Adult Program Innovation Launch Guide

2 ways to use this practice

- Improve program development by focusing on the needs of students and the market.
- Engage staff and faculty in professional development to practice applying strategic principles to program decision-making scenarios.

Adult Program Innovation Launch Guide

Activities to Facilitate "Outside-In" Program Design

Resource in Brief

To improve program development, colleges should design new programs from the "outside-in." An outside-in strategy focuses first on the customer needs, and the greatest opportunity for institutions to provide value, rather than on current institutional capabilities. To help institutions begin adopting this strategy, this guide provides a brief presentation on the realities of outside-in program design, and a 30 minute activity to begin applying these strategies. The activity can be completed with a partner or in small groups of institutional stakeholders.

Problems Addressed

Colleges typically focus first on their capabilities and previous behavior rather than market demand and student needs when designing new programs.

Materials Needed

- EAB labor market demand profile for your state (see Step 1 of this Roadmap)
- Worksheets

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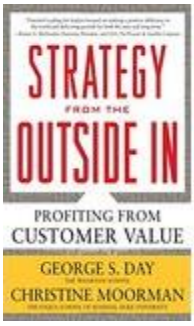
Outside-In Approach Key to Effective Program Design

Lessons from Other Industries

Outside-In Strategy Key to Success in Unpredictable Market



"Companies that continued to profit and grow throughout the boom-and-bust cycles of the last 20 years pursued an **Outside-In Strategy**, vs. Inside-Out."

Inside-Out Strategy Begins with Capabilities

An Inside-Out strategy begins with a focus on the institution's previous behavior and current capabilities

- What are we good at? What are our capabilities and offerings?
- How can we sell more? Gain more share? Improve productivity?
- Where can we apply our new productivity?

Outside-In Strategy Begins with Customer Needs

An Outside-In strategy focuses first on the customer and the greatest opportunity for providing value

- What customer value do we provide and with what capabilities?
- Is our value proposition perceived as superior?
- How are the needs of our customers changing?
- What new competitors are anticipating and meeting these needs?

Source: Moorman, Christine and Day George, *Strategy from the Outside In: Profiting from Customer Value*, McGraw Hill, 2010; Oppenheimer, Todd, "The Flickering Mind," New York Times, 2004; Wikimedia Commons; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Recapture Adult Learners in a Booming Economy

A Common Story from EAB's Conversations with Members

Pressure to Close the Skills Gap

- The chamber of commerce recently enlisted the support of the local community college to reduce the skilled labor deficit in the tri-county area. The college's president turned to her new vice president of academics to address this challenge.

Little Margin for Error

- Meanwhile, the college's board set a new goal: increase adult enrollments by 200.
- The academic vice president knows her faculty does not have the bandwidth to develop all-new content for program launches.

Strengthen the Portfolio

- While academic leaders have reacted differently to program changes, some disciplines (i.e., business, IT) have been more willing than others.
- With limited programmatic resources and staff, the president must carefully prioritize.
- She decides to start with her certificate in business administration.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Putting Market Needs at the Center

Getting to "Outside-In" Product Design

BEFORE ▶ AFTER ▶

Product-First Strategy

Key Inputs:

- Success stories at other institutions
- Programs already in the portfolio
- Credential macro-trends

Representative Questions:

- *Are there faculty volunteers to teach in alternative formats?*
- *What short-format, non-traditional credentials do our peers offer?*
- *How can I find students for our program?*

1 **Understanding Adult Student Segments and Motivations**

2 **Assessing Regional Labor Market Demand**

3 **Aligning Opportunities with Internal Capabilities**

Audience-First Strategy

Key Inputs:

- Student motivations, career pathways, and market sizing
- Regional labor market data
- Program portfolio performance

Representative Questions:

