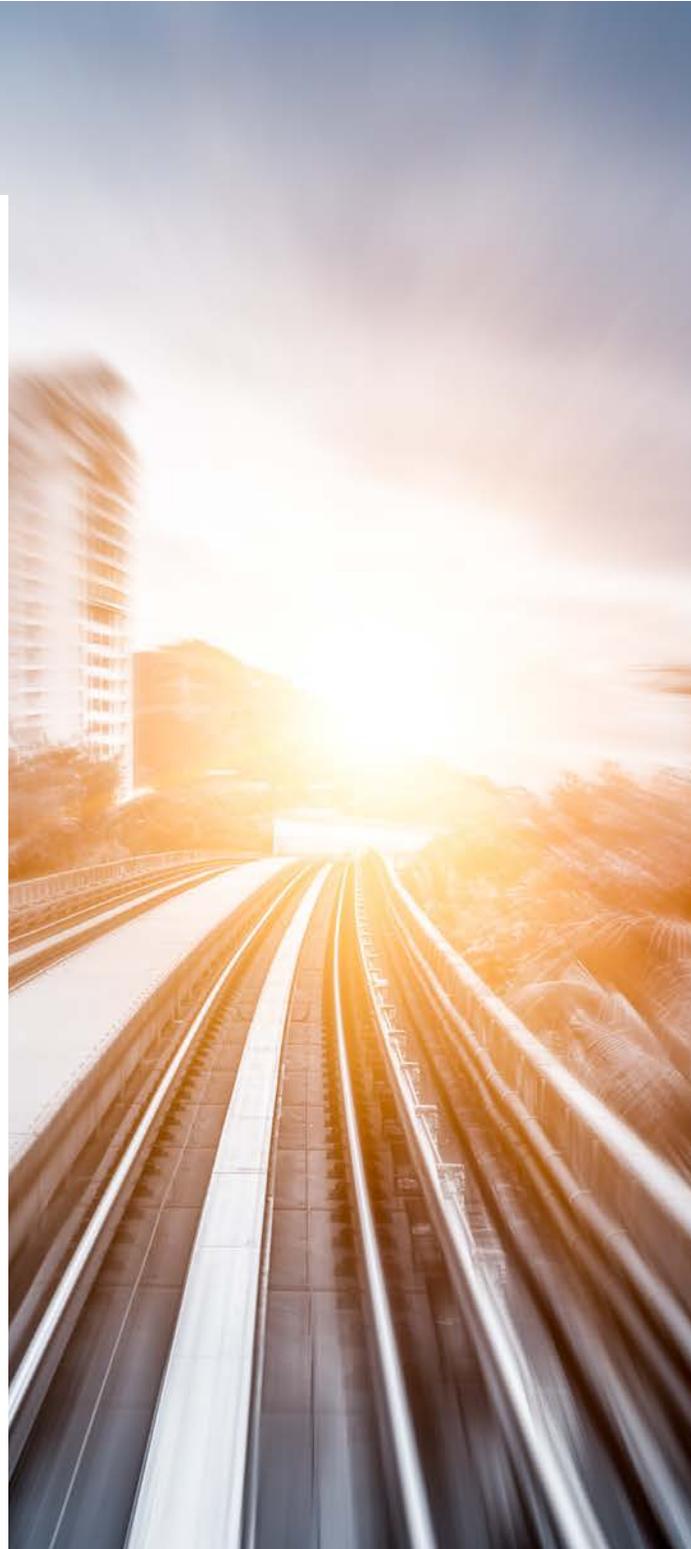


The Future of Associations

Strategies to empower trade and professional associations in the new economy

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Digital Prism Advisors



Executive Summary

Trade and professional associations have a rich history in our social and economic lives and have advanced the way we organize, communicate, and work together for the betterment of society. By bringing together like-minded people to learn, achieve, and promote common values, standards and solutions, associations seek to further the interests of an industry, profession, or cause.

Traditional models that have sustained the growth of associations over the last century are being challenged by the unprecedented pace of technological, social, and generational disruption occurring today. Associations need to respond to these changes with proactive strategies to identify alternative business models, growth opportunities, and an operating culture that can sustain them.

In this report **Digital Prism Advisors**, a leading management consultancy specializing in working with association executives, examines some of the root causes of this disruption and offers prescriptive insights for association executives who seek to transform their organizations in ways that prepare them to meet the needs of emerging professionals and future generations, and thrive in our increasingly interconnected, digital economy.

