At the Edge of the World with a Compass but no Map

We've heard it all before, year after year – the world is undergoing fundamental change, led by rapid innovation in information technology. For the academy this has led to expectations that technology would transform colleges and universities as they adopt new IT-enabled models of fulfilling their educational and scholarly missions. Today the buzz is about things like MOOCs and the cloud. But past results from IT have not lived up to the promises. In some ways, it feels like we've been at the edge of the world forever. Is it different this time around?

I think it is. The forces that previously succeeded in resisting change are no longer as effective as they once were. And that includes many of us.

University administrators cannot exert the degree of control we once did. IT leaders have to be far more creative than the simple "buy, don't build" paradigm that many of us rested on for more than a decade. Today, open source, crowd source, and software-as-a-service models are being used by our students and faculty whether or not we authorize them – or indeed even know about them.

The foundations of our time-honoured approach to instruction – including the classroom lecture – are being forced to respond to effective mass-scale open learning, delivered online.

Activism within our governing boards is on the rise as trustees press university administrators to accelerate the pace of change, and question our ability to leverage new technologies as opportunities rather than fear them as threats. Boards, students, and parents are demanding new answers to the spiraling cost of a university education. In this presentation I will argue that today's opportunities for progressive change- aided and abetted by information technology – can and will have a profound and lasting impact on the academy.

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