- *What is more important to students and employers: the credential or the skills?*
- *Does this segment realize more education is necessary for advancement?*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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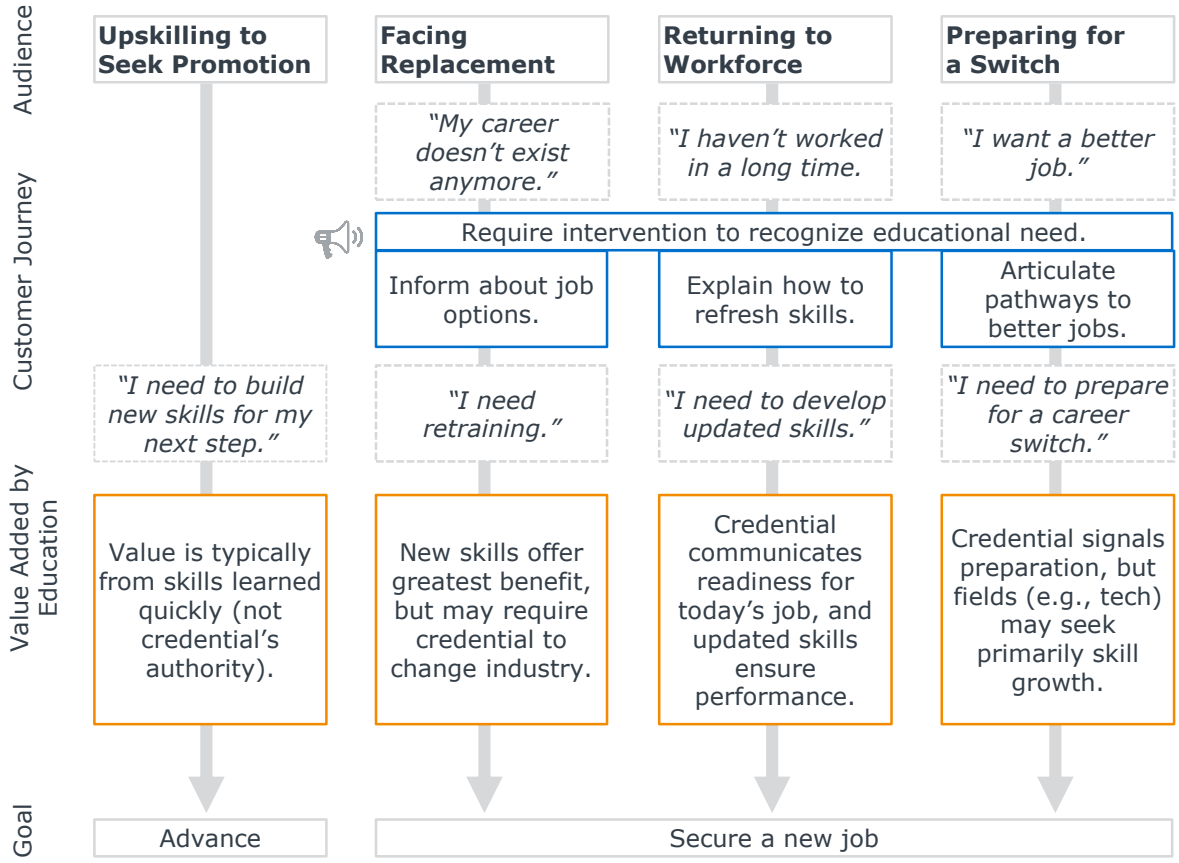
Designing for Distinct Adult Needs and Motivations

How Community Colleges Can Address the Needs of Different Segments of Adult Students



This chart outlines how to appeal to and serve different types of adult students. It divides adult students into four segments: those upskilling to seek promotion, those facing replacement in their current careers, those returning to the workforce after a long period away, and those preparing to switch careers or industries. The chart then shows how colleges can market to each segment, and articulates exactly how higher education can help students in each segment, either through credentialing or skill-building. Use this chart to help target communications and program offerings to the needs of specific student segments.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Activity

