Conveying the Value of Information Technology (IT):

Highlighting IT's Strategic Role in Institutional Success

A peer guide to IT governance

MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Executive Summary

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact's (MHEC) Technologies Community met in February 2023 to discuss issues they saw as most critical to their role at a midwestern higher education institution. One of those issues was "managing expectations" – a short way of acknowledging that the demands of information technology (IT) and technology are continuing to grow at a pace that is not sustainable.

As discussions continued, the phrasing changed from managing expectations to the "value proposition of IT." This shift was an acknowledgment that one of the first steps in managing expectations was to communicate the value of the work that IT does relative to an institution's core mission and values. The obvious next question was simple: What is that value?

Exploring the concept of value more deeply, the group began to ask, 'what is the value that chief financial officers (CFOs), provosts, staff, or students place on what we do.' From there, it became clear that the discussion was not about IT, but rather was about the services that IT provides and supports. While a subtle distinction, it is one that recognizes the importance of IT services and how they are at the core of every institution's strategy.

Patterns started to emerge as the team built out concepts more fully via cross-functional collaboration with IT leaders, technologists, administrators, community engagement through interactive sessions and surveys, broad participation across roles, institutions, demographics, as well as insights shaped by inclusive dialog and feedback. The patterns pointed to the following principles which IT leaders can use to add value to their services:

1. Communication, transparency, and relationship building

2. Understanding institutional values and culture

3. Thinking holistically

4. Adaptability, collaboration, and creativity

5. Understanding what you have and how things work (current state)

Join us as we share some of the stories told and some of the techniques that have worked for your peers. While every institution will and must have a unique story, we hope this paper will be a resource to help IT leaders shift or improve the narrative around IT and IT services regardless of their title or role. From there, IT leaders can help guide their institution into robust, thoughtful conversations around IT services – ultimately leading to the best strategic decisions for your institution.

> *"There are times in our lives when we have to realize our past is precisely what it is, and we cannot change it. But we can change the story we tell ourselves about it, and by doing that, we can change the future."*
>
> *- Eleanor Brown, The Weird Sisters*

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

A shorthand way of acknowledging that the demands on IT and technolgy are continuing to grow at a pace that is not sustainable.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF IT

Acknowledging that one of the first steps in managing expectations is to communicate the value of the work that IT does relative to an institution's core mission and values.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY'S (IT) STRATEGIC ROLE

Acknowledges context: how stakeholders such as CFOs, provosts, staff and students perceive value - through the services that IT provides and supports as well as how IT plays a strategic role at their institution.

The Role of IT: A brief history

HIGHER EDUCATION IT: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Past

» 1960s and 1970s: Mainframe Era

» 1980s: PC Revolution and the Early Internet

» 1990s: World Wide Web and Learning Management Systems

Present

» 2000s: Mobile computing, social media, and open education

» 2010s: Big Data and Cloud Computing

Future

» 2020s: Data Analytics, Generative AI, and Work/Life

» 2030s: New technologies emerge

Before diving into the principles, let us take a moment to reflect on the role of information technology (IT) in public higher education.

Information technology departments, in their infancy, were often modeled after an engineering or facilities department. Their job was to make the things people bought work – hook it up, turn it on, and be sure it was doing what it was supposed to do. At best, IT was an 'order taker.' Budgets contained a single line for 'technology'.

As the use of computers continued to evolve, the demand for support for these systems grew as well. The IT department took on the acquisition process from the identification of a need, the evaluation of options, the procurement of a solution, the implementation of that solution, and finally the ongoing management of the solution. Users became dependent on their technology functioning to be able to perform their tasks and began realizing the value of the data collected. We started integrating systems with each other to generate multilayer reports and analysis. IT department budgets became massive, holding the expenses associated with the integration of core institutional systems.

The COVID pandemic brought a flurry of technology change. Institutions realized that they were, in many ways, reliant upon their foundational technology to be able to achieve their mission, vision, and goals. Elements of the changes forced upon institutions became normalized, such as offering options for remote or hybrid learning.

The pace of change did not stop – it accelerated! Soon, IT departments realized that available resources were becoming insufficient for IT departments to continue supporting existing services and to meet new demands. IT leaders are sensing a fundamental shift in how IT departments will serve their institutions and are looking to turn crisis into opportunity by balancing institutional expectations, IT capabilities, and vendor solutions.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that IT leaders identify how they add VALUE to the technology services, and that they communicate and share these values with their institutional stakeholders. Yes, technology can help you consolidate and find efficiencies, but technology can also lift everything that an institution does, and IT leaders need to be able to describe what that means. That is what we hope the remainder of this paper provides – tools and resources to help with that lift.

Common Themes/Principles

The common themes, or principles, which were identified in our work are:

1. Communication, transparency, and relationship building

2. Understanding institutional values and culture

3. Thinking holistically about problems

4. Adaptability, collaboration, and creativity

5. Understanding what you have and how things work (current state)

To explore each of those principles in more depth, we are going to ask you to immerse yourself in four scenarios that are quite familiar to you. The four scenarios we are going to use throughout this paper are:

Scenario: The Vendor-Driven Solution

A vendor approached your president, demonstrating a product they claim will transform student success by exposing student data from multiple systems to identify students in need of intervention. The vice president for student success calls to let you know that the vendor will be offering an in-person, institution-wide demonstration next week, and that your attendance is 'optional.'

THE VENDOR DEMONSTRATION

» **The vendor has already 'sold' the product to leadership.**

» **It is being demoed prior to purchase.**

» **IT support 'won't be needed.'**

Scenario: The Annual Budget Cut

As happens every year, the institution has asked all departments to cut 5% from their budget – including IT. Your cost to maintain the current level of services will increase at least 12%.

COUNTING PENNIES

» **You will cut 5%.**

» **AND you'll do it by the end of next week.**

Scenario: The Administrative Challenge - Staffing

One of your two enterprise database administrators (DBAs) retired, creating a need to fill that position. The deputy vice president of administration denies the request citing that no new staff positions are going to be filled until the new vice president is named. The national search for the new vice president is just getting underway.

THE MISSING DBA

» One of your two DBAs has quit.
» Your boss says you can't hire anyone new.
» For probably six months.

_____'s COFFEE MUG

Scenario: The Student Experience

The institution is hearing many complaints about IT services from the students. Those have escalated to the provost and chancellor, who are looking to IT to address the student experience NOW.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS

» The wireless is garbage.
» I can't install my favorite app (TikTok, Adobe Flash player, Java).
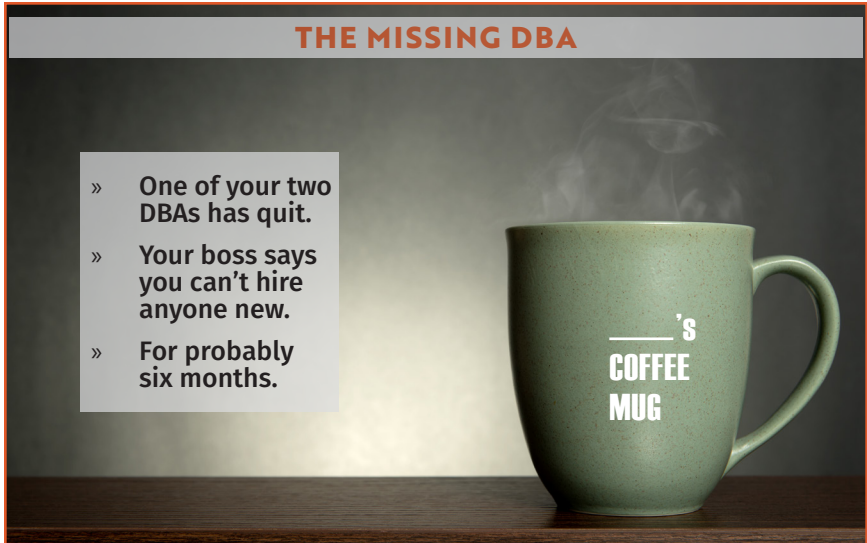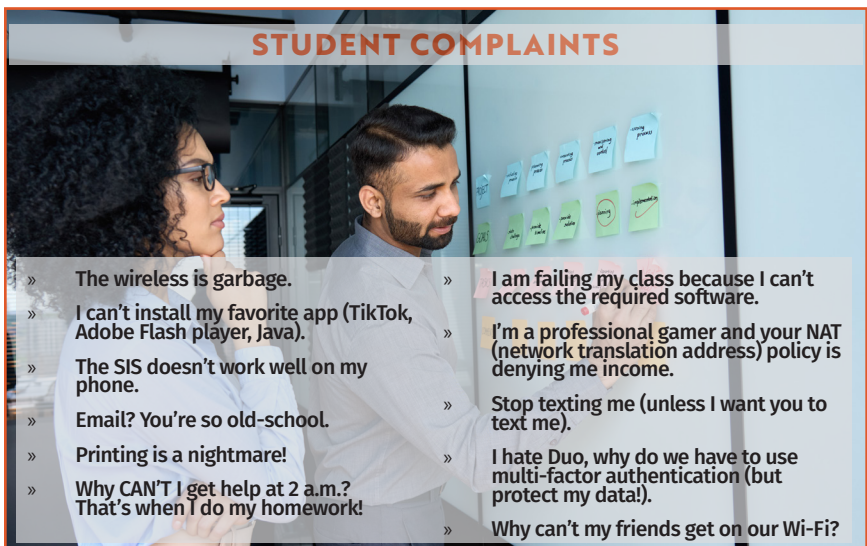» The SIS doesn't work well on my phone.
» Email? You're so old-school.
» Printing is a nightmare!
» Why CAN'T I get help at 2 a.m.? That's when I do my homework!

» I am failing my class because I can't access the required software.
» I'm a professional gamer and your NAT (network translation address) policy is denying me income.
» Stop texting me (unless I want you to text me).
» I hate Duo, why do we have to use multi-factor authentication (but protect my data!).
» Why can't my friends get on our Wi-Fi?

Most of us will recognize one, if not all of these scenarios as they are quite common in higher education institutions. It is likely that, in hindsight, we all wish that we had done a better job of handling a situation like one of these.

But what if we could get a do-over? What if we reacted differently and sought better outcomes? In the moment, it is hard to see how one of these scenarios might lead to something fantastic for the institution … but maybe there is a way. We asked this of our community of technology experts, and they had a lot to say!

PRINCIPLE 1: COMMUNICATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

It seems so obvious, doesn't it? No matter what we are doing, someone always says 'it's about communication.'

