



Strategic Initiatives Inc.
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Action Analytics™



**Measuring and Improving
Performance That Matters in Higher Education**

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**Action Analytics: Measuring and Improving Performance
that Matters in Higher Education**



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For the past several years, EDUCAUSE publications have described the emergence of two complementary forces: 1) the growth of “academic analytics” in higher education and the knowledge services needed to support seamless sharing and leveraging of contextualized data/information, and 2) the escalating demands for accountability that are driving performance measurement and improvement initiatives (1). These forces converged in the July/August edition of *EDUCAUSE Review* which showcased their potentially transformative impacts on higher education.

First, knowledge-leveraging and analytical practices are advancing in sophistication and proliferation, aided in part by a host of new software and professional services offerings. These include deploying academic analytics (tools, solutions, and services) to produce actionable intelligence, service-oriented architectures, mash-ups of information/content and services, proven models of course/curriculum reinvention, and changes in faculty practice that improve performance and reduce costs (2). Over time, these practices have the potential to support previously unattainable levels of measurement, comparison, and institutional interventions to improve student access, affordability, and success.

Second, education’s various publics are escalating their demands for colleges and universities to measure, demonstrate and improve performance, and to provide access to this data. These demands are being driven by a variety of forces and interests. But the most compelling is the stark fact that the United States’ international standing is slipping. In spite of the relative dominance of America’s leading universities and their world class reputations, we are losing ground in terms of the overall educational attainment of our population. We are also deficient in the possession of across-the-economy-and-workforce competencies necessary for success in the global economy. Additionally, our mid-tier institutions are increasingly at risk of falling behind U.S. and international competitors in their ability to track their performance and identify areas where they need curriculum and process reinvention and innovation. As a consequence, we face projected declines in per capita income and economic competitiveness (3).

Taken together, the insights from these articles in *EDUCAUSE Review* paint a powerful portrait of the need for measuring performance and then moving beyond evidence/reporting to action. The action challenge is even broader than described, however. Performance includes both operational performance (administrative and support systems) and academic performance

(design and execution of academic strategies to achieve learning experiences, outcomes, and real-world competencies). Pervasively improving performance requires coordinated measurement, intervention, and action across the entire education/workforce spectrum – “cradle to career,” so to speak. (4) Such performance improvement will require more effective articulation and transitions between learning enterprises and between learning and work. It will require earlier, more effective stimulation of learners to acquire the skills essential for success in the global economy. Working across the entire education spectrum of learning/work requires new solutions and techniques, including sharing of contextualized “actions that work” in improving performance. Clearly, new processes and performance indicators must be developed to measure the emerging life, learning, and work skills necessary for our changing world.

But how can we put more action into analytics? Six primary ingredients are needed to evolve from the current generation of academic analytics (tools, solutions, and services) to action analytics:

- **focus on processes, solutions, and behaviors**, not just acquisition of tools;
- **incorporate workforce factors** in PK-20 curricula and educational offerings;
- **utilize the new generation of open-architecture analytics** to enhance learner access, affordability, and success and to extend the ERP Stack;
- Incorporate **cross-institutional and inter-sectoral comparisons** into action analytics solutions;
- Develop new practices/solutions that ensure the **alignment of institutional goals, strategies, initiatives, interventions, outcomes, and measures** in a variety of ways, including alignment from institutional to college to department to program levels; and
- Develop organizational capacity and change culture to encourage **evidence-based behavior and action-focused innovation to improve performance**.

This article presents examples of performance analytics that are making a difference today. It then suggests how tomorrow’s generation of action analytics solutions will evolve from this base. We present the impact of open-architecture applications on the technology ecology of action analytics solutions in the future and how to embed action in analytics solutions, starting now. We describe how leadership can progressively grow and change the elements of organizational capacity, culture, and behavior in technology, information, analytics, and innovation necessary to make these solutions work. The article concludes with a discussion of the new measures and key performance indicators (KPIs) that will be needed in the future to stimulate coordinated action across the entire education/workforce spectrum and to assure the competitiveness of education and workforce development in the United States.