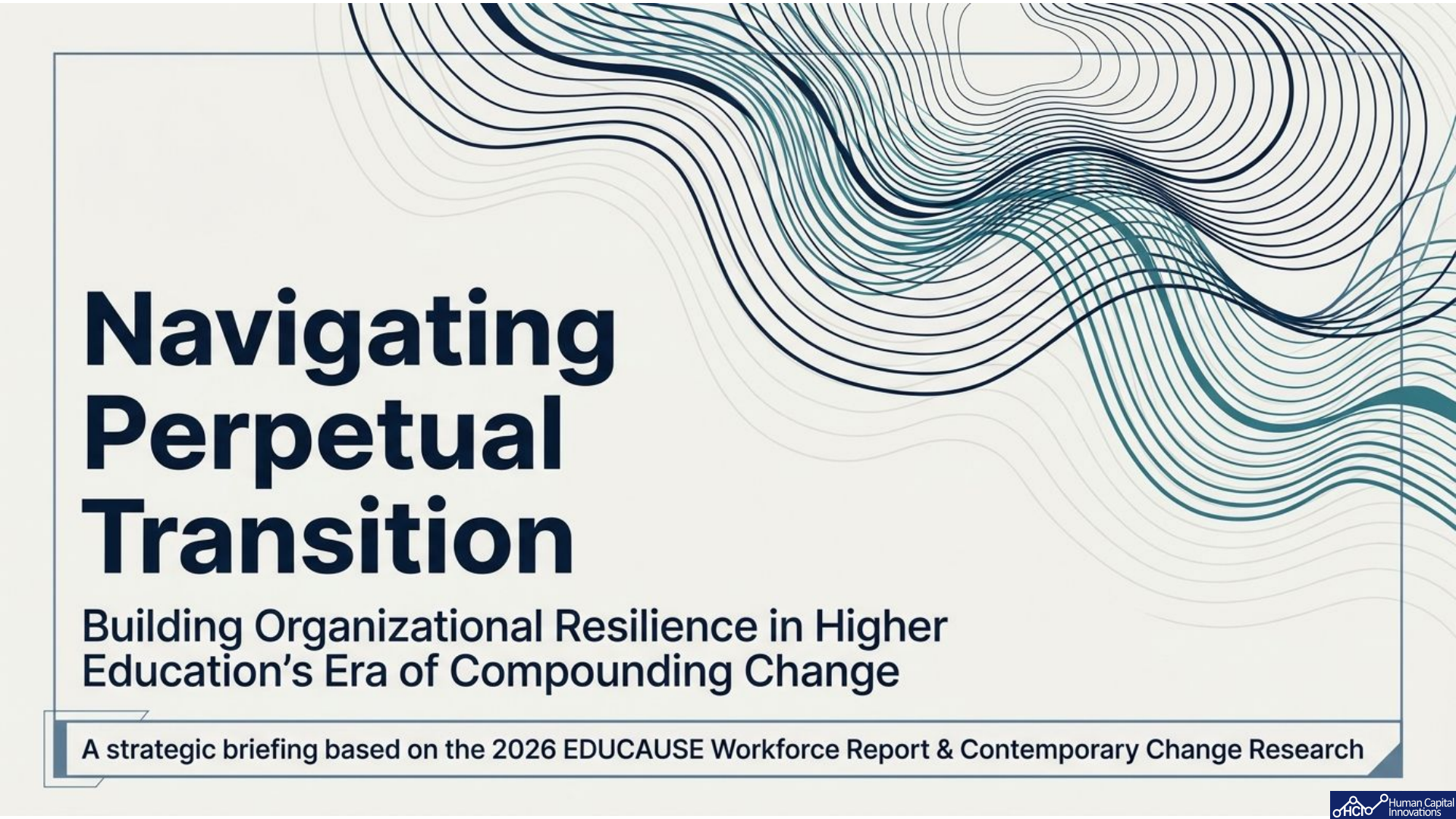


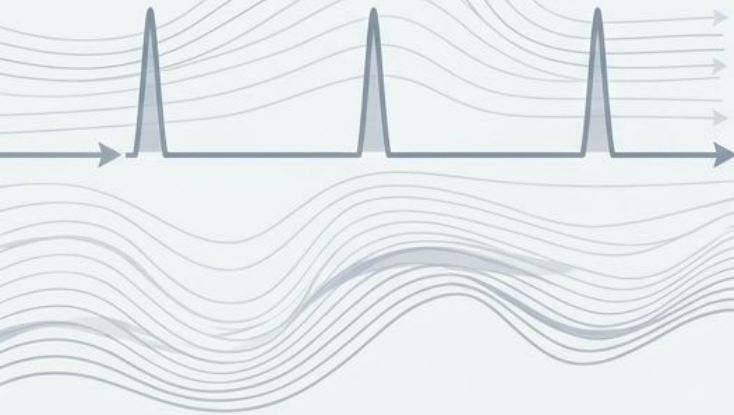


Navigating Perpetual Transition

Building Organizational Resilience in Higher
Education's Era of Compounding Change

