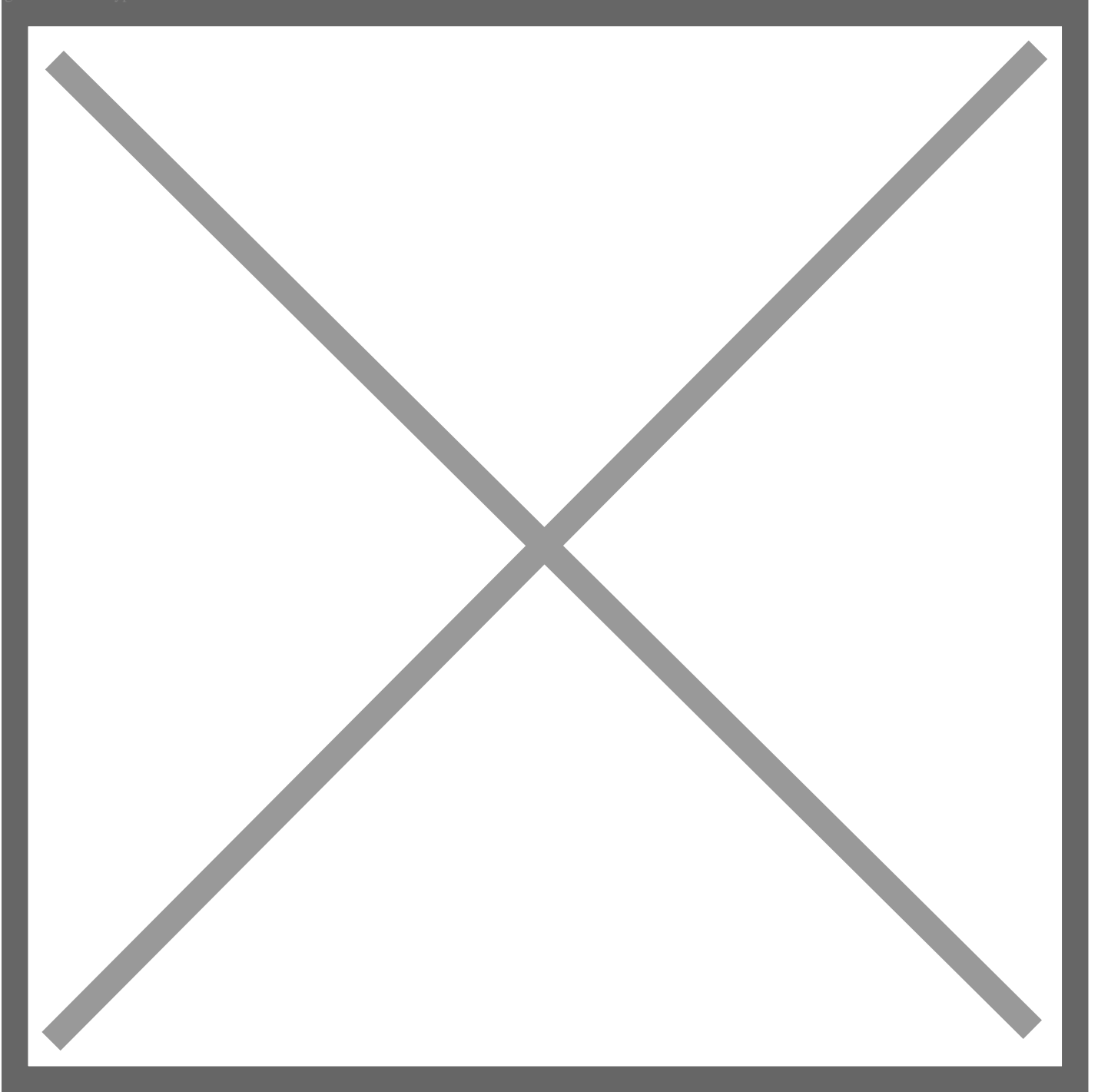


Image not found or type unknown



# Human-Centered Design: Part 2

## Description

Last week, I reprinted the first three principles my client Dave Haney described for Human-Centered Design. Continuing from his newly published article, **In times of crisis, colleges should ask different questions than they do in a traditional strategic planning process** in [Inside HigherEd](#):

---

**No. 4: Engage in prototyping.** Too often institutions spend months planning a major initiative and then roll it out with great fanfare, not knowing whether it will produce the intended results. When possible, it's better to prototype by implementing a small-scale, low-risk version of an initiative that can test the critical concepts involved and allow you to readjust according to what works and what doesn't. For example, instead of launching a new degree program, start with a badge or certificate and carefully examine how it plays with students. A prototype can also be a simulation: before creating a new enrollment office, build a mock-up (physical or virtual) and run students and staff through a simulated set of enrollment interactions. This approach can help create a culture of continuous improvement in which new ideas are constantly tested, evaluated and revised.

**No. 5: Resource the early adopters, and let consensus follow later.** The downfall of many strategic plans is that everybody agrees with them at the outset. If that's the case, then it is probably too general and probably looks like everyone else's plan because it represents the lowest common denominator.

In results-based strategic design, institutions instead provide resources, often minimal, to individuals and groups so that they can try things (prototyping), and then consensus is built around successful or promising results, not prior agreement. (From a slightly different perspective, the higher ed consulting firm CREDO also [advocates abandoning consensus as a goal for the "new university."](#)) The Rensselaerville Institute refers to community members who are energetic early adopters as "community spark plugs." You know who they are on your campus, and they may be administrators, faculty members, staff members or even students — where they are in the organizational chart is often less important than the energy, creativity and attitude they bring to the table. When other people see that the spark plugs are getting the resources, producing results and having more fun, the number of early adopters will grow.

**No. 6: Don't try to do everything.** Too many strategic plans try to cover everything an institution does and therefore sink under their own weight. I prefer Hal Williams's definition of strategy: something is truly *strategic* only if it requires a behavior change when business as usual won't accomplish the desired results. For example, one institution included as a strategy within their plan to review the food service and facilities

contracts with external vendors. Do you really need a strategic plan to tell you to do that? If such reviews are not part of business as usual, then you are looking at problems that are not going to be solved by a strategic plan.

Instead, focus on the things that require major behavioral changes. For example, one institution increased both efficiency and organizational health by changing siloed behavior in administrative offices. They cooperated with other offices to ensure student success became a specific job requirement at every level of the institution — a result that would be evaluated in performance reviews and lauded when it succeeded. That was truly strategic, because business as usual required a sharp behavioral change. Rather than spending the five years of a strategic plan checking off boxes toward the plan's completion, it is more effective to adopt a strategic *design* with recursive cycles of prototyping, learning and improvement.

When I led a strategic design process in 2017 as a college president, and the steering committee had completed its preliminary design for the institution's future, an initially skeptical faculty member gave the process an appropriate endorsement: "This process was messy as hell, but the result is good." The times are even messier now, which makes it even more imperative that we design the future of higher education rather than simply try to plan it.

*David P. Haney is the former president of Centenary University. He and Jeremy Houska, director of educational effectiveness at the University of La Verne, will present on results-based strategic design at the [SCUP 2020 Virtual Annual Conference](#), sponsored by the Society for College and University Planning. For more resources on results-based strategic design, see [davidphaney.com](http://davidphaney.com).*

I'll comment on how I use these six principles with remarkably easy steps in my next blog entry. Stay safe.

***Hal***

**Date Created**

June 2020