We explore *five keys to success*,

- **Re-inventing member value**
- **Developing growth opportunities - market and mission mapping**
- **Integrating new business models**
- **Building an empowered “digital-first” culture**
- **Creating a *modern operating model*.**

The Future of Associations

Origins – The need to advance common interests

The desire for industries and professionals to organize to advance common interests and goals is not a new phenomenon. The origins of associations date back to the “guilds” of the thirteenth century. These precursors of modern-day associations were established primarily to train and certify the skills of their members, and thereby create reliable standards of craftsmanship, quality and performance.

From the modest roots of guilds, much larger organized trade *unions* emerged during the industrial revolution to help labor increase their influence and balance their power with that of company owners. At the same time, trade *associations* evolved to represent the economic and political interests of industries and professional groups with memberships comprised of companies, individuals, or a combination of both. Business associations have more recently become prevalent at the local level, in the form of Chambers of Commerce for example, and serve as community business networks.

The fundamental need for industries and professions to organize, collaborate and communicate may not be fading. But the question is, in an economy characterized by rapid technological and social change, are today’s associations equipped to respond to the rapidly changing needs of members in ways that will expand their role and value, or will emerging alternatives and resources in the new economy minimize and diminish their role?

The last century – Hypergrowth, complexity, and competition

The rapid rise and growth of specialized trades and professions over the last century has created a vast community of associations both large and small, some very powerful and instantly recognizable, others highly specialized and obscure. The proliferation of associations across just about every industry classification and profession has created an intricate web of groups, often with competing or overlapping missions and interests.

Because associations are membership advocacy and mission-driven entities they’re permitted to organize as nonprofit organizations under U.S. federal tax codes. Trade and

professional associations are permitted to engage in lobbying and political activity while charitable and religious nonprofit classifications are more restricted in this regard.

The nonprofit model presents some challenges for associations seeking to drive growth in commercial markets. Commercial activities must contribute to support of the mission and net revenue generation of certain activities can be subject to unrelated business income tax (UBIT). This is important to understand in the context of association growth strategies where deeper participation in commercial markets is identified as an attractive option, but one which may also require the association to explore and adopt a *new business model*.

Nonprofits: A quick reference guide

Classification (Approximate number registered)	Code	Contributions tax deductible	Lobbying and political activity
Trade & professional (66K)	501(c)6	No	Permitted
Foundations, charities, other causes	501(c)3	Yes	Restricted
Social welfare (90K)	501(c)4	No	Permitted

The impact of associations on the U.S. business and economic landscape has historically been significant. According to recent data from the ASAE (American Society of Association Executives) membership organizations from all classifications collectively employ more than 1.3 million people with a combined payroll in excess of \$51 billion. Data compiled from IRS Forms 990, required for associations with \$25,000 or more in revenues, indicate membership organizations generated more than \$140 billion in revenue and held more than \$300 billion in assets as recently as five years ago.

Today, the U.S. National Trade and Professional Association directory lists more than 7,600 organizations. These are the most significant professional and industry organizations by size. In total approximately 66,000 entities are registered in the U.S. as trade and professional nonprofits.

An uncertain future – Challenging times for member-driven models

While on the surface this scale seems impressive, the reality is that today membership-driven trade and professional associations are facing an uncertain future due to slowing – or in many cases, declining – membership interest and growth. Associations are now struggling to navigate new terrain that is quickly and dramatically being re-shaped by social, demographic, technological, competitive and economic forces. Most nonprofit

organizational governance, operating models and cultures are ill-equipped to confront, effectively embrace, and manage these disruptions.

Forward looking association executives must recognize and address the real threats to their traditional models and value propositions driven by changes in their constituency and customer needs. There is an imperative to act to develop new visions, new strategies, and new revenue sources – while building and modernizing the organization capabilities and operating models essential to seizing new opportunities, and sustaining development of clear, new paths for growth.

The same forces threatening associations are at work disrupting commercial markets and businesses, albeit often in different ways. Out of commercial necessity, executives in private enterprises have aggressively taken-up the initiatives to re-engineer their business models to compete, and indeed thrive, in the new economy. The goal of any association in the face of today's unprecedented disruption is to develop a strategic roadmap, and a sustainable operating model that delivers substantial, competitive and continuous value for its members and its industry at-large. Only through this process will associations be able to continue to expand, fund their mission and remain relevant in the shifting market. To do this, associations will need to think differently, and consider taking pages from the playbooks of successful commercial enterprises.