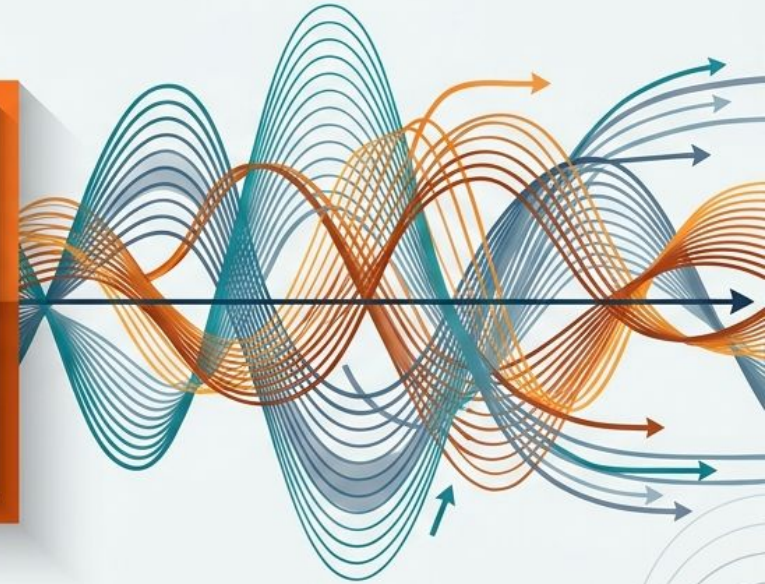
A strategic briefing based on the 2026 EDUCAUSE Workforce Report & Contemporary Change Research

The Episodic Era



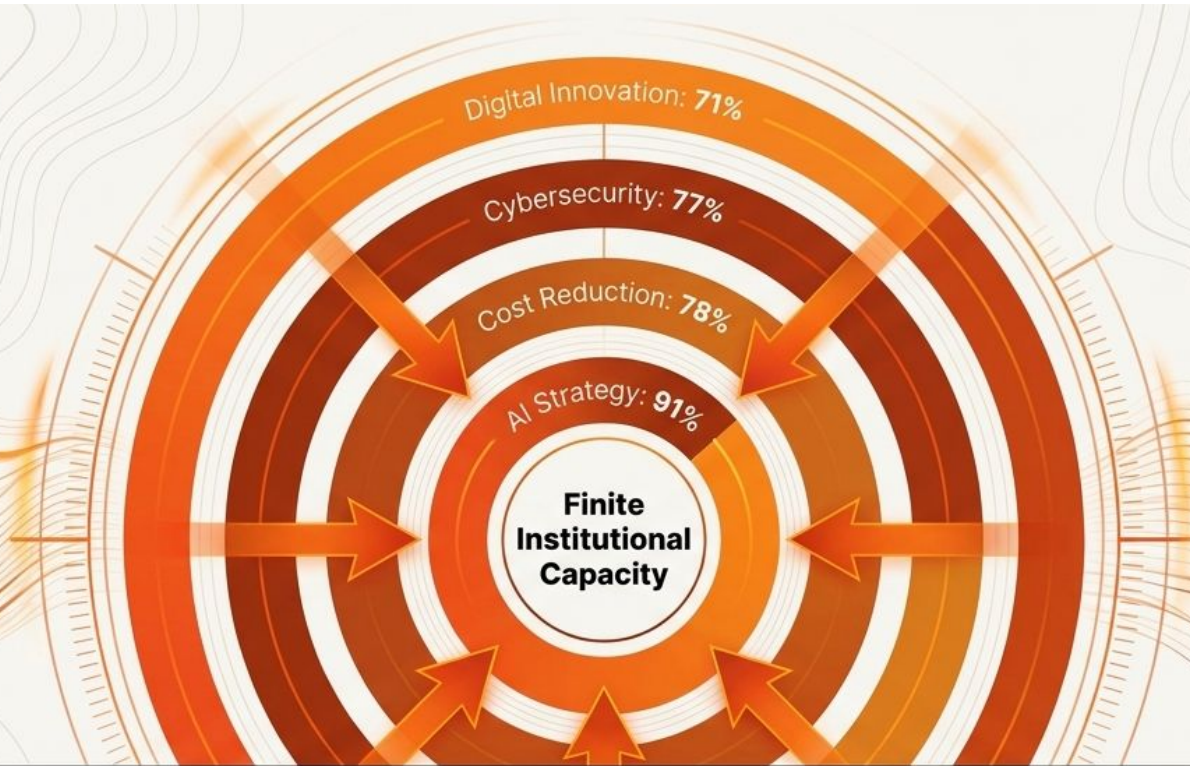
Focus: Predictable, linear
problem-solving.