We are bringing this one forward right out of the gate because it truly is that important. The ability to tell a story in a way that resonates with others is becoming essential to IT leaders. How can you do what needs to be done if your Chief Financial Officer sees IT as draining the institution's resources? How can you influence an academic solution if you are viewed as just a 'car mechanic' who fixes things when they break? How do you share the value of what you do?

The principle of **communication, transparency and relationship building** states that one must develop and use excellent communication skills, be transparent in all that you do, and that IT teams must make a conscious commitment to developing and maintaining relationships across the institution.

IT leaders must be able to tell a story in a way that connects with the listener, and that may mean telling the story in different ways to different audiences. To do that, you must understand who your audience is, what matters to them, and how they digest information. Does your audience like data? Great, we're good at that! But what if they only want to know why they should care? You have to figure out what will resonate with them and present in a way that will pique their interest.

IT leaders and teams must be transparent, as transparency is a foundation for trust. For example, outages WILL happen – when they do, be transparent about what happened and the lessons that you learned. You can't prevent those outages, but you can influence the narrative and make sure the story that is told is the one that you want to have told. What you DON'T want is for others to create their own narrative based on perceptions.

Finally, now more than ever IT teams and leaders MUST have relationships with all the stakeholders at the institution. Technology can do incredible things (more so every day), but the human perspective is what will ultimately drive the success of any technology implementation. Understanding the human part of the project and engaging them is critical to any successful implementation.

We can apply the principle of **communication, transparency and relationship building** to our first scenario, the vendor demonstration, by exploring four ways a chief information officer (CIO) could respond to the scenario.

COMMUNICATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Scenario: The Vendor-Driven Solution

A vendor approached your president, demonstrating a prodcut they claim will trasform student success by exposing student datea from multiple systems to identify students in need of intervention. The vice president for student success calls to let you know that he vendor will be offerin an in-person, campus-wide demonstration next week, and that your attendance is 'optional.'

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	I'm not gonna say a word.	Have lost your flippin' minds?	Let's provide solid inputs.	Let's do this right.
Description	CIO doesn't say a word, knowing the decision is made.	CIO pointedly observes all the reasons the product won't work.	CIO does homework and brings up key points as the project moves forward.	CIO focuses on the problem, engaging with others to develop a robust perspective that guides interactions with the project.

Reaction 1: The first reaction, *I'm not gonna say a word*, reflects your feelings that nothing you can do will matter as the decision has already been made. You sit quietly during the meeting, taking notes for yourself and your team, but not really engaging in the discussion.

The communication in this reaction is nil. Transparency is also nil – the CIO has useful information but is unwilling to share it. There are no observable relationships. Was value added by the CIO? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

One possible outcome is this: The project moves forward based on vendor guidance; but the implementation is not the best. Faculty are irritated by the new platform, and they received no training. The tool did identify areas where an intervention might benefit a student, but the institution did not allocate any resources to DOING the interventions. After considerable time, money, and effort - retention rates do not really change, and the project goals have not been met. The president is not happy.

The CIO added no value in this scenario, and some might argue that the value was even negative.

Reaction 2: Our second reaction is *have you lost your flippin' minds?*. You know this is not going to turn out well, and you point out all the issues you see during the meeting and explain why the purchase would be a waste of resources. The meeting ends early.

Communication increases, but it only flowed in one direction – from the CIO. Transparency improved, as the CIO's knowledge IS shared. This was a solo approach that used no relationships or collaborations - the CIO acted on their own. What do you think the outcome is now? Did our CIO add value?

> A possible outcome is that the potential project comes to a screeching halt because of the CIO's concerns. However, the perceptions that resulted blamed the CIO for blocking the project, and institutional leadership still views the project as something that would have solved all the institution's problems if only the CIO had not been the obstructionist. The poor perception of our CIO will be a cloud over the CIO and the IT team for all future projects.

> While the CIO did add value, the value of the information shared was overshadowed by the way it was communicated. All that most participants will recall is that the CIO was aggressive, arrogant, and unwilling to support institutional objectives. They will not remember the specific points that the CIO made. While this is NOT what our CIO wanted to do, perception too easily can become reality.

Reaction 3: In our third reaction, our CIO wants to help the institution *make this decision well*. Our CIO immediately starts doing their homework about the product that is going to be discussed. Over the weekend, our CIO starts gathering information for the meeting next Tuesday. Using sources like EDUCAUSE's Technology Solutions Market Profile, the CIO identifies some institutions that have been using the product, and some institutions that switched to another platform. The CIO pulls IPEDS data for retention for these institutions. On Monday, the CIO cancels planned meetings, and reaches out to the CIOs at those institutions. In the meeting, the CIO makes sure to align their comments with the stated objectives for the product and the institution's mission, but also shares that preliminary research shows that those that used the product most successfully implemented the product as part of a comprehensive effort. The CIO offers to do further research and to arrange meetings with interdisciplinary teams at other institutions. What outcome do you predict now? Did our CIO add value?

> The outcome this time is stronger. The project goes forward and is modeled on an institution that has successfully implemented the product. The project is moderately successful based on standard metrics. Faculty are grading more frequently and are onboard

In a feedback session, after discussing this reaction, one of our participants said "YES, that's how it's done." For many of us, this may be the optimal reaction and outcome given our specific circumstances. But we are going to look at what might be possible if we have the capability to go one step further...

although not particularly engaged. The IT team was able to bring in a developer Full-time equivalent on a trial basis to support the project. Early results show some improvement in key metrics, but not as much improvement as was hoped.

In this reaction, the CIO added considerable value. They raised pertinent points, brought in feedback from outside the institution, and asked key questions that help the project implementation move forward well. The CIO is seen as a team player, contributing sound information and guidance to the project.

Reaction 4: Our fourth reaction is ***let's do this…right***. This time, our CIO does not give up the weekend, knowing that many relationships can be leveraged come Monday morning. The first engagement is with the IT team, who are tasked with doing the homework that was done over the weekend in the third reaction. But our CIO is not idle! While the team is busy, the CIO connects with the CFO, the provost, and the dean of students to listen to their thoughts, concerns, and insights. The CIO comes to understand that while they are all excited about the project, they also have concerns about the process, institutional readiness, and the vendor's ability to deliver. In Tuesday's meeting, the CIO listens carefully, asks a few clarifying questions, and finally shares that the IT team has done some quick research and that with more time the team would be happy to arrange some calls with institutions that have used the product. This idea is supported by others in the room.

Communication and transparency are embedded within each relationship that was leveraged. Our CIO was able to quickly touch base with key players, which provided a rich understanding of the various concerns surrounding the potential project. While our CIO had facts and data, those were secondary to being able to frame questions and comments in a way that resonated with others in the room. How did the value of the CIO's contribution change? Now what are your hopes for the outcome?

Our final possible outcome in this scenario is that the project moves forward with an interdisciplinary team led by the CIO, the associate provost, and the dean of students. The focus of the project is the improvement of student outcomes. The faculty senate drafted and ratified a new grading standard. Multiple solutions were considered, and the original product was ultimately selected based on a combination of fit for the institution, cost, and ease of procurement through a MHEC contract. The institution has a deeper understanding of what can be achieved, what resources are needed, and a clear understanding of what measurements will define project success – the number of students saved. The CIO will be presenting with the president and provost at an upcoming conference. Most importantly, 35 students were 'saved' this year because of this project, and they

have enrolled for the next semester as students in good standing.

The value the CIO brought to the project was top-notch. By building on various relationships, an abundance of information was gathered. The IT team gathered facts, data, and technical knowledge far more efficiently than the CIO alone could do, and in some cases the team leveraged their own peer networks. But the most value came from the insights that the CIO was able to gather from multiple institutional perspectives. These perspectives provided a better understanding of the underlying problem, and the CIO made sure that those perspectives were embedded in his approach to the meeting. Although the team gets credit, the CIO's thoughtful approach and collaborative skills are noticed in a positive way.

Here is a quick summary of how communication, transparency, and relationship building impacted the outcomes in our scenario on the vendor-driven solution.

Now that we have explored the principle of communication, transparency and relationship building, let's look at how **understanding institutional values and culture** can have an impact on outcomes for our institutions.

COMMUNICATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Scenario: The Vendor-Driven Solution

A vendor approached your president, demonstrating a prodcut they claim will trasform student success by exposing student datea from multiple systems to identify students in need of intervention. The vice president for student success calls to let you know that he vendor will be offerin an in-person, campus-wide demonstration next week, and that your attendance is 'optional.'

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	I'm not gonna say a word.	Have lost your flippin' minds?	Let's provide solid inputs.	Let's do this right.
Possible Outcome	Project moves forward based on vendor guidance; implementation is not the best. Retention goals aren't met.	Project stalls, and the CIO is blamed for blocking something that would have solved all the problems.	Project goes forward modeled after successful implementations, and is moderately successful based on standard metrics.	Project shifts from product to improvement of student outcomes. Multiple products are measured against institutional needs and goals. Original vendor still selected, with a deeper understanding of what can be achieved and a clear measurement of project success-the number of students saved.

PRINCIPLE 2: UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL VALUES AND CULTURE

Every institution will have written its own mission, vision, and goals. They will have a strategic plan. They will have an organizational chart.

Yet every institution will also have an informal set of values. They will have their institutional budget which will tell you if funds are being allocated in alignment with the strategic plan – or if unwritten priorities are being funded. Every institution will have their own history, their own funding, their own governance, their own people (faculty and staff, leadership, students, alumni, community), and more. There will be 'influencers' that may or may not be on the organizational chart.

The principle of **understanding institutional values and culture** is that to be effective, one must embody those things that truly matter to your institution, incorporating them into the work you do and the conversations you have. A web page with data about the institution and the institutional strategic plan is a great starting point, but it is only that, a starting point. It is important to make sure that you understand what truly matters most to your president, to your provost, and to your CFO. It is important to understand the challenges they are dealing with and the choices they make. Understand that the informal culture at some institutions may be more powerful than the formal culture – if you are in that situation, it is critical to truly understand the informal culture and to ensure that your work to address institutional needs aligns with the informal expectations. Defining values and culture is not easy; it cannot be defined in isolation and it is ALWAYS changing. Understanding your institution's culture and values is an important tool to help address the different demands and agendas with which IT contends.

Let's explore the principle of **understanding institutional values and culture** through that all-too-familiar and dreaded scenario: the annual budget cut. Here are four possible ways to react in this scenario.

UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL VALUES AND CULTURE

Scenario: The Annual Budget Cut

As happens every year, the institution has asked all departments to cut 5% from their budget – including IT. Your cost to maintain the current level of services will increase at least 12%.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	Woe is me.	Let's be rational about IT.	Let's work with those that will be impacted.	Let's do this…right.
Description	CIO makes unilateral cuts to meet the set goal.	CIO shows CFO the imbalance, who nods their head in agreement.	CIO talks to individual division leaders and is successful in sharing some costs or in obtaining agreement on the elimination of some tools/services.	CIO uses the trust they have built with senior leadership to have a discussion based on the needs of the institution, not the needs of IT. Together, they consider options and agree on where cuts can be made if it comes to that. In budget meetings, there are many voices wanting to ensure IT is funded.