Transformation – Operating in a digital world

Ask a dozen business thought-leaders what the term “digital transformation” means and you'll likely get a dozen different definitions. The term has become so overused and so lacking in definition it has become virtually meaningless. This can be a real problem and a real communications trap for senior association executives charged with leading the imperative to address challenges brought on by digital disruption.

There's no escape from the fact that the world in which we live and operate today is digital. All organizations operate in an economy where almost every meaningful transaction and interaction with customers and stakeholders is intermediated in the digital realm. The key question association executives need to frame for their organizations is not whether they can successfully drive a digital transformation, but whether they can build a *strategic roadmap* and a *modern operating model* that can deliver innovation and growth in a digital world.

Key disruptors – Digital and generational factors

There are many disruptors contributing to the need for associations to urgently prioritize a strategic review of their markets, value propositions and operating models. Here we'll explore three that are particularly relevant to membership organizations.

1. The ability of members to self-organize

This disruption is a social phenomenon brought about in large part through technology and social media platforms. If membership associations have traditionally justified their value by bringing like-minded professionals together to share information and ideas, collaborate, and network, then it's clear to see that the rise of social media platforms is a disruptive intermediary that can provide the same, if not more benefits at less cost to members. Today's social media platforms offer professionals the opportunity to self-organize for little or no membership fees. Organizers of groups have low technical barriers to entry, and often can assemble at scale with little overhead. Members and potential members have myriad opportunities to organize amongst themselves. Online communities on Google, Facebook, open source platforms such as Discourse, and communications tools such as Slack provide built-in support for community building, discussion and interaction. The convening power of traditional membership associations is being undermined by these tools and services. For associations to remain vibrant and sustainable they must embrace these new forms of communication and self-organization and integrate them into their core services and platforms. In doing so, associations will find they can reach and deliver their core value proposition to a broader universe of potential members with new efficiency and impact.

2. Momentum behind the "open" publishing market

Growing momentum behind open access models for research publications poses an increasing risk to the publishing revenue streams upon which many member associations rely. Current trends and the growing support of public research funding agencies around the world for open and freely accessible publishing is likely to further drive significant declines in publishing revenue. Associations need *aggressive* plans for recasting their publishing and operating models to take account of this loss of revenue.

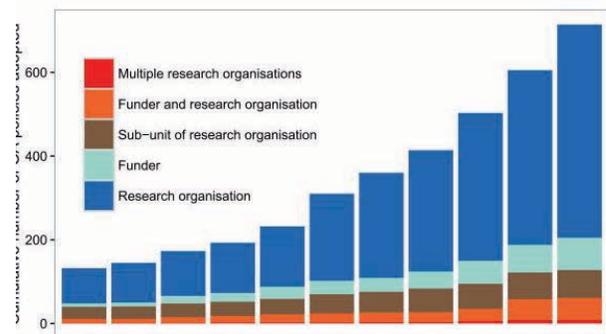


Figure 1 - Cumulative number of Open Access policies adopted by multiple research organisations, funder and research organisation, sub-unit of research organisation, funder, and research organisation.

Tennant JP, Waldher F, Jacques DC, Masuzzo P, Collister LB, Hartgerink CH. The academic, economic and societal impacts of Open Access: an evidence-based review. *F1000Res*. 2016;5:632. Published 2016 Sep 21. doi:10.12688/f1000research.8460.3

3. Generational change

Perhaps the greatest disruption facing associations is one driven by the expectations of a new generation of digital-native talent and professionals entering the workforce. The ability of associations to attract this talent as either new members or association staff will be critical to building a sustainable future. It's clear that our society's new generation of talent has grown up in a world where open communication and sharing is a way of life, where their professional and personal lives are largely self-organized, and where tortuous and lengthy rules and procedures for decision making are an anathema. Associations will require profound changes in culture and governance to be attractive and relevant to emerging professionals and future generations. Closing the gaps in user-expectations, communication methods, and decision-making processes will be required to recruit and retain next generation members and internal talent.