The Polycrisis Reality



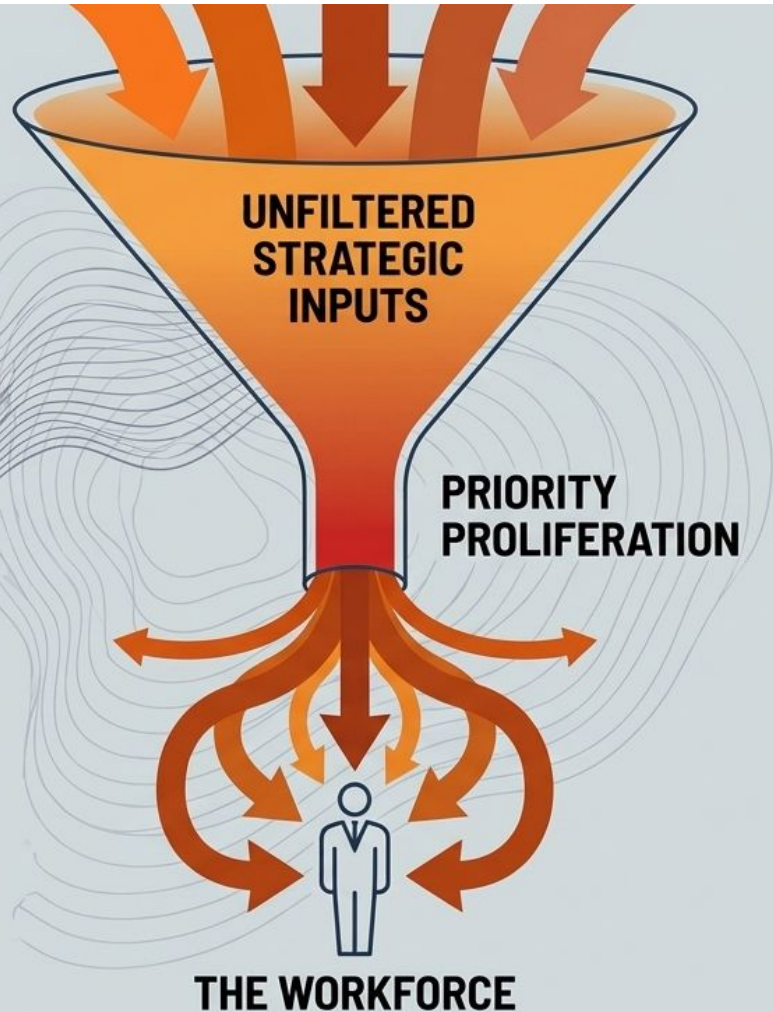
Focus: Continuous, layered,
self-reinforcing adaptation.

63% → of higher education professionals report **substantial strategic shifts** in just the past 2-3 years, driven simultaneously by **AI (61%)**, **financial constraints (46%)**, and **political conditions (43%)**.



The Amplification Effect

These drivers do not exist in silos; they collide. AI promises long-term efficiency but demands immediate, heavy upfront investment in infrastructure and governance precisely when cost-reduction pressures are peaking. Strategic imperatives are rapidly collapsing into operational urgency.



THE PATHOLOGY

When everything is a priority, nothing is prioritized.

