

Digital Transformation of Higher Education Institutes

Management Summary

1. Why is it relevant?

Digital transformation has had a profound impact on our society, particularly in the field of education. The need to adapt to an increasingly digital world has become crucial for organizations to thrive. Especially in higher education institutions, digital transformation plays a vital role. These institutions face the challenge of preparing students for a job market that demands strong digital skills, as well as keeping up with the forefront of research and integrating state-of-the-art techniques and processes into their academic programs. To keep up with these challenges higher education institutes need to enter a foundational strategic digital transformation process, that builds up the capabilities and needed digital resources to compete in today's educational environment.

Research into the topic has shown that the term “digital transformation” is often misinterpreted and lacks a unified understanding. This leads to institutions misusing the term for simple digitization and digitalisation initiatives whereas we understand it as a more foundational strategic process following the definition given by Gong & Ribiere:

Digital Transformation is a fundamental change process, enabled by the innovative use of technologies accompanied by the strategic leverage of key resources and capabilities, aiming to radically improve an (organizational) entity.

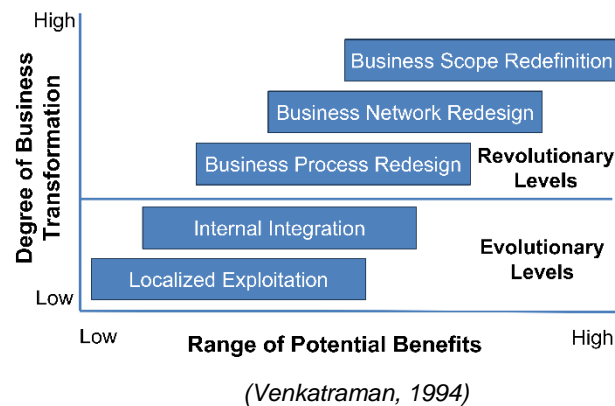
Gong & Ribiere (2023)

2. What did we research?

Comparing digital transformation initiatives among higher education institutions becomes challenging due to the frequent misuse of the term. For instance, when a university sets out to pursue digital transformation initiatives, it inevitably seeks to assess its own proposed or undertaken efforts and measure the resulting level of digital transformation maturity relative to other universities. To support higher education institutions in those endeavours, a literature review has been conducted, with the goal to compare different higher education institutions in terms of their proposed or completed digital transformation initiatives.

To do so, a total of 20 different papers concerned with digital transformation in higher education organisations were identified through a structured literature search. Those 20 papers were then reduced to a total of nine papers as only those focusing on concrete initiatives in the digital transformation area were considered further. To be able to compare the various initiatives with each other, the digital transformation initiatives were classified according to the five levels of IT-enabled business transformation which were developed by Venkatraman in 1994.

Five Levels of IT-Enabled Business Transformation



3. Results

The classification yielded results over all five levels of digital transformation which can be seen below. As many of the papers focus on proposed and future initiatives rather than already implemented ones, a distinction between current state and future potential of digital transformation has been made. All in all, at the current time that there are quite some efforts documented in the literature that we would categorize as Localized Exploitation and Internal Integration, which only focus on improving existing processes rather than leveraging the IT capabilities as an enabler of future organizational capabilities. On the other hand, some universities propose strategies reaching the highest level of IT-enabled business transformation, Business Scope Redefinition, where a redefinition of the corporate scope that is enabled and facilitated by IT functionality is undertaken. However, the highest-level initiatives of the covered organisations are only proposed and have not yet been implemented, making a definitive assertion of the effectiveness and success impossible.