Reaction 1: Our CIO knows that cuts must be found somewhere. Scenarios were presented to the budget committee, they have made their decision, and the CFO has said that everyone must now comply with the mandate. The CIO combs through the budget and through vendor quotes looking for things that can be done to meet the dollar target. A vacant position gets eliminated. A maintenance agreement gets cancelled instead of renewed. Older equipment is repurposed instead of being replaced. Was value added by the CIO in this reaction? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

There has been some communication in this scenario, but primarily through the framework of the budget process. Transparency is interesting – it can be argued that the budget scenarios were transparent, but more than likely they only focused on new expenditure requests and ignored any potential impact of cuts. Does this approach to the budget really reflect the institution's values? Did the cuts the CIO made align with institutional values?

One possible outcome is this: The cuts are made. All approved renewals are paid in the first month of the new budget year. Six months later, a system goes down and it happens to be one of the ones where the maintenance was terminated, and it happens at a critical point in a research project. The value of that system to the institution was unknown to the CIO, and the principal investigator and provost ensured that everyone knew that it was 'IT's fault.' The research is set back months, and the costs to upgrade the system come from the IT budget. A physical device that was not upgraded fails a month later, and this time the CFO is affected and cannot work until an emergency procurement is done to acquire and install new equipment. Again, IT gets the full blame.

The CIO added some value to this scenario, in that the requested budget cuts were completed to balance the budget as directed. But in the long term, the value was negative because needed systems were not available, and the impact was felt throughout the institution.

Reaction 2: This reaction is one of rational thought and logic. Surely, if we just show the CFO the imbalance in the budget this will get fixed. The CIO puts together various reports that show the imbalance between needed funds and budgeted funds before scheduling a meeting with the CFO. In that meeting, you make it clear how important IT is to the institution and that these cuts are institutional cuts. The CFO's head is nodding as you speak, which is taken as agreement to your points. What do you think the outcome is now? Did our CIO add value?

> One possible outcome is that while the CIO goes back to his office thinking that the CFO will make the needed adjustments, the CFO really thinks that IT always has their hands out and that this meeting was more of the same. The CFO heard three similar arguments that same day, none of which made any impact. The CFO recommends to the president that the cuts be implemented at the 5% cut level proposed, and the president agrees. This comes as a shock to our CIO when the budget comes out! Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to cancel some contracts, so the CIO is forced to make unplanned cuts. Some cuts that would have been made cannot be made due to contractual agreements, so ultimately IT spends the year cobbling funds together to meet needs. There are unplanned reductions of services to the institution, and the budget situation negatively impacts the morale of IT staff (some of whom immediately start looking for a new position).

> Our CIO attempted to add value, but the institutional values and

culture surrounding the budget process were not affected. What the CIO viewed as a logical outcome was perceived as whining, to no one's benefit. The CIO tried to show that cuts to IT would really affect the institution, but nothing in the reports connected to the institutional culture or values and they became meaningless.

Reaction 3: In this reaction, our CIO knows that it will be critical to continue to engage others as tough decisions are made. To do this, the CIO sets up meetings with key department leads to engage in conversation about potential cuts, making it known what is being considered, and gathering inputs on the impact each cut might have. Mutual understandings are reached for many of the proposed cuts, and in some cases offers were made to share the costs of maintaining a particular system. Our CIO is confident that the budget is now balanced, that everyone knows what is coming, and that IT is in a good position for the upcoming year. What do you think the outcome is now? Did our CIO add value?

> At first, things are going well in our possible outcome. While a researcher did complain about one of the systems that was cut, the provost addressed the issue and made it clear that the decision was made jointly. However, the dean of students took a new position at another institution and the new dean of students is not interested in honoring prior, undocumented, promises. The dean and CIO's relationship starts off on a sour note. Over time, the provost 'forgets' about your conversation due to other institutional priorities and the support once provided begins to disappear.

> On this scenario, the CIO did add considerable value. Having conversations with individual end users provided key information and was helpful in making decisions that were better aligned with the institution's best interests. However, the budget office is not happy that funds are being moved around and makes plans to prevent IT from playing games like this in the future. The dean of students was hired to improve the student experience and complains frequently that IT is not 'supportive' of the culture they are trying to create, pointing to the items that were not in the IT budget that 'should have been.'

Reaction 4: Our CIO knew that a request like this was likely to happen and has been taking steps to hopefully mitigate the impact. Relationships have been built with key players in the budgeting process at the cabinet level, the staff level, the committee level, and more. The relationships have created trust between the IT team and other departments. There is a high-level recognition of the value that

IT services provide to each of those areas. While it was hoped that cuts would not be necessary, conversations have already taken place around the items that might be on the table if a 5% cut were mandated. What do you think the outcome is now? Has our CIO added value, and will a robust budget be allocated?

One possible outcome: A full budget committee meeting is held a week after the mandatory percentage cut is announced. In that meeting, several department heads expressed concerns that the approach will force IT to make cuts that will be detrimental to institutional goals. Rather than discussing the IT department as a cost center, the CFO and budget officer listen closely to the broader perspectives in the room, and express appreciation for the committee looking so closely at the potential impact. The services are discussed in the context of institutional mission and values. In the end, IT terminates redundant services, implements plans to sunset other services in a year, funding changes are implemented within the budget, and IT is exempted from the mandatory cuts. While it is not ideal, everyone feels ownership in the decisions made and supports the actions taken.

The value the CIO brought to the project was in the understanding of institutional processes and how discussions took place within those processes – and in how competing needs were discussed from the perspective of the institution rather than individuals. The institution sees IT as a valued partner and knows that IT will continue to strive to make decisions that are aligned with institutional values. The culture of the institution has shifted towards a more engaged IT decision-making process.

Scenario: The Annual Budget Cut

As happens every year, the institution has asked all departments to cut 5% from their budget – including IT. Your cost to maintain the current level of services will increase at least 12%.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	Woe is me.	Let's be rational about IT.	Let's work with those that will be impacted.	Let's do this…right.
Possible Outcome	Personnel leave due to low pay. A terminated maintenance agreement turned out to be needed for an academic project. Physical devices fail, causing system outages.	When the budget comes out, 5% was still cut. You begin robbing Peter to pay Paul and have no time to deal with things in a non-emergency manner.	Some departments honored their agreements, but others reversed when their team objected – IT was blamed. A new VP refused to honor a cost-share, straining that new relationship.	While the reality of competing needs still exists, IT does NOT receive a 5% cut. Instead, the institution decided together to eliminate some services, and to begin sunsetting others. There are no surprises, and all agreements are a part of the budget.

Now that we have explored the principle of communication, transparency and relationship building as well as the principle of understanding institutional values and culture, let us move on to the principle of **adaptability, collaboration, and creativity**.

"The relevant question is not simply what shall we do tomorrow, but rather what shall we do today in order to get ready for tomorrow."

- Peter Drucker

PRINCIPLE 3: ADAPTABILITY, COLLABORATION, AND CREATIVITY

This principle could simply have been titled 'dealing with change.' But most IT folks know that change is simply a part of the job, so such a title would be boring. The question is, therefore, what skills will an IT leader need to be able to successfully manage an environment that is always changing? Some of the most essential skills needed will be adaptability, collaboration, and creativity. Fortunately, IT folks tend to lean into these skills already, so the trick is knowing when and how to apply them.

The principle of **adaptability, collaboration and creativity** reflects that by embracing adaptability, encouraging collaboration, and unleashing creativity, IT leaders can innovate, solve problems, and thrive in an ever-changing world.

Let us explore how this principle applies in that all-too-common scenario: the administrative challenge of staffing. Here are the four possible reactions we will explore:

ADAPTABILITY, COLLABORATION, AND CREATIVITY

Scenario: The Administrative Challenge – Staffing

One of your two enterprise database administrators (DBA's) retired, creating a need to fill that position. That request is denied by the deputy vice president of administration citing that no new staff positions are going to be filled until the new vice president is named. The national search for the new vice president is just getting underway.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	Accept and pray.	Chicken Little.	What's in it for you?	Let's do this…right.
Description	You know the risks, but what else can you do?	You reach out with your tale of woe to cabinet members and the deputy VP is told to let you fill this position.	You set up a meeting with the deputy VP, taking some key talking points that you can share with him. You promise the deputy VP that you are 'there for them.'	The first thing you do is pull your core team together to work up a game plan, which you then present to the C-suite, after reviewing it with the deputy VP.

Reaction 1: The first reaction is simply to put the hands together and pray. The CIO accepts the default answer as given, and the IT team putters along as best they can, while knowing that the risks of outages or service interruptions have just gone up. Daily maintenance becomes weekly maintenance. Response time to user tickets slows from 24-36 hours to 3-5 days. Changes to tables, schemas, etc. are put on hold. Was value added by the CIO in this reaction? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

> One possible outcome is this: because the position is not filled, outages that could have been prevented with regular updates and monitoring start happening. The remaining team does their best when the outages happen, but it takes them longer to restore services. The team members are frustrated, as are the users, and remaining team members start to leave as well.

> The CIO did not add value in this reaction. In the long term, the value was negative due to outages and staff departures. In this reaction, there was no adaptation, collaboration, or creativity applied to the underlying problem.

Reaction 2: Every chance our CIO gets, they share that the sky is falling because of staffing issues, and that they are afraid systems may crash any time! The CIO reaches out to and convinces the provost and president that all the IT systems will crash if you this position is not filled as soon as possible. They told the deputy VP to let you fill the position. Was value added by the CIO in this reaction? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

> One possible outcome is this: Your first search fails, because the experienced DBA you wanted, counter-offered asking for $2,000 more than the offer. The deputy vice president (VP) denies it, citing lack of funds in your budget, and the CIO has no more political capital to leverage. The second search results in the hiring of a much less experienced DBA. Small outages occur as the DBA is learning the systems. Unfortunately, it soon becomes clear that you have made an enemy in the administration division, and you are hearing rumors that the new VP is hearing the deputy VP's opinion of IT.

> The CIO added value by successfully filling the open position. But the lack of collaboration and creativity in this approach has resulted in lost value as a key colleague is unlikely to be willing to work with you in the future.