INTERNALIZING STRUCTURAL FAILURE

- 69% adopting new technologies/tools
- 62% assuming new responsibilities
- 54% reorganizing roles

THE SKILLS GAP WHIPSAW

A plurality (41%) report decreased job satisfaction. Of those, a staggering 67% are actively seeking new positions (compared to just 20% whose satisfaction increased).

Institutions reduce headcount while demanding emerging specializations.



The Strategic Capacity Paradox

Institutions are demanding greater strategic agility exactly when teams have the least capacity to deliver it.
(Conservation of Resources Theory)

The Data Breakdown

- 50% report institutional workload challenges remain unaddressed.
- 57% shift to reactive work.
- 55% slow long-term progress.
- 43% pause or delay strategic initiatives entirely.

The Inversion Effect: Senior leaders face the highest strain (84% of C-level executives report excessive workload vs. 71% of managers), threatening institutional succession planning.

The Engaged Retainee (Intrinsic)

- Meaningful work and impact:
- Work-life balance:
- Collaborative culture:

42%

33%

33%

Burnout Triggers

The Flight Risk (Extrinsic)

- Compensation: 48%
- Career advancement: 44%

The Great Hunkering

33% are considering new roles, but only 12% are actively searching due to external market constraints.



“Everyone feels like if they were to leave, they’re just burdening the people on their team... because the institution isn’t going to let us refill their position.”

The Pivot: From Coping to Organizational Resilience

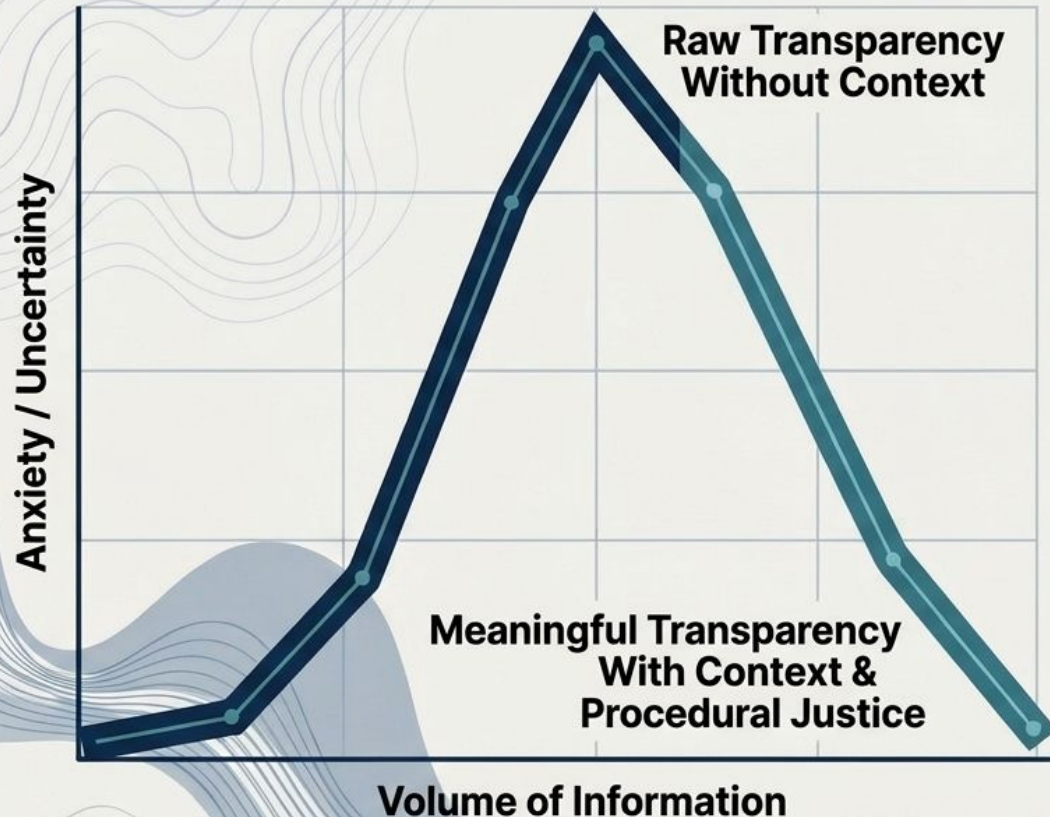


	Workload Management	Workload Governance
The Assumption	Assumes infinite capacity elasticity (staff just need to be more efficient).	Treats capacity as a finite, zero-sum strategic institutional asset.
The Mechanism	Wellness apps, time management seminars, individual resilience training.	Portfolio management, capacity-informed priority setting, explicit authorization to decline work.