In sum, digital platform intermediaries and the changing expectations of new generations are impacting the association's role as convener of professionals and industry players and challenging traditional business models;

- The rise of alternative means to convene via digital engagement and collaboration platforms reduces association membership pricing power. Associations that regularly increase membership fees year-after-year to achieve growth will find these increases increasingly difficult to sustain.
- Society's new generations of Millennials and Gen Z professionals lack the affinity to association brands and the historical value they may have played in professional development and advancement in their parent's or grandparent's generation.
- Associations can no longer look to publishing to compensate for declines in membership revenue. Publishing, which today can account for 15-25% of association revenue, will be at risk as open source digital publishing platforms take hold in scale.

To address these challenges associations must invest in an internal culture comprised of new talent who understand shifting customer sentiments, user needs, market dynamics, and how to deliver value in a digital world.

Unlock the future – Five keys to success

Now that we have identified several of the core challenges, we'll explore in some detail five prescriptive actions association executives can begin to take now to build market-responsive services, a culture of adaptability and change, and a modern operating model that will sustain development and growth.

Five keys at-a-glance

- Re-invent member value
- Discover growth opportunities - market and mission mapping
- Integrate new business models
- Build a "digital-first" culture
- Create a Modern Operating Model

1. Re-invent member value

Professionals are re-evaluating their choices and the investments in time and money allocated among the many associations, groups and resources available to them. They're becoming more discerning about the value, cost-benefits, and useful information

available through memberships, and are increasingly exploring alternatives. This has increased pressure on member retention, and competition amongst associations for both renewals and new member recruitment.

Associations must repeatedly ask, "what do members want out of the association?". Critically, they need to look at this question from two important and very different angles; What do they want from a *professional* perspective and what do they want from a *mission* perspective. Looking at needs in this binary fashion is essential to effective re-invention of member value.

Most professionals are passionate about the advancement of their industry and profession, and its benefits to society. But is this value alone worth the current price of admission to be part of an association? Does the mission still resonate with Millennials and Gen Z, or does it need to be updated? What are the essential services both current and prospective members need to help them succeed or grow as a large corporate member, a small business, or as an individual professional or proprietor?

In this discovery and re-invention process association leaders must identify the gaps that may exist within their membership profile. Is there a big difference in perspectives and needs between generations, or between members in large companies versus small businesses? Today, current and prospective members are weighing this balance with much greater scrutiny as they align their priorities with the value offered.

Once this deeper understanding of the values and needs of members and prospective members are thoroughly understood the findings can't be ignored or discarded. A customer-centric and responsive association will implement a process for how this information informs strategic prioritizations – and investment decisions. These are often difficult decisions to make particularly in larger associations with broad and diverse constituencies and member profiles. In the process some user needs and member demographics may be prioritized and served over others. Like commercial enterprises, associations need to begin to think about customer and market segmentation strategies, prioritizing where they have both the "right to play" and the "need to win" first.

2. Discover growth opportunities – Market and mission mapping

Create a market map to:

- Position your products and services within your industry's ecosystem
- Identify market "white spaces" where you have a strong "right to play"
- Identify competitors, partners, M&A potential
- Create an opportunity pipeline
- Prioritize product development into a roadmap for growth

In this journey to the future, one exercise all associations need to undertake is "market mapping". Market mapping is a customer-centric, outside-in analysis of an association's role in the larger industry ecosystem it serves. Associations that develop a comprehensive market map will discover where their products and services – and those of their members – fit into the industry at-large. Mapping will reveal how data and digital innovation are impacting industry workflows, and where new potential revenue opportunities exist. The relationships between buyers and suppliers,

strategic partnerships, the competitive landscape, and "white spaces" for new products and innovation all become clearer through market mapping.

As new technology platforms and software reduce barriers and increase collaboration between industry players and professions, many associations will discover new customers and new constituencies in adjacent industry segments not previously considered for membership. With the insights from market mapping, associations can begin to think about how new products and services will serve new classifications and tiers of membership to drive growth.

By taking this broader view of the commercial opportunities in the marketplace, associations can also think about acquiring or merging with other related associations where synergies can be found. Or, acquiring "tuck-in" companies that complement the products and services they are building for members.

Mission mapping is a related exercise that can be conducted in conjunction with or independently from market mapping. Whereas market mapping is product and service focused, mission mapping orients an association's mission within the industry and professional groups it currently serves and aspires to serve. It reveals competitors in the ecosystem and overlap with other associations. Importantly, it can identify emerging or underserved constituencies and their advocacy needs that can be a basis for new member value and engagement.

