

PwC focus on Education

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The nature of education is rapidly changing – not only in how it is delivered but also the role of universities in society.

Universities staying relevant in the digital age

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Globally and locally, universities are competing for students, academics and funding. Only those that stay relevant and leverage new digital capabilities will benefit in the digital era. This is an area that local institutions can lead change and harness the significant benefits that can be realized through focusing on the digitisation of the delivery of education, research and supplementary activities.

These are some of the highlights from PwC's paper titled *'The 2018 digital university: staying relevant in the digital age'* released recently. Many universities are developing digital strategies and business models in response to the substantial shift towards using new technology. According to the paper, some institutions don't have the vision, capability or commitment to implement these strategies effectively. Although some universities invest heavily in IT systems these systems don't always deliver the expected benefits and outcomes due to a disconnect between the implementation team and the users of the systems.

Staying relevant in the digital age requires a strategic vision, driven by the institutions senior management and supported by staff and students of all departments. It calls for coming together to turn challenges into opportunities.

The advent of digital has changed the game

Advances in technology and digitisation is impacting and changing education and academia and the change is set to continue. Students are bringing their own expectations of digital to universities. The value proposition for universities is changing and this means that employability and the student experience is more critical than it has ever been.

Societal attitudes towards how education should be delivered has evolved at a faster pace than we've witnessed in decades. Academics are therefore being challenged to consider new methods of teaching that is underpinned by digital technology. Although Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are continuously being expanded, this is still being used far less than expected due to the plethora of courses available, and oftentimes not sufficiently tailored to meet the specific needs.

As a generation that has more knowledge and experience of digital than any previously, students expect to be taught and to learn using methods that suit their personal preferences and a pace that they have chosen. Nowadays, students take on new tools and apps at a pace that even the most agile university can struggle to keep up with.

The power of emerging technologies

New and emerging technologies such as smart mobile phones, wearable devices and sensors, cloud-based IT, advanced analytics and the Internet of Things are changing business and operating models across all sectors including higher education. These technologies present new opportunities to improve or redefine the university experience through activities including teaching and learning, research and working on complex projects with other universities and partner organisations. New ideas can also be tried out with minimum upfront investment.

Advanced analytics is also transforming what universities can do for students and lecturers. A wealth of data is now being collected from a range of internal systems and external sources such as mobile and wearable devices that can be analysed and presented back to the user in a highly interactive manner. It also enables the analysis of student progression patterns, identification of pitfalls in academic performance and student throughput in an integrated manner.

Over time, we can expect that students will be attracted to those universities that embrace the digital age. This means that being aware of new trends in emerging technologies and having the ability to harness their potential to drive improved outcomes will become a key differentiator within the education sector.

The barriers to going digital

Worldwide, there are a number of universities that are unable to respond effectively to the disruptive impact of digitisation. The PwC study puts forward a number of reasons for this:

- Understanding that universities have a new breed of customers that they need to engage with, and competitors that they need to compete with.
- An inability to simultaneously evolve existing ways of working while adding new techniques, tools and capabilities.
- A culture that inhibits the rapid development and release of new technology.
- A lack of trust in digital services and cloud technologies, or concerns about their reliability, security and resilience.

In addition to the factors listed above, another inhibitor of digital uptake in universities is digital literacy. Academics and staff can be sceptical of using tools in which they lack confidence and may be reluctant to engage in digital spaces where they feel at a disadvantage to students who have grown up around technology. Ultimately, universities have the responsibility to embrace technology, particularly when teaching, to ensure students are getting the most from new technology.

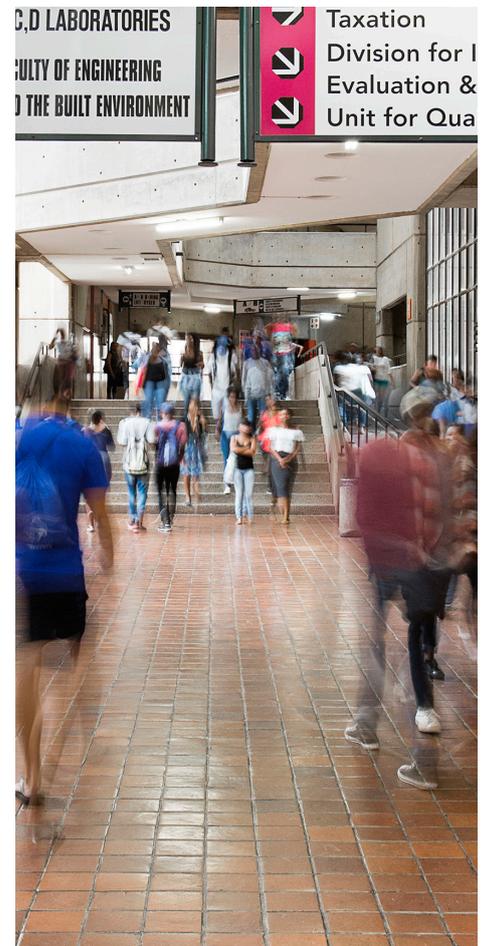
How to successfully harness digital

The paper makes four key recommendations that institutions should consider regarding the adoption of digitisation:

1. Insightful solutions can only come from collaboration. Therefore understanding that digital transformation affects every department within the institution and not just the IT department.
2. Digital activity should be linked to the university's overall vision and strategy.
3. Investing in communities should be built around willing and capable digital innovators.
4. Adopting a design approach that focuses on student's and stakeholder needs, not the institution's structure.

There are many aspects to becoming a successful digital institution, and there is not a single 'one size fits all' answer. There are a number of key themes that we see over and over again in those institutions that are leading the way on the digital

agenda. The modern university has to play a number of different roles but must also have a well-defined focus that sets it apart from the competition. Finding the right balance is the key to success. Approaching change in a proactive and positive manner will ensure success.



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