Reaction 3: This is a more creative reaction, in which our CIO develops strategies that might persuade the deputy VP to reconsider. The CIO sets up a meeting with the deputy VP and prepares key talking points

to use in the conversation. One such point is that the deputy VP uses many reports to support legislative conversations about the costs of higher education, and you note that it is primarily the DBAs that develop these queries and reports. Suspecting that the talking points themselves might not be enough, the CIO also prepared a carrot that shows what is in this for the deputy VP – which is that IT will put the deputy VP on the very important person (VIP) ticket list with the cabinet officials if filling the position is approved now. What do you think the outcomes were?

> One possible outcome is that the deputy VP is flattered by your offer of VIP services and agrees to your proposal. You recruit and hire a skilled DBA, who has already identified some updates and improvement opportunities in your standard procedures. Downtimes are minimal, and the team has come together.

> Value was certainly added – the IT team is in great shape. The solution the CIO found was collaborative and creative, and the CIO hopes that this outcome is the basis for a better relationship with the deputy VP in your channel. But this has caused a few issues across the entire IT department. One team missed a request from the president due to a flood of VIP tickets, and you are now having to consider creating a very, very important person (VVIP) list in your system.

Reaction 4: This is the reaction in which our CIO truly gets creative and gets it right. Rather than focusing on filling the open position, our CIO pulls the core IT team together and starts brainstorming. One team member is assigned to put together a staffing history and to reach out to other institutions to discuss their DBA staffing strategies. Another team member puts together a pictograph of all the systems that link to data. The team develops alternate methods to fill the DBA responsibilities, such as consulting services, part-time or temporary workers, and develops a cost/risk analysis for each. All of this is put together into a brief presentation, and you tentatively schedule a meeting with the president, provost, and deputy VP. You then set up a meeting with just the deputy VP to present your information and to ask if the deputy VP is okay with you presenting the information to the full group. The deputy VP says yes, and after meeting with the president you are authorized to contract with a vendor to cover the position until the new VP is on board. What do you think the outcome was?

> One possibility is this – the plan worked. A consultant was on-site within two weeks, and their skills brought about a noticeable improvement in response time. The rest of the team picked up some of these skills and worked with the consultant to update

procedures. The deputy VP was eventually named as the new VP, and quickly approved your request to fill the role permanently.

By being adaptable, collaborative, and creative, you created value not only by finding a great solution but also by developing trust and a good working relationship with your colleague, the new VP. Faculty and staff don't know all that happened, but they comment on how much better the systems are working.

ADAPTABILITY, COLLABORATION, AND CREATIVITY

Scenario: The Administrative Challenge – Staffing

One of your two enterprise Database Administrators (DBA's) retired, creating a need to fill that position. That request is denied by the deputy vice president of administration citing that no new staff positions are going to be filled until the new vice president is named. The national search for the new vice president is just getting underway.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	Accept and pray.	Chicken Little.	What's in it for you?	Let's do this…right.
Possible Outcome	Without a DBA during the search process, outages happened. IT's reputation is badly damaged, and remaining staff are leaving.	You are only able to hire an in-experienced DBA, and experienced small outages. You realize you have made an enemy in the administration department.	You hired a skilled DBA. There has been minimal downtime, and the DBA team has solidified well. Other deputy VPs want the same 'special' treatment which is causing issues.'	You had a consultant on-site within two weeks who was able to get a noticeable improvement in response time. Your primary DBA picked up some new skills and together they were able to update your procedures.

> ### "Change is a challenge and an opportunity, not a threat."
> — *Prince Phillip of England*

Now that we have explored the principle of communication, transparency and relationship building, the principle of understanding institutional values and culture, and the principle of adaptability, collaboration, and creativity, it is time to investigate the principle of **thinking holistically**.

PRINCIPLE 4: THINKING HOLISTICALLY

This principle is easy to say, but **thinking holistically** can be challenging to do. The temptation is, as it always is, to focus on YOUR problem and solving it. But as we moved through the prior scenarios and reactions, you might have detected that the final reaction ALWAYS took a broader perspective. In fact, our fourth reaction always used a bit of each of these principles. And that brings us to our fourth principle – thinking holistically.

The principle of thinking holistically is that IT leaders need to view how their services enable the interconnectedness of things, and need to use an integrated, all-encompassing view to better understand complex challenges and unlock innovative solutions. It is not enough anymore to focus on one part of the puzzle or to operate in a silo. IT is now embedded in the fabric of our institutions, and IT teams need to understand and embrace that broad purpose.

Let's explore how the principle of thinking holistically applies in a scenario about the student experience. Here are the four possible reactions we will explore:

THINKING HOLISTICALLY

Scenario: The Student Experience

The institution is hearing many complaints about IT services. Those have escalated to the provost and chancellor, who are looking to IT to address the student experience NOW.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	It works for me!	Whack-a-Mole	What's in it for you?	Let's do this…right.
Description	Assume students will never be satisfied and start deflecting with minor tweaks.	CIO works with faculty and staff to try to fix individual systems.	CIO meets with dean of students and IR to baseline student perceptions, then uses a survey to identify the hottest issues, which are tackled and somewhat funded.	IT reaches out to students, asking for partners. You listen, survey, and discuss with the students, then work as a team to develop and implement solutions.

Reaction 1: The first reaction is that 'students always complain no matter what I do.' The CIO knows that the students do not understand resource limitations, the complexity of maintaining multiple systems and system integrations, the limitations that regulations and laws put on your ability to share data, or that you do not even know that they have been asked to use a certain tool! The CIO also is sure that trying to explain these things to students will be difficult. That all boils down into the assumption that the students will never be satisfied, so most complaints are deflected. When pressed, our CIO makes several minor tweaks in the hope that something works. Was value added by the CIO in this reaction? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

> One possible outcome is this: The students see right through you, and they now are complaining about your team and your service because they perceive that you did really try. They aren't the only ones; the provost and chancellor are LIVID, and your faculty and staff are not all that happy either. Worst of all – a local vendor knows what is going on, senses an opportunity, and has started making in-roads to outsource the IT shop.

> The CIO adds little, if any, value in this reaction. The tweaks may have some impact here and there, but they are mostly insignificant. The CIO never thought about the bigger picture, and simply dismissed the issues that were being brought out.

Reaction 2: Our CIO looks at the list and starts playing 'whack-a-mole.' Each complaint is reviewed, and attempts are made to make improvements to the systems where possible. For example, the IT team created an emergency call center in the evenings to supplement the 9-5 call center. They installed more wireless access points in the residence halls to boost the Wi-Fi service. Was value added by the CIO in this reaction? What do you think the outcome is going to be?

> One possible outcome is that while there are some improvements, those improvements have little impact on the list of student complaints. Surveys results remain the same despite the attempted improvements. The emergency desk is struggling due to a lack of staff. The student services staff see IT as unhelpful, the students are still complaining, the president is still unhappy, and even our CIO is frustrated with the lack of improvement in survey results.

> There was value added, but was it the right value? Individual systems did improve, which some faculty and staff appreciated, but the students did not perceive any improvement to THEIR experience. There is clearly a disconnect, but how will it be resolved?

Reaction 3: Our CIO takes more of a student focus this time, and really wants to work it out. He meets with the dean of students and institutional research (IR) to develop a plan to baseline student perceptions, and to then identify the hottest issues. A survey tool is used, and the issues are prioritized. With this information available, the CIO was successful in obtaining some funding to put towards the top initiatives. What do you think the outcome was?

> One possible outcome is that the IT team makes improvements that are seen and appreciated. Student surveys show some improvement in satisfaction, but overall satisfaction is still lower than desired. The dean of students helps ensure that IT knows what software is needed for the upcoming semester, but this does not impact student satisfaction (as they view this as something that should be a given). The institution appreciates the progress that has been made, but thinks there is more that could, and should, be done.

> Our CIO added significant value by diving beneath the surface layer and focusing on the students rather than the systems. He worked more holistically by joining forces with the dean of students and IR, which did result in documentable improvements and an increase in student satisfaction. But if the institution, as a whole, thinks more can be done, did we think broadly enough?

Reaction 4: In the final reaction, our CIO goes all in with the students. With the help of the dean of students and IR, the CIO reaches out to student leaders and organizations. In a meeting with the student senate, our CIO expresses a genuine wish to better understand student concerns, a willingness to listen, and a desire to collaboratively address concerns. Through these conversations, a survey is developed that focuses on identifying the most pressing challenges students are experiencing. A team comprised of students and others throughout the institution begins collaborating on how to address top challenges. The open communications allow the team to develop multi-pronged and creative approaches to the challenges, ranging from removing technological barriers to education programs to student technology fees. Faculty members are interested and develop a course around misinformation in social media. Other institutions in your system are intrigued with your work and are open to partnering to create an after-hours, outsourced helpdesk for all. What do you think the outcome was?

> The students helped decide what to tackle first and are pleased with the initial improvements made. The team is now fully engaged

and willing to continue the work, and students are confident that improvements will continue to be made on a regular basis. Because the students feel like partners with IT and have been exposed to additional perspectives, they developed a proposal for the student body for new fees to be used for technology to support student needs (which was approved by the student body). Surveys now show high satisfaction with the technology and with the IT team itself. The system office provided funding for the after-hours help desk, which will be going live soon. The social media class was a tremendous success, and the department is considering expanding it into a certificate program. The president is proud of the team's work, and the variety of positive outcomes that have been produced.

By thinking holistically, our CIO avoided the trap of putting the team in single box with a narrow focus. Rather than relying on others to present the student perspective, an opportunity was created for the students to do that themselves (*and boy, did they)*. The value created was immense, impacting not only current students but also impacting prospective students as satisfaction with technology services became a positive recruiting point for the institution. The value extended throughout the institution and even beyond, solving a problem for the system and creating a new certificate program.

THINKING HOLISTICALLY

Scenario: The Student Experience

The institution is hearing many complaints about IT services. Those have escalated to the provost and chancellor, who are looking to IT to address the student experience NOW.

Reaction	1	2	3	4
Title	It works for me!	Whack-a-Mole	What's in it for you?	Let's do this…right.
Possible Outcome	Students are even less happy, and the provost and chancellor are LIVID. Faculty and staff aren't happy either. A local vendor senses an opportunity…	The list of complaints doesn't really change, even though there are some improvements. IT is seen as unhelpful.	Some improvement is seen and appreciated, but overall satisfaction is still lower than desired, and the institution thinks there is more that could and should be done.	The partnership is ongoing, with regular improvements being implemented. Students have voted to increase fees to be used for technology that supports them and feel that they are part of the solutions. Proposals are made to enhance student success, not technology. Surveys now show high satisfaction with the technology.

Now that we have explored the principles of communication, transparency and relationship building, the principle of understanding institutional values and culture, the principle of adaptability, collaboration, and creativity, and the principle of thinking holistically, it's time to pull everything together by with a final principle, **understanding what you have and how things work (current state)**.

