

# LEADING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Dave Moretti, Senior Director of Digital Marketing & Technology at Columbia Business School



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**W**ith a career rooted in technology and shaped by diverse industries, Dave Moretti brings a perspective to digital marketing and innovation.

He began as a computer technician and field service engineer, supporting organizations like Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he gained hands-on experience across various tech environments. Moretti's role as a technical specialist at Republic New York Securities further expanded his understanding of enterprise systems and operations. Over the years, he has worked across healthcare, finance, pharmaceuticals and higher education, each role adding depth to his expertise. His time at Queensborough Community College helped him grow through multiple positions, strengthening both his technical and leadership skills. Now at Columbia Business School, he draws on this journey to support digital transformation with practical insight and a people-first approach.

Through this article, Moretti emphasizes on how collaborative leadership is essential to advancing digital transformation in higher education, highlighting the need for strategic alignment and a people-centered approach to overcome institutional challenges.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, digital transformation and innovation have become pivotal in shaping the future of institutions. As Senior Director of Digital Marketing and Technology at Columbia Business School, I'd like to share my insights on navigating this dynamic environment, drawing from my extensive career in digital marketing and technology.



## My Approach to Digital Strategy

Leading digital strategy at one of the world's top business schools requires a collaborative approach. I emphasize the importance of engaging all stakeholders at Columbia Business School to ensure that the technology we implement serves the school's mission and day-to-day goals. By involving my team, colleagues in IT, key stakeholders and senior administrators, I ensure that the technology aligns with the institution's day-to-day and long-term objectives. My approach is rooted in identifying needs, immersing myself in the prospective technology and being authentic in my requests for financial support.

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## Challenges in Digital Transformation

Higher education faces numerous challenges in digital transformation, including IT security, user acceptance and legal ramifications. Higher education is not a fast mover but it is an experimenter and early adopter for research, testing and

piloting the technology in the classroom. It is important to conduct proper due diligence, risk assessment and data security in implementing digital changes. Outside of the classroom, digital transformation in higher education is more of a slow, bureaucratic and thoroughly vetted process. Overcoming these challenges involves education, participation from all stakeholders and a commitment to continuous improvement.

## My Collaborative Leadership Style

My leadership style is characterized by collaboration and empowerment. I share projects and priorities with my staff, allowing them to choose their areas of focus and encouraging teamwork across departments. By fostering a culture of innovation, I enable my team to lead sessions with stakeholders, ask questions and try new ideas. My philosophy is rooted in authenticity, continuous learning and giving credit to my staff for their contributions. This collaborative approach is essential in driving digital transformation and innovation.

## Advice for Aspiring Digital Leaders

For aspiring digital leaders in the education sector, I offer this valuable advice: be bold, authentic and seek knowledge. I emphasize the importance of taking calculated risks, seeking wisdom from peers and listening to staff. By blending strategy, technology and impact, digital leaders can create positive, immediate and long-term effects on a small scale, building on those successes to achieve larger goals.

Digital transformation and innovation are crucial in higher education, and I hope my insights provide valuable guidance for senior-level decision-makers and C-suite executives. By understanding the challenges, embracing collaboration and being authentic in their approach, institutions can navigate the complexities of digital change and create a dynamic and engaging learning environment for all students. **ET**