Real-World Application: Duke University's Service Load Balancing

Department chairs audit annual commitments. If thresholds are exceeded, chairs must formally reassign work, provide release time, or block new requests.

The Sensemaking Curve



The Transparency Paradox

"Our campus has been very transparent about upcoming budget changes. But it means everybody's left in a suspended state of terror..."

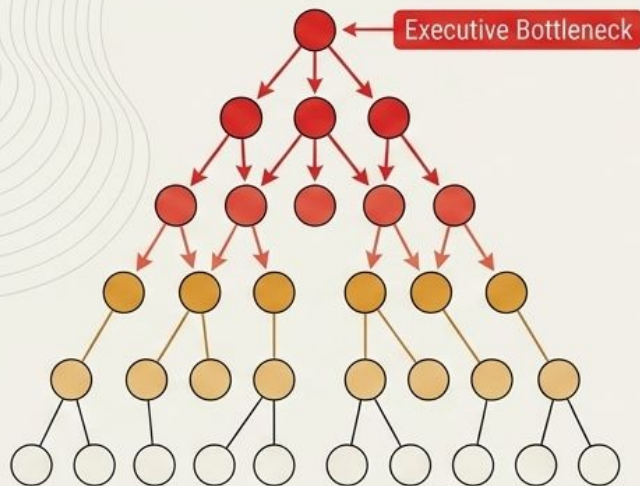
The Blueprint: Procedural Justice

Fair processes matter as much as favorable outcomes.

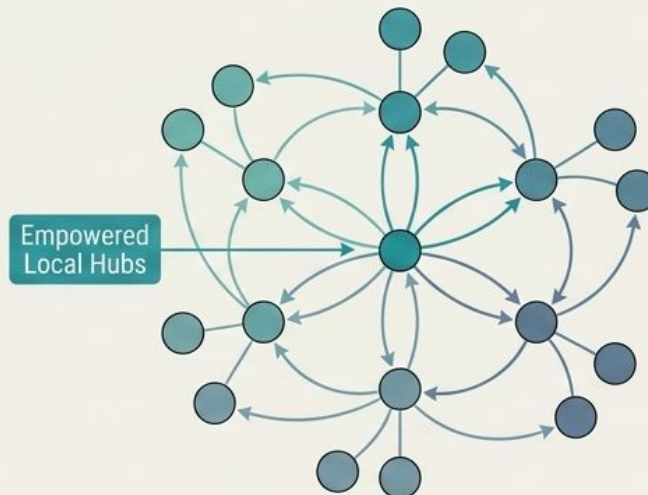
Example: University of Virginia used structured Prosci change methodology to close a \$2.1B gap, certifying 54 employees to lead the change.

Result: \$82.1M saved over 4 years while simultaneously improving staff satisfaction scores.

TRADITIONAL HIERARCHY: CENTRALIZED BOTTLENECKS



CONSTELLATION MODEL: DISTRIBUTED AUTHORITY



Moving from bottlenecks to empowered networks

REDEFINING CENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP

Central leadership establishes the boundaries, principles, and resource allocations. Local teams dictate the how.

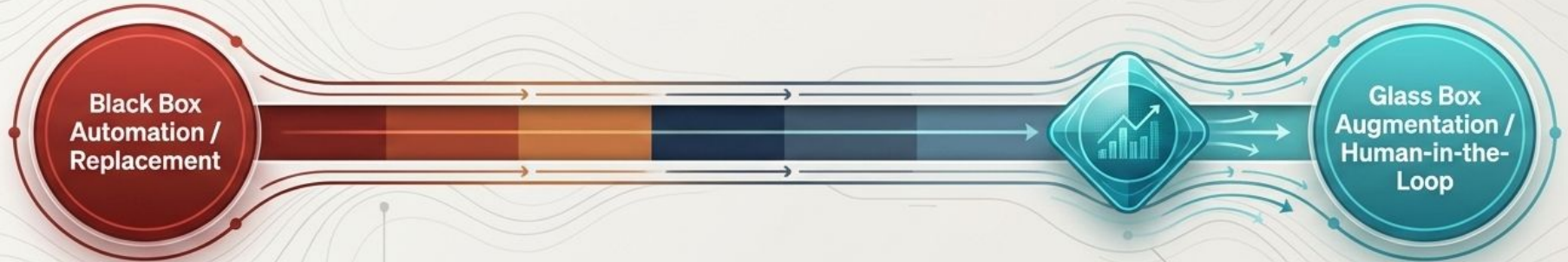
THE IMPACT DATA

Organizations investing in distributed change leadership achieve 6.4x higher success rates. Microsoft scaled from sluggish adoption to a 450% increase in tool adoption by certifying 25,000 employees as local change leaders.