PRINCIPLE 5: UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU HAVE AND HOW THINGS WORK (CURRENT STATE)

The final principle is simple – no matter how you react in a situation, it will not matter if you do not know what you have and how to use it. We can't tell you what you have or how your institution works, but what we CAN do is offer some ways to think about what you truly have.

Here are some questions that might help you think through what you have – or don't have.

- Do you have a solid grasp on technology's value and what your portfolio offers?
    - Take a good, hard look at your current tech stack. What's working well? What's not cutting it?
    - Think about how your technology aligns with your institution's goals. Is it helping you get where you need to go?
    - Don't be afraid to explore new technologies that could give you a boost. Stay open-minded!

- Do you understand the level of maturity of your institution, the data you have, and the tools you use?
    - Assess where your institution stands in terms of processes, policies, and procedures. Are you ahead of the game or playing catch-up?
    - Take stock of your data. Is it accurate? Complete? Usable? If not, it's time to clean house.
    - Make sure you have the right tools for the job. If something isn't working, don't be afraid to make a change.

- Do you understand who your stakeholders are, and their needs and perspectives?
    - Identify key stakeholders across your institution, including students, alumni, and community partners.
    - Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered.
    - Communicate regularly with stakeholders to keep them informed and engaged in your institution's initiatives.

- Do you understand the resources that are available to you?
  - Funding
    - Know your budget inside and out. Where's the money going? Where could it be better spent? How does it align with institutional goals and objectives?
    - Don't be afraid to get creative with funding sources. Grants, partnerships, revenue-generating activities – explore all your options.
    - Have a clear process in place for requesting and allocating funds. Make sure everyone's on the same page. Review it regularly and make adjustments as needed.
  - People
    - Influencers
      - Who are the people that really drive your institutional decisions?
      - Who are the people that drive your institutional culture?
    - Staff
      - Take a good look at your team. What skills do they bring to the table? Where could they use some extra support?
      - Invest in your people. Offer training and development opportunities to help them grow and succeed.
      - Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing. You're all in this together!
    - Faculty
      - Get faculty involved in the decision-making process. They've got valuable insights to share.
      - Tap into faculty expertise to guide technology investments and curriculum development.
      - Encourage faculty to stay on top of industry trends. They can help keep your institution ahead of the curve.
    - Vendors and other external relationships
      - Build strong relationships with your vendors and partners. Vendors, community organizations, and industry leaders can all be a valuable resource to extend your capabilities and drive innovation.

- Don't be afraid to hold vendors accountable. Make sure they're delivering what you need.

- Look for opportunities to collaborate and innovate with vendors. Together, you can achieve great things.

  - Do you have stated goals and performance metrics?

    - Identify key stakeholders across your institution, including students, alumni, and community partners.

    - Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered.

    - Communicate regularly with stakeholders to keep them informed and engaged in your institution's initiatives.

Think of it like making a cake or building a model airplane. You must know what ingredients or parts you have, and you must know how to combine them to create your vision. In IT, ingredients might be data or technology, but they might also be people or funding or donors. An ingredient might be an understanding of the trajectory of your institution, of technology. Another ingredient might be understanding the institutional processes behind the technology – the student life cycle, the onboarding process for human resources (HR), the procurement process. The result must taste or look good to others – if it does not, then something in your recipe or schematic is not right.

For this principle, the principle of understanding what you have and how things work (current state), we are not offering a scenario or story. Every institution, every individual, every situation is unique. The best possible outcome, therefore, will also be unique. That is what we mean by understanding what YOU have. Develop your OWN scenarios and keep them in your back pocket. Take one of our scenarios and reframe it to reflect your institution and the outcomes that are possible within your environment.

The following section will offer a set of questions that you can use to reflect on the unique aspects of your institution.

> *"Something that I noticed was that there are a lot of institutions that are in this phase of basic understanding of their data. If that data is not where it should be, if they do not even have that basic understanding, then using AI is going to be tricky or even potentially dangerous."*
> *— Alyssa Brinkley, SAS*

Reflective Questions

We hope that our stories and principles have helped you think about how you approach challenges. We know that it will not always be possible to obtain that fourth reaction where everything comes up roses, but that should not mean that we do not strive towards that goal.

The five principles have no meaning or value unless they are applied to the work that you do. We certainly do not have all the answers, but we do offer these questions to help you think about your work from the perspective of *your* role, *your* institution, and *your* experiences.

HOW DOES YOUR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATION NEED TO EVOLVE TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS?

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

> *In the past, my folks used to come to me and say, "I need $XXX to invest in this system." Now when someone does that I respond with 'money is the simple answer, talk to me about the more challenging things you thought through before you came to me, and what the impact of this system will be.'*
>
> *- Dirk Huggett, North Dakota University System*

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO BREAK DOWN SILOS AND DEMOCRATIZE TECHNOLOGY?

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

> *I realized that while I have a great relationship with my boss and a great relationship with the provost, my relationship with our CFO isn't as strong as I would like it to be. We had a disagreement a year ago, and we have never moved beyond it. To be successful, I need the support of the CFO – so I need to put effort into repairing that relationship.*
>
> *- Anonymous*

HOW CAN YOU BETTER COMMUNICATE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY'S VALUE AND CONTRIBUTIONS?

> *I'm primarily thinking about our mission and students experience and reflecting how revenue, margin and risk impact success. I apply those thoughts into what do Deans want - they want revenue, a provost wants analytics, the CFO wants all of that but especially risk, or the president wants all of that but also wants innovation. Then I ask myself how could we achieve those things? How do we become something extra special?*
>
> *- John Rathje, Kent State University*

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

IN A RECENT SITUATION, COULD YOU HAVE REACTED DIFFERENTLY AND SHAPED A BETTER OUTCOME? IF SO, HOW?

> *I was recently asked about AI. I launched into an explanation of large language models, all the different models that are being developed, and how AI is going to change our lives. In retrospect, that was not what they wanted. I should have just shared a proactive example of AI use, such as using AI to quickly create a summary of our policies. I've learned to keep stories in my back pocket to engage people, rather than jumping in with details.*
>
> *- Anonymous*

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3 _____

   _____

WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR PORTFOLIO?

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

> *I used to think of my portfolio as an inventory or hardware, software, and applications. That's still part of it, but now I also think of things like who my work impacts, who impacts my work, and how the institution as a whole is impacted. My 'portfolio' is huge, I just need to leverage it to its fullest.*
>
> *- Anonymous*

WHERE CAN YOU CREATE THE MOST VALUE, GIVEN THE RESOURCES YOU CURRENTLY HAVE?

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

> *I'd like to zero in on technologies that will really elevate the student experience, as that's our stated mission and we already measure metrics like student satisfaction, retention, and post-graduation success. That means investing in solutions for personalized learning, collaboration, and engaging educational content. Plus, if we can use data analytics to gain deeper insights into what students need, we can set them up for success not just here, but in everything they do down the road.*
>
> *- Anonymous*

Conclusion

As we close, we hope that you have enjoyed the scenarios and how they illustrated the five principles. We wanted to take a step back from those and focus on the things that we hope you will take away from this paper.

» Key Points: Add Value, Tell the Story, and the five principles.

» A Challenge: What are your goals and next steps?

» Growth: Ways to continue the conversation!

» A final thought.

KEY POINTS

■ **Add Value**

If IT is continued to be seen at the institution as just a cost center to be minimized as much as possible, IT leaders will continue to struggle to deliver the expected services at the expected levels. IT is critical to the delivery of an institution's mission and IT leaders must get better at identifying and communicating that value to play a strategic role in their institution's success.

■ **Tell the Story**

You can provide data, charts, and figures all you want. In fact, you need those things to support your story. But people do not remember those things, people remember a good story.

Don't talk about a system and how it works – instead talk about the time when you worked with a faculty member who was trying to help a struggling student. As you tell the story of the student, you can weave in how you identified an existing system that helped that student succeed. And then you can show how that single student success led to changes within the department to help *all* of their students be more successful. Because the technology in and of itself isn't what matters, but student success does.

We all have stories like that one. We just need to get better at telling them, and telling them often. Have those small success stories ready to be used whenever an opportunity presents itself. The stories must focus on the mission and values of the institution.

■ **Understand and Use Core Principles**

1. Communication, transparency, and relationship building - IT leaders engage and connect with stakeholders, build trust through openness, and nurture meaningful partnerships. This human-centered foundation enables technology success.

2. Understanding institutional values and culture - IT leaders immerse themselves in institutional values, adapt services for cultural fit, and ensure all voices are heard when shaping a shared future. This cultural intelligence allows technology to amplify what matters most.

3. Adaptability, collaboration, and creativity - By embracing adaptability, encouraging collaboration, and unleashing creativity, IT catalyzes innovation, solves problems, and drives an agile institution.

4. Thinking holistically - IT leaders take an integrated, all-encompassing view to see interconnections, grasp complexity and unlock innovative solutions. This mindset allows technology to enable the institution's mission.

5. Understanding what you have and how things work (current state) - IT leaders fully comprehend the maturity, capabilities, data and tools of the existing technology portfolio. This factual foundation informs strategy and decision-making.

Communication, Transparency, and Relationship Building	Understanding Institutional Values, and Culture	Adaptability, Collaoration, and Creativity	Thinking Holistically	Understanding Current State
Engaging and connecting with stakeholders, building trust through openness, and nurturing meaningful partnerships. This human-centered foundation enables technology success.	Immersing oneself in institutional values, adapting services for cultural fit, and ensuring all voices are heard when shaping a shared future. This cultural intelligence allows technology to amplify what matters most.	Embracing adaptability, encouraging collaboration, and unleashing creativity. These skills enable IT to catalyze innovation, solve problems, and drive an agile institution.	An integrated, all-encompassing view to see interconnections, grasp complexity and unlock innovative solutions. This mindset allows technology to enable the institution's mission.	A comprehension of the maturity, capabilities, data and tools of the existing technology portfolio. This factual foundation informs strategy and decision-making.

CHALLENGE: WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND NEXT STEPS?

We challenge you to set your own goals, and to identify the next steps that you can take to achieve these goals. Think about the value your IT team can bring to your institution, and where you can have the most impact using the principles discussed and the questions posed.

Goal 1: _____

_____

Goal 2: _____

_____

Goal 3: _____

_____

Write them down, and remember to revisit them periodically! Change is continuous, and thus your goals may change too.

GROW: CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION!

We loved this conversation so much that we want to keep it going!

- Did you find this resource useful? Use it freely, just give us a shout-out when you do.

