stackable credentials” in workforce development training, the lines are blurring. Continuing education should not be treated as a special, auxiliary money-making enterprise, but as part of the college that can work in collaboration to better meet service needs. The customizability of workforce development training adds to the complex nature of continuing education. Therefore, it is vital to be able to adapt and respond to changing market forces if the unique services provided by continuing education are to be sustained.

How Community and Technical Colleges Can Lead Educational Change

Community and technical colleges may be best positioned to make a change in approach which leads all higher education institutions in the charge. Community colleges especially have the capacity, the community connections, and the willingness to change more easily for the sake of their students’ success. Recognizing that individuals have unique learning needs, colleges must build all learning experiences around a new established learning cycle. Their diverse student population has the capacity to learn, but community colleges must find the capacity to effectively educate this population.



Educators Need to Partner with Business

The college campus cannot be the only home of learning, and a classroom is not the only venue where learning can take place. The new entrepreneurial model should be driven by educational quality, assurance of application, and desired outcomes.

There has been some reluctance and resistance, by both business and education, to make a full commitment to the idea of partnering because perspectives are often not shared between those involved. A new entrepreneurial model can ignite a collaborative partnership between educational and communal leaders. Businesses and education must form alliances working together to create a new workforce identity in this competitive global economy.

Leadership Key to Transitioning an Operational Model

The choice of changing the current approach to education will ultimately depend on the college leaders.

Leadership becomes the key source of beliefs and values that move an organization to confront its internal and external problems. This type of change

leadership is not popular and certainly not easy. Educational leaders have an ethical responsibility to nurture the well-being of both the students and the institution.

The college president of the future must find a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice, exemplifying ethical leadership for the college and the community. The face of education and training will not continue to look the same as we move further into the 21st century.

Economic demands are forcing our society to transition right before our eyes. Community and technical colleges will need to find an operational model to meet the new requirements of the employers, the economy, and each employee being served.

College leadership should already be analyzing business models for implementation in order to keep up with the change that is already occurring. In effect, colleges should be considered educational enterprises determining their own direction. Colleges that have already adopted a business model measure will find the process liberating and their ability to service students and communities will improve dramatically.