HIGHER ED APPLICATION

Berklee College of Music's curriculum redesign. Central set the credit budgets and principles; local departments designed the pathways. Result: 23 new degrees launched in just 18 months.

The Preparation Gap: 73% of teams must support AI strategy, yet only 28% feel prepared.



The Solution: Human-Centered Design

AI tools reduce burnout only when they enhance professional agency.

Co-design AI workflows with end users, not over them.



Case Study: Georgia Tech's Jill Watson

TAs and instructors co-designed an AI to handle repetitive logistical questions.

The Result: Instructional staff spent 40% less time on administrative tasks and 40% more time on substantive pedagogical interactions and student relationship-building.



The Old Contract:
Implicit expectations of
stable roles are dead.

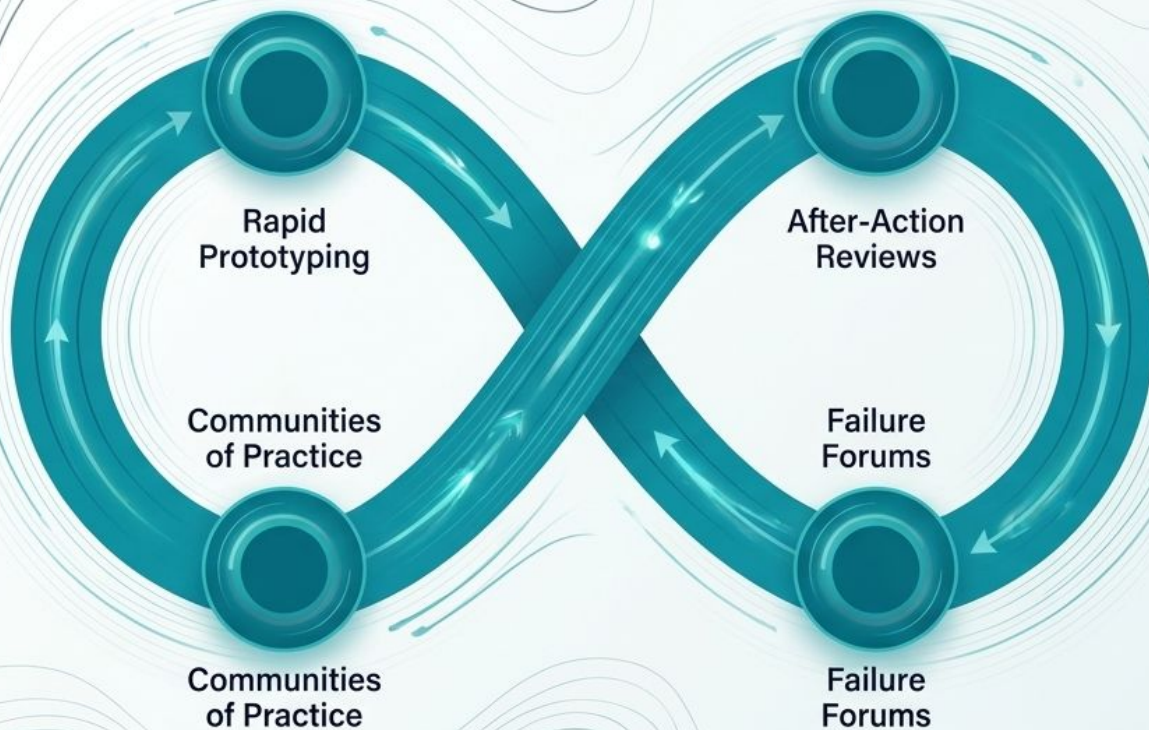
Track A: The Innovator/Expander Track

Focuses on continuous role evolution, adopting new technologies, and broad scope expansion.