- Would you like for us to facilitate a conversation with your IT team? Contact Deb Kidwell, director of technology initiatives at MHEC, **debk@mhec.org**.

- Are you in an area other than IT but would like to dive into this topic? Get in touch with us!

  o This resource was written by IT people for IT people, but it truly is applicable to anyone in higher education. We'd be happy to have the same conversation about your area.

- Would you really just like more insight into what IT does and why? We'd love that conversation as well, and we could dive into these scenarios at a deeper lever if desired.

- Watch for upcoming presentations or chats from MHEC on this topic!

- For those of you in the MHEC region, consider joining MHEC's Technologies Community.

- For those of you that aren't in the MHEC region, if you like our work feel free to follow the Compact's work by subscribing to the MHEC newsletter (**https://www.mhec.org/subscribe**).

FINAL THOUGHT

Remember, it's not just about knowing what you have –
it's about using those resources wisely to achieve goals and drive success.
- Claude 3 Opus

Background Information

ABOUT MHEC

Vision MHEC members collaborate to address the region's most pressing challenges in higher education and transform educational opportunities so that people and communities thrive.

Mission MHEC brings together midwestern states to develop and support best practices, collaborative efforts, and cost-sharing opportunities. Through these efforts it works to ensure strong, equitable postsecondary educational opportunities and outcomes for all.

Who MHEC Serves MHEC is comprised of member states from the midwestern United States. MHEC works with and for a variety of stakeholders within and across member states, including higher education system leaders, state policymakers, legislators, and institutional leaders, while always maintaining a focus on students and their success.

How MHEC Works MHEC's strategic approach highlights member states' strong desire for collaboration, effectiveness, and efficiency. MHEC believes that collaborative actions informed by research and best practices are the catalyst for improving quality, accessibility, relevance, and affordability of postsecondary educational opportunities. MHEC does this primarily through the following approaches: convenings, programs, research, and cost-savings contracts. Increasingly, MHEC looks to leverage these approaches in conjunction with each other to serve its strategic priorities.

COMPACT LEADERSHIP 2024-25

President
Ms. Susan Heegaard

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Rep. Barbara Ballard, Minority Caucus Chair Kansas Legislature

Vice Chair
Sen. Joan Ballweg, Senator; Majority Caucus Vice-Chair

Treasurer
Mr. Larry Tidemann, South Dakota Governor's Designee

Past Chair
Dr. David Eisler, Former President; Professor, Community College Leadership Studies, Ferris State University

ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGIES COMMITTEE

Purpose Technology's role in higher education is increasingly diverse, continually evolving, and embedded in the fabric of institutional operations. The MHEC Technologies Community engages IT innovators and specialists from services areas for technology, academia, students, and administration. The community provides strategic guidance to MHEC on technology-related topics in support of the mission of higher education institutions and states in the Midwest.

Structure The Technologies Community is comprised of representatives from the twelve member states of MHEC who have a role related to technology. From within the community, a single member from each state is selected to serve on the Technologies Executive Committee, which acts as a steering committee for the full community.

Objectives and Goals Provide focused and structured conversation and develop strategies on challenges with a technology component facing the region. Identify and support opportunities to overcome those challenges. Create opportunities to share information regarding identified solutions across the MHEC region. Expand information exchange opportunities across the MHEC region. Support other MHEC initiatives that need a technological viewpoint. Encourage diversity in our membership. Develop strategic sourcing methods to assist institutions in member states to utilize market-share, strategic partnerships, and collaborative sourcing to deliver solutions efficiently and effectively. Produce revenue to fund the work of the community and other MHEC initiatives.

TECHNOLOGIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ross Berndt, Minnesota State
Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska System
John Dunning, University of Wisconsin-Platteville (Ex Officio)
David Hansen, South Dakota Board of Regents
Dirk Huggett, North Dakota University System
Aric Kirkland, Eastern Michigan University
Marty Mark, University of Northern Iowa
Angela Neria, Pittsburg State University (KS)
John Rathje, Kent State University (OH)
Al Stadler, Crowder College (MO)
Chet Strebe, Northcentral Technical College (WI)

APPENDIX

As part of the process of developing this paper, the team worked through scenarios that they have faced, reflecting on how they could have responded at various stages of their careers. Each of these scenarios should be familiar to anyone that has worked in higher education, because they are real.

Some of the scenarios were memorable because we handled them poorly in the past, others were memorable because we have learned over time how to respond better. The possible outcomes for each scenario may or may not be ones that everyone can achieve given their unique situation – they are intended to simply show how your reactions can drive outcomes.

By necessity, these were streamlined for the paper itself, but we felt there might be value (and entertainment) in sharing the more robust versions of the scenarios. Perhaps you can use the scenarios as a training exercise with your team. Perhaps you want to incorporate your institution's mission or values into the scenarios instead of using our assumptions, which might have different outcomes.

These scenarios are yours to use and share in any way that may be helpful.

SCENARIO 1: THE VENDOR-DRIVEN SOLUTION

SCENARIO 2: THE ANNUAL BUDGET CUT

SCENARIO 3: THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGE - STAFF

SCENARIO 4: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

SCENARIO 1: THE VENDOR-DRIVEN SOLUTION

Synopsis: The Vendor-Driven Solution

A vendor approached your president, demonstrating a product they claim will transform student success by exposing student data from multiple systems to identify students in need of intervention. The vice president for student success calls to let the CIO know that the vendor will be offering an in-person, institution-wide demonstration next week, and that your attendance is 'optional.'

Vendor X approaches the president at the Higher Learning Commission conference in April with a product that will transform student success by exposing student performance data from multiple systems to quickly and reliably identify students in need of intervention. Your initial exposure to this conversation is the vice president for student success calling you Friday afternoon at 4:30 to let you know that the vendor will be on campus Tuesday morning for a demo. Thirty institutional leaders from a variety of offices have been invited and, despite the 'fact' that no IT involvement is necessary for this project to be successful, you're welcome to attend if you would like to.

Here are some of the things that you immediately think about:

- Many faculty record grades only twice a year – at mid-term and finals. There is no policy that forces faculty to record their grades in the learning management systen (LMS)– so the only place all grades are reported is the student information system (SIS).

- For financial reasons, the institution uses Moodle for their LMS platform.

- The institution is currently implementing a housing and dining system. The housing application goes live in October for new students. The IT development staff are down two FTE due to the lack of hybrid or remote options

and non-competitive salaries with local industry. The remaining developer is working on a tight project timeline to ensure that integrations are ready for application testing in August.

- Prior to the meeting, the president pulls you aside and very pointedly makes the comment that our students deserve every chance to be successful and the vendor has promised that this software will help. She is excited about the possibilities.

- Our mission statement calls out student success as its first priority.

How would you react?

1. I'm not gonna say a word.
2. Have you lost your flippin' minds?
3. Let's make this decision well.
4. Let's do this – right.

1. **I'm not gonna say a word.** It is clear to you based on the lead-up to this meeting that the decision has already been made and the meeting is a mere formality. You know this isn't going to work. You say nothing but, when asked in the face of the vendor saying there were no IT requirements, somehow you will encourage your team to get it done if asked. You also call your spouse and ask them to cancel your scheduled vacation in July. That call does not go well. The salesperson leaves the room happy.

    18 months later: The project goes ahead. Faculty are irritated that they now must file early alerts in a new platform with no training. The platform identifies students who should have interventions, but no resources have been allocated to performing those interventions, nor can the institution afford to do so as the project cost $500,000 and retention has not improved to provide more revenue. The president is not happy.

2. **Have you lost your flippin' minds?** You loudly and pointedly observe that grades are not available in Moodle or the SIS more often than twice a term. The salesperson pivots quickly and makes the claim that there will be enough data in the LMS without grades based on homework and chat engagement. You point out that Moodle is not on the certified integrations list. The salesperson blanches and you know this is your moment. You point out that the institution is not at a process maturity level to implement this package and it will be a gigantic waste of resources. The meeting adjourns 15 minutes early. You are the only happy person leaving the room.

    18 months later: The project stalls and nothing happens. There is no budget impact, but neither have student outcomes improved. Executive leadership is now being courted by another vendor and the process is beginning all over again. The staff responsible for supporting students resent your role in shutting down something that might have helped them do their jobs better and work hard to bypass you whenever possible.

3. **Let's make this decision well.** Despite your better judgement, you spend the entire weekend looking at EDUCAUSE's Technology Solutions Market Profile and find five institutions that have been running this product for three years or more. You look up their IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) retention over that same period. You also find five institutions who have switched to another platform. You cancel all your meetings on Monday and frantically reach out to the CIOs listed on those institutional profiles. You get ahold of three of them. Two have seen no improvements in retention. The common factors in those scenarios are that they have not enforced grading policies. The

one institution who has met with significant success launched a campus initiative around student success that included the provost's office, faculty senate, student success office, and IT. The software was implemented over a year's period alongside significant modifications to grading practices and socialization of those changes with faculty. In the demo, you listen carefully to the conversation and align yourself with both the president's comment and the mission statement in wanting to support student success. You point out, however, that in your research with other institutions, those that have been successful have implemented this as part of a comprehensive effort. You would be happy to do further research and arrange meetings with interdisciplinary teams at other institutions who have improved student outcomes with the software.

18-months later: *The project does go ahead, but the project plan is modeled after the institution that successfully implemented the project. Faculty are now grading at least four times per semester and given the project priority, you were able to lobby to refill a developer FTE in hybrid modality on a trial basis. The institution used a MHEC contract to alleviate RFP (request for Pproposal) requirements. Faculty are on-board, though somewhat grudgingly. Early results are that fall to spring persistence for new first-year students improved 2%, with low-income and first-generation students leading that increase.*

4. **Let's do this – right.** You call a stand-up meeting first thing Monday morning with your two best sleuthy employees. You assign one the task of finding institutions, using EDUCAUSE's Technology Solutions Market Profile, who are currently using this solution, some who have recently migrated away, and to what solutions did they migrate, limiting results to institutions with a profile like yours. To the other, you assign the task of looking

up IPEDS retention rates for those institutions. Meanwhile, you spend Monday arranging coffee and impromptu meetings with associate provost and dean of students, both of whom you know to be passionate about student success, as well as the CFO. You listen to their perspectives on the project and come to understand that while they are excited about the potential, they have concerns about the process, institutional readiness, and this vendor's ability to deliver. In the meeting on Tuesday, you listen to the conversation and ask a few clarifying questions:

- Does the vendor have references for other similar institutions who have improved student outcomes with this software and how did they implement it?

- What is the total cost and, given that this would normally require an RFP, is there a contract vehicle that could be used in lieu of an RFP?

- Does the vendor have experience integrating with Moodle?