By re-inventing member value with the insights gained through market mapping and mission mapping analysis, associations establish a foundation for a *strategic roadmap* that will increase their participation, impact and relevancy in the industries they serve, deliver new value to members, discover new potential members and alliances, and unlock new and sustainable sources of revenue growth.

3. Integrate new business models

As strategic roadmaps take shape, association executives will likely find themselves exploring attractive new market spaces and opportunities that are primarily commercial in nature, and which fall outside of core mission and advocacy activities. As we've previously explored, 501(c)6 trade and professional associations are tax-exempt because a large majority of their activity is related to mission and advocacy. Entering commercial spaces in greater scale could jeopardize that status. But this should not prohibit associations from pursuing business transformation and a more sustainable future. Associations that have identified a strong "right to play", who have access to customers, and are uniquely qualified to develop and deliver high quality services and value in new or promising commercial spaces should consider adopting *new business models* that will remove the constraints and free them to participate in their market's broader growth opportunities.

Creating for-profit subsidiaries or other separate entities is a strategy that can insulate the parent organization from the commercial aspects of the new initiatives while allowing it to benefit from the subsidiary's success financially. Associations are making more frequent use of *new business models* to develop non-dues and growing sources of revenue that may be commercial in nature. In addition to financially contributing to mission-activities, new business models can give associations a more visible, expansive and relevant role in their industry.

A for-profit subsidiary will require developing an entity with a clear and separate governance and management structure. Management of the subsidiary will be able to direct the business under a different set of rules, giving it the flexibility to operate and make independent decisions in market segments that likely have a commercial presence currently, or soon emerging. This will ensure that the subsidiary can operate competitively or in partnerships with other players in the space and keep pace with

For-profit subsidiary benefits

- Separate governance and management speeds decision-making
- Can raise capital and incentivize employees to compete in commercial markets
- Enables parent to focus on mission-related work
- Success contributes revenue to fund mission activities

today's fast-moving commercial "start-up" cultures. Subsidiaries can also make it possible to move quickly and more easily integrate strategic acquisitions opportunities as they become available.

A vast majority of associations have some commercial aspects to their services. Unlocking the future means developing internal capabilities and competencies. A subsidiary may take some time to execute, but associations can take immediate steps to operate more like a "business" in the way they evaluate customers

and markets, develop products, and execute growth. Association executives need to urgently recruit, empower, and promote internal talent based on business acumen to balance a workforce that has traditionally been stronger on advocacy skills.

4. Build an empowered "digital-first" culture

Digital innovation is positively changing the world. How well associations embrace digital innovation will have a profound impact on their future success. Sizable shifts in the global economy and in individual markets and industries are being shaped by advances in technology, and how data is generated, captured, analyzed, shared and used. It's essential then for association executives to build a culture internally and externally that puts digital and data first.

Because we are *always* customer-driven, the motivation to put digital first begins externally with member and market expectations. Big data and social media giants, such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon have set a high bar for everyone – commercial enterprises and associations alike. There is now an expectation from users that if "they can do it, so can you." This means associations need their market-facing digital presence to be more user friendly, intuitive, easy to navigate, and responsive than ever before.

Association executives should not underestimate the critical imperative to engage in a comprehensive, outside-in evaluation of all content delivery, content management, and content governance platforms. An association's life-blood is its ability to connect and serve geographically dispersed members instantly, and digitally. Being digital and staying digital requires constant vigilance.

Unlock data to change your world

Members now expect to benefit from digital innovation when they engage with your association.

By analyzing your data, you can discover new products for members – and the industry at-large.

Applying a rigorous internal digital orientation is simply "table-stakes" to make the external digital execution possible, effective, and operational. And it's not just the IT department that needs to be digital. All departments and managers benefit from a digital-first orientation both in terms of better serving their customers and constituencies or running their departments more efficiently.

But there is another benefit of being digital-first. Associations that can discover, extract, analyze, and

integrate the trapped silos of data they already have, collect and own are finding new ways to leverage this data for the benefit of their members and markets. When you consider the multitude of engagement and touchpoints associations have with their members and other industry players – through member registration data, directories, certifications, continuing education, events, research papers, publications, websites, forums, chat and online groups, and awards programs – the potential to derive new value and new products is eye-opening. Associations need to consider how this data can be used by itself or combined with data from third-party partners or sources. Assessing the broader use-cases for integrated data can open customer opportunities in adjacent industries and markets.