Track B: The Core Contributor/Stabilizer Track

Rewards deep mastery, reliable execution, and mentorship without requiring scope expansion.

Real-World Application: Cornell University explicitly acknowledges that institutional stability requires deep-expertise stabilizers just as much as adaptable innovators through parallel advancement tracks.

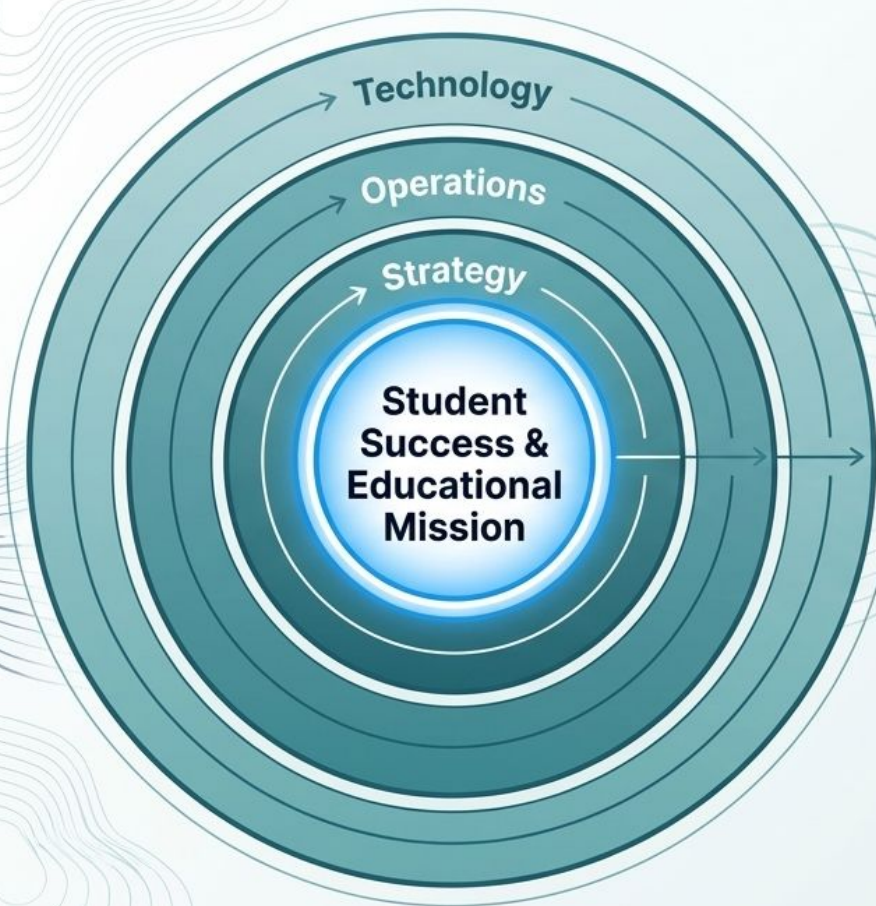


Dynamic Learning Ecosystems

In perpetual transition, static policy manuals and knowledge management fail. Institutions need dynamic, horizontal learning ecosystems to survive.

Spotlight: California State University System

Implemented a 23-campus Community of Practice (CoP) network spanning 50,000 faculty/staff. By enabling horizontal peer learning over top-down training, system leadership reduced emergency implementation time by 40%.



The Strategic Imperative

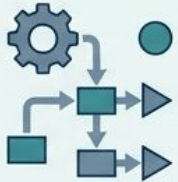
Lead with mission, not mechanics. The “Why” must always center on educational impact to secure professional buy-in.

- **Focus on student success** drives strategy confidence (49%), beating clear vision (27%) or execution (14%).

Proof Point: Western Governors University

WGU frames every technological shift through direct student impact (e.g., asynchronous pathways for working adults). Despite massive scaling from 87k to 175k students amid disruption, they maintain 82% internal favorability.

Protect Strategic Capacity



Implement explicit workload governance and sunset lower-value initiatives to preserve bandwidth for AI and structural transitions. Treat capacity as a zero-sum asset.

Invest in Meta-Competencies



Shift L&D from technical button-pushing to human-centered meta-skills: adaptability, complex collaboration, and sensemaking.

Anchor in Mission



Never announce an operational or technological shift without first mapping its direct impact on student outcomes.

In an era of permanent transition, capability and capacity are the strategy.