

The Winds are Blowing Down the Door

Preparing for Dramatic Changes

By Joe Whitefield

[Ed. Note: In the spirit of change discussed here, the COIN Toss column has been renamed Enabling Leadership, to more accurately describe the important leadership issues presented by author Joe Whitefield.]

Last summer, while participating in both the APPA 2013 conference and the Senior Facilities Officer Summit in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I was somewhat taken aback by the several presentations speaking to the current and impending changing environment of higher education. I understood there are many forces of change at the door of higher education, but I have been underestimating the magnitude of the forces and the potential impacts of the changes.

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

What changes you ask? For starters, how about dramatic shifts in:

- the demographics of students and workforce—the millennials are here
- enrollment trends (from increasing to decreasing) for many institutions
- technologies that slay the traditional classroom lecture format on campus
- technologies that undercut the very need for facilities that support traditional classroom formats
- the expectations of students regarding the employment prospects of their education
- the expectations of employers regarding the skills of graduating students
- increased requirements relating to student retention and graduation rates
- financial models and numerous revenue source issues

In short, everything appears to be on the table. Long-held beliefs concerning the need for a college degree and the costs and benefits thereof are being re-thought and challenged by all. Growing student enrollments are no longer considered a sure thing for many institutions. And, of course, all of this impacts the demand for and expectations of the facilities and the facilities management organization.

EMERGE STRONG

Every institution is now grappling with these new emerging paradigms. Undoubtedly, some will be progressive and responsive, emerging stronger in this environment. Others will be more reactionary, suffer from poor timing, and

have a mighty struggle on their hands. Regardless of where your institution is as a whole, it is time for strong facilities managers to rethink the immediate future of the facilities and the organizations they manage during these times of change.

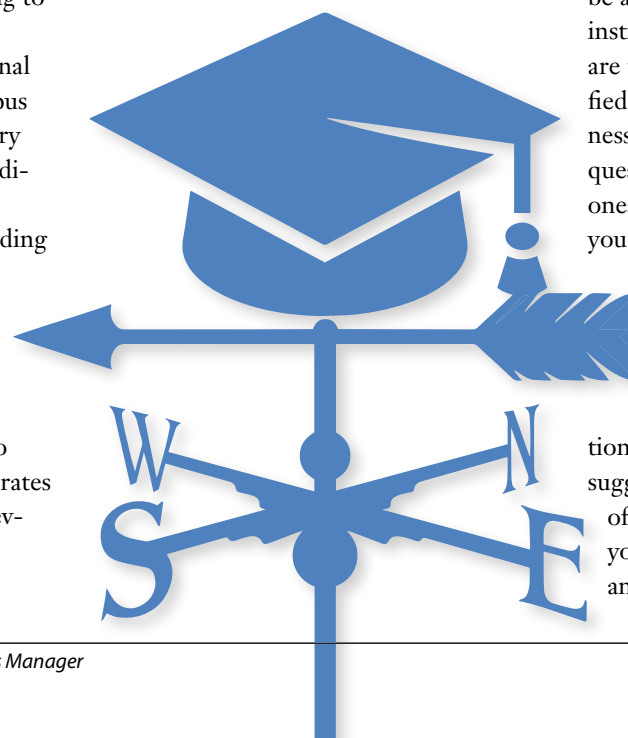
In addressing the overall topic of the changing environment in higher education stemming from disruptive innovation at the APPA conference, speaker Ian Jukes displayed the following quote from Jack Welch:

When the rate of change outside an organization is greater than the rate of change inside an organization, the end is in sight.

Based on the emerging trends, the predicted outcome of this quote may not be an exaggeration for many educational institutions. Given that, how effectively are the elements of change being identified and how effective is the responsiveness of your organization? Difficult questions, I know, but very important ones nonetheless. If you haven't already, you should initiate some type of exercise at your institution to begin exploring these issues.

TRADITION...

In order to add a sense of direction for any exercise of this type, I would suggest you begin with two major areas of focus for both your institution and your facilities organization—**tradition** and **value**. It begins with lead-off ques-



tion: does your institution have enough tradition to support itself through the changing environment? Traditions are powerful foundations for many institutions. They can provide the structural mass on which so much institutional success is built.

Perhaps your institution has enough of the right type of tradition to buttress it from the impacts of oncoming change—perhaps not. If not, the second question becomes even more important: does your institution or organization provide enough value to support itself through the changing environment? The value questions are being asked of every institution and every department therein. At a time when rising costs of education are evident, the benefits are no longer simply assumed. To be valuable, the benefits must be real, recognizable, quantifiable, and worth the costs. This applies to the institution as a whole and to the facilities

department in particular. Even if tradition is an insulator for you, it should not be a reason to forgo the value portions of any self assessment.

Interestingly, these questions were posed by Duane Hickling to a group of senior facilities officers at the SFO Summit. Their challenge was to consider a list of potential metrics that institutions should be monitoring in these areas. I recommend this useful exercise for all facilities managers at their current institution. These metrics should be useful in quantifying the forces of change and provide guidance on responsive measures of the institution. Consider the functionality, efficiency, condition, and costs associated with your facilities and space management programs.

Proper metrics should help determine which areas of the organization are currently contributing to the success of the institution and which ones are not.

And which areas of the organization can stand up to the impending impacts of the forces of change that are at the door. Make it relevant. Ian Jukes puts it this way: “The continued existence of the current system is not assured.” Don’t get in a position of simply doing the wrong thing well, because “there is little interest or market for obsolete excellence.”

One final thought on the need to understand the changing paradigms and prepare for their impacts. It will not be business as usual. The consequences for many will be more severe and even detrimental. So, read more, network and collaborate more, think harder, and stay with it. That is the nature of change; once you have figured it out, it changes. ☛

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