Because of the direct relationship associations have with members, they are often in a unique and trusted position to collect data. Information exchange platforms and hubs managed by associations can be attractive and viable methods of developing value, so long as the data is repurposed with permission and some value accrues to or can be channeled back to members for their benefit. Data products and digital acuity are the new competitive differentiators in the association world and developing a culture around it will foster innovation and success.

5. Create a modern operating model

The imperative behind the operating model is that association executives actively drive strategic decisions and investments that will enable their organizations to develop these

five essential elements and the underlying capabilities required to operate and thrive in a digital world. In the following section, we'll look at some of the nuts-and-bolt elements of what we mean by a *modern operating model*.

Essential elements of the modern operating model

Five essential elements

- 1) Empowered culture
- 2) Data-enabled decision-making
- 3) Process automation (RPA)
- 4) Experiment-driven service design
- 5) Platform technology strategy

We've explored the state of the association industry, identified some of the more important disruptive forces challenging them today, and examined prescriptive actions in terms of membership, business models and digital culture. Now we'll look at the modern operating model in greater detail. Each discussion is accompanied by recommended actions that should be taken at each step.

1. Building an empowered culture

Attempting to build an empowered organizational culture without clarity of purpose is a likely road to chaos. A successful modern business requires a clear framework for decision making and governance. This starts with a definition of strategic objectives and clarity over measures of success that can be shared with the entire organization. Staff who do not understand both the strategy and their role in delivering on it cannot be empowered.

A well-defined strategic operating framework with clear measures and objectives becomes the guard-rail that enables association executives to push decision making out to the edges of the organization. This approach has obvious implications for organizational structure. Truly empowered decision making at the lowest levels of the organization requires much less "middle-management" structure. Modern organizations tend to have a much flatter organization structure. What middle-management that remains needs to evolve from being a filter for decision making to become a coach and enabler of the front-line staff now making the decisions.

In a truly empowered culture, risk-taking and experimentation need to be rewarded even when decisions end in failure. Permission to fail must come from the highest level of the executive ranks with the reinforcement that the learnings from failures need to be re-

integrated in the collective governance framework for the organization. Again, a well-defined and clear strategic framework and identified objectives are the guard rails that enable the management of risk as decision making is decentralized.

Recommended actions

- *Implement a structured strategic-planning process embracing all levels of the organization.*
- *Develop and publish a strategic framework with articulated long-term goals, enabled by short-term measurable objectives.*
- *Align staff incentive structures to strategic framework objectives.*
- *Identify, reward and showcase staff actions that exhibit front-line empowerment.*

2. Using data to augment decision-making

Data is the lifeblood of a modern operating model and connected data that flows seamlessly throughout the organization is critical to the success of the organization. Data does not tell you what the right answer is, but the right data, at the right time, combined with the perspectives and experience of skilled staff, is what accelerates organizational performance.

Modern organizations use data to sense the state of the business and to drive real-time adjustments in strategy and operational decision making. Strategic framework measures and objectives require relevant data to be collected and made available to front line staff making day-to-day operational decisions.

Most organizations are swimming in data, but often the data picture is incomplete or not joined up. The most critical insights often come from the correlation of disparate sets of data. Transactional data for membership subscriptions, publishing revenue transactions and events ticket sales are helpful individually for those lines of business. But, combining that data with behavioral data from online services and perhaps third-party datasets will most likely provide deeper insights into the trends and developing needs of the community the organization serves.

Modern organizations invest not only in streamlined data capabilities but also in the recruitment, training and development of staff with modern data analysis skills. A truly empowered culture requires an integrated foundation of operational data and front-line staff who know how to extract insight and value to make informed decisions from it.

Recommended actions

- *Undertake an analysis of existing data assets, technical landscape and staff capabilities to quickly identify gaps in data capabilities required to measure, manage and operationalize the strategic framework.*
- *Identify third-party data relationships that may be required to cover gaps in data landscape.*
- *Execute focused pilot implementation of new data-enabled opportunity in alignment with strategic framework. Prove or disprove pilot hypothesis – iterate to next opportunity.*
- *Create and publish a “real-time” strategic framework progress dashboard to the entire organization.*

3. Streamlining operations with repeatable process automation (RPA)

Staff costs are likely the most significant ongoing operational expense of most organizations. So why do these valuable resources often spend a considerable amount of their energy on low value, repetitive operational tasks: processing invoices, membership enquiries, basic HR functions, website content updates, etc.? It's difficult to build an empowered culture when staff attention is devoted to mundane low value activities.