Activity to Facilitate "Outside-In" Program Design

Audience

Senior College Administrators or Cabinet Members

Instructions

1. Look at the scenario described on page 4. Pretend your group is advising the president of that college on her new Business Administration Certificate.
2. Review the details of the current Business Administration program on page 8 and examine your state labor-market demand portfolio. Use this information to guide your decisions during the next phase of this activity.
3. Select a student segment from the graphic on page 6 for your new Business Administration Certificate Program to focus on. Remember, you want your program to fully meet the needs for one or two groups of students rather than meet only some of the needs for all students.
4. Complete the worksheets on pages 9 and 10. You can choose to complete these worksheets individually and then come together and discuss your thoughts, or to complete the work as a group.
5. Once you have "created" your new program, use the discussion questions on page 11 to consider how best to promote the program. Remember to refer to page 6 to see what communications your target student segment needs to realize this new program opportunity.
6. Finally, use the discussion questions on page 12 to begin applying these lessons to your own program portfolio.

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Before: Certificate in Business Administration

Appealing to Everyone and No One

Certificate in Business Administration

An overview of business fundamentals for working adults looking to advance in their current position, begin a new business career, or start their own small business

Program Logistics and Delivery

- Non-credit, open admissions
- Online, asynchronous
- 5 courses completed on part-time basis
- Typically takes one year to complete
- $395/course, total cost of $1,975

Structure & Courses

- Principles of Finance
- Principles of Marketing
- Principles of Management
- Business Accounting
- Organizational Communication

Current Performance

- Average student satisfaction score: 55%
- Outcomes: 11% complete the corresponding associate's degree
- Overall enrollment: 32 students
- Adult enrollment (25+): 87%
- Student feedback: some disappointment in lack of career relevance and employer value
- Faculty feedback: believe this certificate program could benefit from increased rigor through experiential learning

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Operationalize Outside-In Program Design

Selected Key Questions to Consider as a Small Group

External Market

Assessing Student Audience Needs and Motivations

What would motivate this target audience to seek out business education?

What is more important to this segment: skills or a credential?

How well does the current program appeal to these motivations?

What employer demands is this student audience responding to?

What obstacles might students face to enrollment?

What types of flexibility and accessibility matter most?

- Flexibility in terms of how to pay? When to attend? How to attend?
- Accessibility in terms of cost? Location? Modality? Academic support?

Design Checklist

Translating Needs and Motivations to Business Decisions

What does our audience need from this credential?

What is the right program length to meet our audience's intended outcomes?

What is the right level of specialization?

What modality, schedule, location, and duration best align to the needs of this segment?

What experiential components (e.g., capstone project, portfolio creation) will demonstrate value?

What content from other parts of the portfolio (e.g., field introductions, emerging skill development) could we incorporate?

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After: Redesigned Business Programming

How you will revitalize the Certificate in Business Administration :

Program Logistics and Delivery

- Structure:
- Duration:
- Modality:
- Other:

Unique Program Components

- Learning Objectives:
- Potential Partnerships:
- Interdisciplinary Components:
- Key Competencies:

Features Tailored to Target Segment

-
-
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-
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Presenting Your Program Redesign

A Discussion

Key Questions

- What features will resonate most with your target student audience? Is there potential to serve multiple audiences effectively within one offering?
- How did your regional market data influence your business decisions? How did you embrace an outside-in approach to your redesign?
- What curricular elements did you change and what features did you add? What did you keep the same?
- For this specific student audience, what types of changes would you prioritize—logistics and delivery or program content and features?

Notes:

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Takeaways for Your College

Final Thoughts

Key Questions

- Which offerings from your own portfolio came to mind during this exercise? What has limited attempts to innovate in the past?
- What are the internal capabilities that would support, or even accelerate, program repositioning? What would be limiting?
- What takeaways from your group discussion are most important for other members of your institution to know?
- What types of data, reporting, consultations, or advocacy would be most helpful to have from the CCEF Forum to support existing program innovation at your institution?

Notes:

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