- What innovative approaches has the vendor seen with encouraging faculty to grade frequently enough to provide meaningful analysis?

- What does a typical implementation timeline look like for institutions who have improved student outcomes and how long does it take for outcomes to measurably improve?

Toward the end of the meeting, you indicate that your team has done some quick research and that with more time (i.e. invite me sooner to the meeting next time), you could arrange some calls with interdisciplinary teams at institutions that have successfully implemented as well as some that have struggled with or abandoned the project. The associate provost and dean of students enthusiastically support this idea and volunteer to help you organize the effort. The president smiles. The only person leaving the room unhappy is the salesperson.

18 months later: *The project moves ahead with an interdisciplinary team that you co-lead with the associate provost and dean of students. The focus has shifted from software implementation to improvement of student academic outcomes. The faculty senate drafted and ratified a grading standard that provides more timely feedback to students in Moodle about their performance. The institution did a quick review of alternative solutions and found that the original product was a good enough fit for the institution, was relatively low-cost, and could be easily and quickly purchased using a MHEC contract. The president and provost will be presenting the preliminary positive results at the HLC conference in a vendor sponsored session. They have, for the first time, invited you to go (just in case anyone asks any technical questions). The 35 students who were saved through a platform-initiated intervention re-enroll for the following fall. They are happy and so are their families.*

SCENARIO 2: THE ANNUAL BUDGET CUT

Synopsis: The Annual Budget Cut

As happens every year, the institution has asked all departments to cut 5% from their budget – including IT. Your costs to maintain the current level of services will increase by at least 12%.

As happens every year, the institution has asked all departments to cut 5% from their budget. As the CIO, you know that there is no longer 5% to cut, in fact, your actual cost to maintain the current level of service will be an increase of at least 12%. Any cuts simply will make things worse. You are also aware of some potential projects that the institution might do, and that IT will be expected to provide support for them but you have no resources allocated to them in your budget.

How would you react?

1. Woe is me.
2. Let's be rational about IT.
3. Let's work with those that will be impacted.
4. Let's do this right.

1. **Woe is me.** You find the 5% cut somewhere, even though you are not happy about it. Your vacant position will not be filled. You do not renew your maintenance agreement on an older system, figuring that it is lightly used and if a problem does arise, it will not be unmanageable. You defer maintenance on a physical device that is end-of-life, figuring you can squeak by for one or two more years. You put your oldest network switch in the closet servicing the CFO's office. You are not happy about these decisions, but you presented scenarios to the budget committee, and now they have made their decision, so the only choice left is to comply.

18-months later: *The CIO implements the cuts that were identified. All approved renewals are paid in the first month of the budget year. Six months after the budget was released, a system went down and it just happened to be one of the ones where the maintenance was terminated. The outage happened at a critical point in a research project, and it cannot be restored without the latest version of the software which you no longer have access to. You have lost personnel, who took positions paying significantly more than you do because no raises were given. Several directors are livid when they find out there was no maintenance agreement purchased, and all point to the IT department as the culprit. In addition, the physical device has failed, the company will not support it, and as a result the students cannot access a key service for almost a week while an emergency procurement is done to acquire and install new equipment. No one is happy.*

2. Let's be rational about IT. You run the numbers and show the CFO the imbalance between the IT department's spending (as is necessary in your opinion) and the revenue that is projected. You clearly demonstrate how special IT is to the entire institution, and that any cuts to IT are really cuts to the institution itself – everyone knows this. The CFO nods her head in agreement, and you think you have avoided the looming 5% cut.

    18-months later: It turns out the CFO thinks that IT always has their hands out and that the argument you made is no different than the 'whining' arguments three other department heads also made. The CFO has the president's ear and, despite appearing to agree with you, recommended to the president that the cuts be implemented as originally presented. When the budgets came out, a 5% cut had been made that had no input from you. Service contracts can no longer be cancelled, and payments are due. The vendors are not willing to negotiate as services have already been used. You are forced to cut office expenses, meaning a vacant position is left unfilled, no professional development is provided for staff, no travel, no capacity to buy new parts to replace failing ones. You have spent the last 18 months lurching from one emergency to another, robbing Peter to pay Paul. All of this contributes to an unplanned reduction of service to the institution, and negatively impacts the morale of IT staff (some of whom immediately start looking for a new position).

3. Let's work with those that will be impacted. You reach out to key department leads to engage them in conversation about potential cuts that you might make, and the impact those cuts would have on the end users. Mutual understandings are reached as services are flagged to be terminated, reduced, or maintained as is. In some cases, there were offers to share the costs of maintaining a particular system which were helpful to the IT department. As a result, our CIO is confident that the budget is now balanced, and that IT is in a good position for the upcoming year.

    18-months later: At first, things went well. While a researcher did complain about one of the systems that was cut, the provost addressed the issue and made it clear that the decision was made jointly. However, the dean of students took a new position at another institution. The new dean of students is not interested in honoring prior, undocumented promises, and states that his budget does not have these costs in it (which it does not, as this was not an agreement that involved the budget office). Further, it starts the new relationship off on a sour note. The provost encounters challenges of their own, and "forgets" about funds promised to you due to other priorities that arose.

4. Let's do this right. You have taken the long-term approach. Our CIO started working on this issue long before the mandatory budget cuts were proposed. Relationships were built with key players at the cabinet level, the budget committee, and others. Trust has been created with the IT team, and there is institutional recognition of the value provided by IT services. While cuts are not desired, everyone has already identified where they would be able to sacrifice services if it comes to that.

    18-months later: Our final possible outcome is that when the budget committee next meets, there is a general tone of support for IT. Several members make it clear that cuts to IT would have an impact well beyond IT that would be detrimental to institutional goals. The CFO and budget officer do not see IT as a cost center, they understand the broader impact and appreciate that the budget committee is looking

closely at the services to make sure they are needed and align with the institution's mission, vision, and values. In the end, IT terminates redundant services, implements plans to sunset other services in a year, funding changes are implemented within the budget, and IT is exempted from the mandatory cuts. While it is not ideal, everyone feels ownership in the decisions made and supports the actions taken.

SCENARIO 3: THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGE – STAFF

One of your two enterprise DBA's retired, creating a need to fill that position. That request is denied by the deputy vice president of administration, citing that no new staff positions are going to be filled until the new vice president is named. The national search for the new vice president is just getting underway.

Here are some of the things that you immediately think about:

- This position supports system-wide, aging, student information and financial systems.

- You know that this decision will result in longer service delivery times. Currently the team processes about ten tickets a day on top of the routine maintenance, emergency patching, and support tasks.

- There is a higher outage risk because one staff member cannot keep up with the daily maintenance tasks.

- With only one person who has access to the system, you know it will take a longer time to recover from an outage.

- Policy will not let you rehire a retired staff member as a consultant until at least 6 months have passed.

- A typical high-level administrator search has taken 4-6 months to fill recently.

How would you react?

1. Accept and Pray.

2. Chicken Little.

3. What's in it for you.

4. Let's do this...right.

1. **Accept and Pray.** You know how risky it is, but what else can you do? Trying to go around this person will just likely get you fired and still will not get you the person you need. You assign other staff that have done DBA work in the past to support the primary person. First and foremost, put a hold on all changes to tables, schemas. Have your current DBA ensure that your backups are functioning properly, and that the data is protected. If possible, automate the process. If your current DBA has the time, have your current DBA begin working on monitoring and trouble shooting.

18-months later: The search took about four months, with another month for the new VP to move, settle in, and start deciding to fill positions. Your first DBA search failed and so it took eight weeks to fill the position with a relatively inexperienced DBA. You had several minor outages because the supporting DBAs skills were pretty rusty, and they did not follow current procedures. You had one major outage at finals time, of course, due to a misapplied emergency security patch that was performed by the primary DBA after a 12-hour regular shift. It delayed grade entry by a week and all payments, including payroll for five days. IT's reputation has taken a significant hit, and your primary DBA has submitted their resignation and filed a complaint with HR about the extensive amount of overtime they were forced to do.

Chicken Little. You immediately start telling everyone the sky is falling and that all the institution's systems are going to crash if you cannot fill this position. You reach out to the provost and

the president, and they tell the deputy VP to let you fill this position. You are happy.

18-months later: Your first search failed because when an experienced DBA counter-offered asking for $2,000 more the deputy VP denied it citing lack of funds in your budget. You had no political capital left to bypass the deputy VP a second time. The second search was filled with a much less experienced DBA. You still experienced small outages due to mistakes made by the inexperienced DBA. You now realize you have made an enemy in the administration department, and you hear rumors the new VP is listening to the deputy complaining about you.

3. **What's in it for you?** You reach out and set up a meeting with the deputy VP for next week. You then write up some key talking points that you can share with him.

The legislators have been talking a lot about the cost of higher education, and the deputy VP has submitted several requests for reports to present to them about how much the institution is doing to keep the costs as affordable as possible.

You note that it is primarily the DBAs who develop the queries for these and all other reporting from both systems allowing the institution to present data that also ties to student success.

If you are allowed to fill this position, you offer to put the deputy on the VIP list in the ticketing system, ensuring all his requests get the highest response time. Only the president, VPs, and provost are on this list.

In your meeting with the deputy, you convince them to let you fill the position.

18-months later: You were able to successfully hire a skilled DBA with the deputy VP approving the counteroffer. The transition went relatively smoothly, and the new staff member has identified some updates and improvement opportunities in your standard procedures. There has been minimal

downtime, and the DBA team has solidified well. You did start getting requests from other deputy VPs to be added to the VIP list and this has caused a few issues across the entire IT department. One team missed a request from the president due to a flood of VIP tickets. You are now having to consider creating a VVIP list in your system.

4. Let's do this right. The first thing you do is pull your core team together to work up a game plan.
   - You assign one team member to develop a staffing history that depicts how you have, over time reduced the DBA team from five positions to two utilizing automation, moving positions to higher demand areas, and closing some open positions to cover budget reductions. They are also tasked to reach out to fellow MHEC institutions and discuss their DBA staffing strategies.
   - Another team member is assigned to develop a pictograph of all the systems linked to the Oracle databases.
   - You also assign someone to develop alternative methods for filling the DBA role including multiple options for consulting services and develop a cost/risk analysis for each.
   - You put together a presentation using the information the team developed and focused on how each of the systems identified help deliver the mission and vision of the institution.
   - You look and find a small window of time with the president, provost, and deputy VP and ask the president's administration to tentatively hold that slot for you. You then set up a meeting with the deputy VP prior to that meeting.