Modern organizations apply automation broadly across the business to free up staff resources, improve process quality and responsiveness to stakeholders. A new generation of RPA services and tools is enabling organizations to streamline their business operations to ensure staff are freed to apply their talents to higher level value creating activities.

Modern RPA tools can be applied incrementally to the business, automating a single process to start with and then expanding into other areas of the business as the value of the investment becomes proven. Successful RPA implementations requires not just a technical solution but also a change in mindset by senior leadership and staff alike. Staff need to be reassured that automation is not being implemented to eliminate their jobs but to free up their time to create more value for the organization. Incentives need to be created to encourage the organization to identify areas where automation can be profitably applied.

Recommended actions

- *Identify initial processes that could be streamlined through implementation of RPA.*
- *Identify new products or services that your organization can provide based on the faster turnaround time available with automated processes.*
- *Define target measures of success including reductions in staff effort, improvements in timeliness etc.*
- *Evaluate and select appropriate RPS platform vendor.*
- *Implement an RPA pilot and use measured results and expand beyond initial process areas.*

4. Using experiment-driven service design to stay relevant to stakeholders

Organizations looking to build long-term sustainable success will need to evolve an increasingly sophisticated portfolio of online products and services to meet the needs of members and stakeholders. Doing this successfully will likely require the development of new skills and organizational capabilities in modern product management practice.

Modern product management processes use iterative experimental methods to ensure ongoing alignment with user needs: Develop a hypothesis, determine the measures required to test the hypothesis, field the experiment in the form of a new version of the service or product, collect data on usage of the product, analyze the data to validate or invalidate the hypothesis, refine and repeat. Very successful web services today, Facebook, Google Maps, Amazon Alexa, etc. use some variant of this approach.

A wide range of proven tools and services is available to any organization to implement this product management approach but the greatest barrier to successful adoption often lies in the attitudes and cultural norms of senior and front-line staff. An iterative, experimental approach to service design and implementation implies two – often counter cultural – attributes: Respect for failure and the lessons that come from it and a deep understanding that perfection is the enemy of progress. Senior staff need to become comfortable with greater lack of clarity at the start of design processes and the need to remain engaged in the process on an ongoing basis.

Recommended actions

- *Define and adopt a modern agile product management process and invest in appropriate staff training.*
- *Implement specific processes to obtain stakeholder input.*
- *Highlight and reward teams that embrace iterative, experimentally driven and data validated design and decision processes.*

5. Utilizing a platform-based technology strategy to underpin strategic choices

The four keys to a modern operating model outlined above – empowered culture, data augmented decision making, repeatable process automation and experiment driven service design implementation – require an evolved approach to the organization's technology strategy.

The traditional approach of selecting individual technology solutions to meet discreet needs of each function of the business is no longer enough. If a modern organization depends on joined up and free flowing data, those streams of data require an underlying joined up technology foundation.

In a modern operating model technology becomes the platform upon which other capabilities and services and products are built. Technology selection, architecture design and implementation are integrated processes which need to be aligned to the broad strategic needs of the organization and defined in the strategic operating framework.

Technology leadership and staff in a modern organization ensure that mundane, low-value technical tasks are handled by automated tools and infrastructures to able these expensive resources to be focused on enabling the organization to achieve its strategic objectives.

Recommended actions

- *Undertake a full technology portfolio analysis to identify duplications and gaps in capabilities required to enable strategic framework objectives.*
- *Define new technology platform principles, standards and decision governance model.*

-
- *Mandate all new implementations adhere to and implement defined platform standards.*
 - *Develop strategic priority driven roadmap for migration, retirement or ongoing maintenance of technology portfolio.*

Associations need new operating models, digital products and services, "Doing digital right" requires some initial investment, but the payback can be significant by opening-up many new operational solutions and efficiencies, while driving costs down.

Step One is assessing the state of these five key aspects of your association

1. Staff skills
2. Process maturity
3. Data enablement
4. Technology portfolio
5. Cultural readiness

Step One - Assessing your current state

Associations that are motivated to transform and thrive through the processes outlined in this discussion begin their journey by taking stock of their capabilities and "readiness" in five key areas.

To know where you are going, you must know where you are beginning. Understanding strengths and weaknesses and identifying operational and infrastructure gaps through a methodical assessment

gives association executives a 360-degree view of the "state" of these critical operational dependencies, and a benchmark from which to begin real change.

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