You meet with the deputy VP, present your information, and ask them if they would be okay with you presenting this to the president and

provost. i.e., they get cover for approving moving forward or shutting you down. After meeting with the president, provost, and deputy VP, the president decides he still wants to wait for the new VP to make any long-term decisions, but given the importance of the systems, authorizes you to contract one of the slightly higher cost/lower risk vendors to cover the position. The president also thanked the deputy VP for pulling this together for them.

18-months later: You were able to get a consultant on-site within two weeks. The consultant had some specialization in tuning databases and was able to get a noticeable improvement in response time on the attached applications. Your primary DBA picked up some new skills and together they were able to update your procedures. The deputy VP was named the VP and approved your request to fill the role permanently. You have developed a level of trust and have built a good working relationship with them. You keep hearing comments from faculty and staff about how much better the systems are working.

SCENARIO 4: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The institution is hearing many complaints about IT services. The students have escalated their complaints to the provost and chancellor, who are now looking to IT to address the student experience NOW. The top complaints presented to you are:

- Wireless is 'garbage.'
- I'm a professional gamer and your NAT (network translation address) policy is denying me income.
- The SIS doesn't work well on mobile.
- Printing is a nightmare.
- Can't install my favorite app (TikTok, Adobe Flash player, Java).

- I am failing my class because I can't access the required software.
- Stop texting me (unless I want you to text me).
- Email? You're so OG (old-school).
- I hate Duo, why do we have to use multi-factor authentication (MFA)? (Usually, followed by please protect my data).
- Why can't my friends get on our Wi-Fi?
- Why can't I get help at 2 a.m.? That's when I do my 'homework'!

Here are some of the things that you immediately think about:

- You have limited support services and are having trouble filling student help desk roles. Due to lack of staffing and funding, you have cut the help desk hours down to 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Most systems have a separate log in and only some have MFA. The SIS's mobile application is a bolt-on that doesn't support MFA, so the decision was made to not provide access to sensitive areas via the app.
- Each department has implemented their own printing policy and there are six different applications being used across the institution.
- The IT department has deployed Twilio to do text messaging for the various applications at the institution. However, some systems have their own built-in system and there is no institution-wide policy on how texting is handled. Twilio just notified you that new federal regulations could mean penalties for complaints regarding unwanted texting.
- Microsoft just announced they were going to charge for storage over a certain amount. If we don't cut storage, it could cost the institution an extra $35,000 per year. There is a significant amount of usage marked as unread in student emails.

- Many faculty have not significantly changed the design of their courses to support hyflex/hybrid/distance delivery. There are a lot of underserved households in our area who do not have enough bandwidth for high quality videos or streaming.

- Each course has a code/app from the publisher, delivered/supported by the bookstore with costs hidden at the time of registration. No advance notice is given of requirements for technology. The IT department becomes aware of the need when student requests slam their ticket queue to get added to the lab systems or students are having issues getting it to work on their own systems.

How would you react?

1. It works for me!
2. Whack-a-Mole.
3. Let's work this out.
4. Let's do this…right.

1. It works for me! We assume that students will never be satisfied, that they are wrong and start deflecting the issues. When pressed by the dean of students, we update various systems, call our internet service provider demanding improvements in their service, turn off ports and virtual private networks, install modern anti-virus tools, and make other tweaks in the hopes that something works. You also implement storage restrictions on your Microsoft products.

   18-months later: The students are even less happy than they were, and the provost and chancellor are livid. Three faculty members have filed complaints that they lost critical research data due to the storage restrictions. A local vendor has started making in-roads to outsource the IT shop.

2. **Whack-A-Mole:** We work with the faculty and try to fix individual IT systems. We set up an

emergency call center for evening calls, installed extra wireless access points in the residence halls, and asked our vendor what they were doing to add MFA to the SIS mobile application. You disabled most SMS messaging because you are not meeting the regulation requirements.

18 months later: The list of complaints really hasn't changed. Even though you can show some improvements, the student experience does not change, and surveys do not reflect any improvements. Your emergency support desk is often closed due to a lack of staff, and you have a lot of complaints from those who now must work split shifts to cover the hours. Most students did not receive an emergency weather alert via text and there have been a lot of complaints from students and parents that the institution doesn't care about student safety. Your president is unhappy, and the student services staff see IT as unhelpful, at best. The students still complain regularly.

3. **Let's work this out:** You call a meeting with the dean of students and IR, enquiring about existing survey resources to start baselining student perceptions of IT and establishing long-term trending capabilities. From that conversation, you launch the EDUCAUSE Student IT Survey. Early results point to wireless and printing as the hot button issues. You begin to explore solutions in those areas, asking the CFO to add funding to the IT budget to pay for these systems. Some funding is provided, and some small successes are found with improvements in networking and a single printing solution across the institution. You assign staff to become department liaisons to provide help and guidance to faculty as they explore new electronic course materials.

   18-months later: Some improvement is seen in the student surveys because of the progress made on the hot-button issues. However, overall
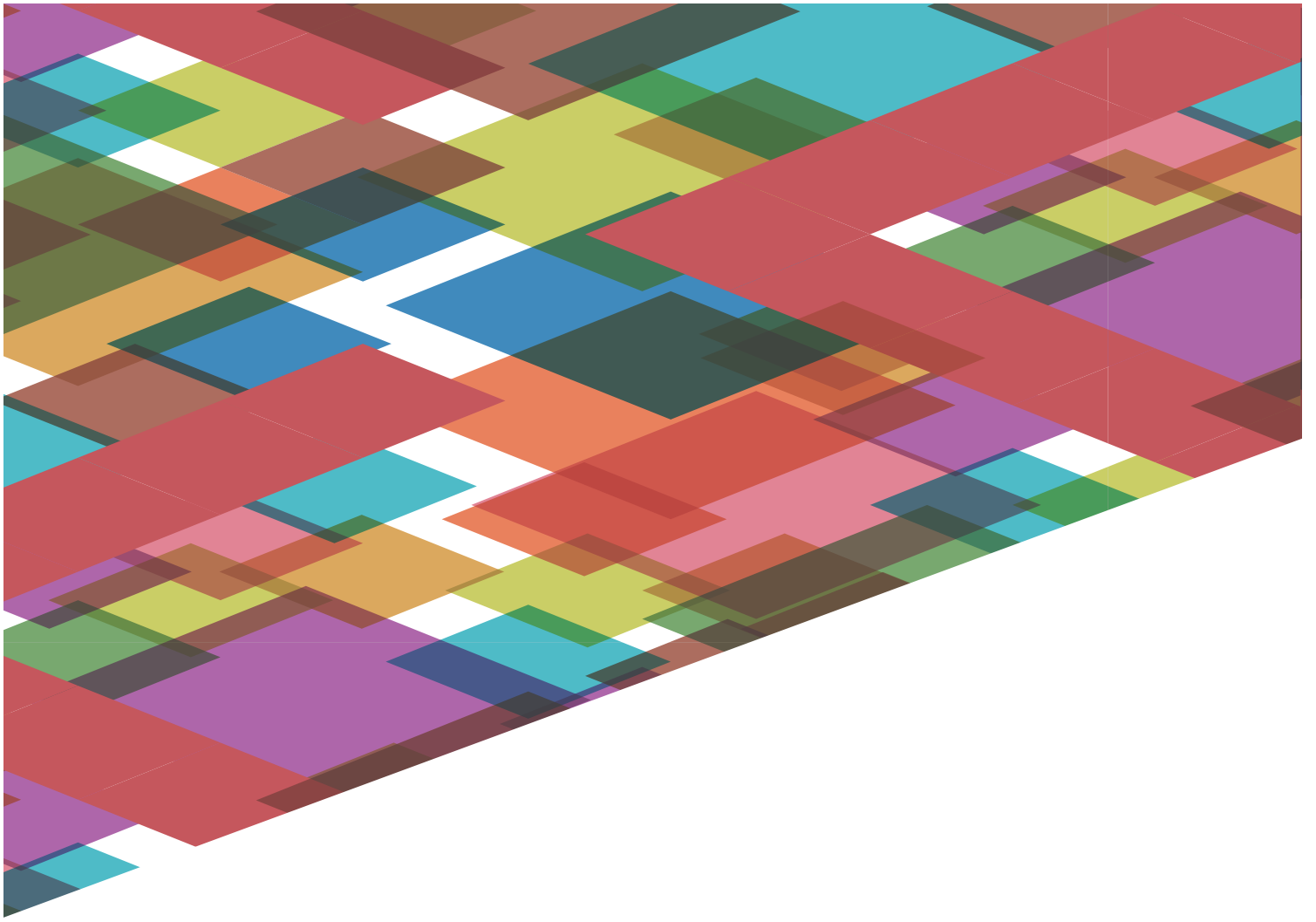
satisfaction remains lower than the institution would like. Your liaisons were able to identify several new software products and were able to get them installed on the lab computers prior to students needing it. The students, academic staff, and president appreciate the progress made, but think that there is more that could and should be done.

4. **Let's do this…right:** You reach out to your student organizations and ask them to work in partnership with you. You call a meeting with the student senate officers in which you express a desire to better understand and collaboratively prioritize student concerns. From those conversations you work with IR and the student senate to launch the EDUCAUSE Student IT Survey. Initial findings indicate that internet bandwidth and printing are the most pressing challenges for students. You discuss student willingness to start (or increase) a student technology fee and establish a governance process where students direct the funding priorities from that fee. You open communication, listening to the student's struggles and challenges before sharing your own. You begin working on the areas of the most concern as a team, working together to educate and remediate technical barriers. An off-hand comment by one of your liaisons gave one faculty member an idea to create a new course to teach students how to identify misinformation campaigns in social media and dangers that can have on a democratic society. You assign your help desk manager to coordinate as task force with other institutions in your system, looking into a consolidated after-hours outsourced help desk for everyone.

18-months later: The partnerships have continued, and the IT department makes improvements regularly. The students vote to increase the student fees to help ensure that modern technology and processes support them, sharing in the responsibility. Focus groups and surveys help identify where the greatest needs are and provide specific feedback on those needs. The users feel like they are a part of the solution and are helping make the necessary decisions. Communication helps set expectations for all parties and promotes understanding of what the services provided SHOULD BE. With the liaison's help, most software/courseware required are entered into the SIS with the bookstore and IT getting notices of changes in time to make the necessary adjustments needed. The social media course was successful, with all seats filled in all the semesters it was offered. The department is planning to expand to be able to offer a certificate program in social media. The system office has offered to provide some funding support for a systemwide after-hours help desk and the task force is putting the final changes on the proposal. The proposal focuses on improving student success, not delivery of specific services. The president is proud the institution is considered a leader in this effort and is supportive regarding covering the cost portion of the proposal. The president and provost are incredibly happy with the overall progress, and surveys show student satisfaction with your technology is high.