HOW LOW-CODE WILL TRANSFORM HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

During a time when higher education is actively looking for ways to improve productivity and efficiency, relying on time-consuming and expensive manual processes will become a distant memory.

With most classes moved online, hundreds of institutions are going through rapid digitization processes and relying on technology to mitigate the disruption. Further, administrators who may have been hesitant to adopt new technologies are now open to it and learning from experience.

The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the need to digitize and automate processes to ensure higher education benefits from a more strategic position in the new world. For administrative teams who want to create functional and relevant business apps there is a solution: low-code workflow automation.

What is low-code? When business users can create functional applications without hand-coding - when your developers can take advantage of pre-built modules to produce higher-value apps at a faster rate - that is the advantage of low-code.

In addition, the shift to online learning has led many institutions to come up with new digital transformation strategies that their teams can implement quickly. Some have turned to low-code platforms to meet the obstacles of the increasingly digitized world. These platforms help business users create quick apps as needed to improve productivity and automate redundant workflows.

Demand for low-code platforms continues to ramp up. In fact, Forrester Research[13] predicts the low-code market to reach a revenue projection of $7.7 billion in 2021.

When we reach the other side of the pandemic, and updated operations resume, higher education institutions with limited IT resources will value low-code platforms as a cost-effective means for creating new applications.

This whitepaper takes a look at some of the digital challenges higher education faces today, and how low-code workflow automation can address them.

3 https://go.forrester.com/predictions-2020/

Let's start with the low-code platform

A low-code platform comes with pre-built modules and code so that business users can create relevant apps without IT support. Even developers can take advantage of a low-code platform to help improve development cycles and time frames.

For instance, developers can add custom code to a low-code app to increase its range of functionality. With built-in governance, all apps can go through an approval process before deployment.

And, you can monitor usage, performance issues, and feedback. In a post-pandemic world, a low-code platform can truly empower higher education administrators to drive next-level productivity and end-user experiences.

Plus, you can use a low-code platform to help automate any of your eligible manual processes, at scale - from anywhere. Think of how data entry and similar tasks can benefit from intelligent automation so that your team members can work on data-driven decision making.

Instead of waiting weeks, or months, to develop and app - you can create one in minutes. Consider how remote work will become more commonplace. You can create an app to monitor and track the institution's computer equipment used by staff from

home. Sure, there are already software applications that do this but to customize, buy, and implement it within days is unprecedented.

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On the other hand, you can customize apps to track work status and hourly productivity of your remote employees. As you continue to experiment with remote staff, you could further customize your app as needs evolve.

These apps can also integrate with your current, or legacy systems, allowing your institution to continually meet changing demands and markets.

While low-code isn't a new form of technology, adoption[3] has grown during the pandemic to ensure business continuity as students attend classes and interact with universities from home.

Even when the consequences of COVID-19 subside, you can continue to use low-code to ensure your institution develops a sustainable operating model regardless of any future challenges and disruptions. If you need to continue to keep employees safe, you can easily create an app to receive updates of employees' health status.

3 https://www.techrepublic.com/article/covid-19-triggering-a-massive-shift-in-adoption-of-low-code-platforms/

Perhaps you need to file weekly, or monthly, audit and inspection reports. With a low-code platform, you can create an app to enable the required users to fill out the forms remotely. When you create a more automated footprint, your institution can always work safely.

As your institution searches for new ways to serve your current students, prospective students, alumni, donors, community, and team members, the impact of digitization only increases the demand on your IT department. Yet, turnaround times and budget are limited, while the demands and expectations are at an all-time high.

Higher education IT departments have to adapt to these evolving evolving constraints. With a DIY, low-code platform, administrators can build anything they need relative to performing their jobs more efficiently without having to wait on an already overburdened IT department to get to their request.

Is your institution digital enough?

Despite many institutions ramping up their digital transformation, is it enough? Unfortunately, many administrators in higher education still rely heavily on manual business processes. From the front-office to the back-office, team members still manually enter data into paper files and spreadsheets.

Higher education is rife with labor-intensive processes. In these types of environments, not only is it difficult to transition to remote work but it also forces team members to memorize a variety of differing functions. When new policies are created, or new software is deployed, team members have to start from square one all over again.

Students may never see the back-end processes in play, but they will be impacted by manual front-end processes. To start, the learning curves are quite time-consuming causing delays in problem resolution and interaction with students or even new employee onboarding. Invariably, manual processes keep higher education stuck in the dark ages.

Yet, it's not just about the time consumption, manual processes are also at a higher risk of errors. Humans aren't perfect: simple distraction or exhaustion often leads to errors and other preventable mistakes.

Minor mistakes like accounting spreadsheets with incorrect amounts, or mixed-up delivery dates can pile up into costly errors. All administrators in higher

education should have a goal of error reduction while improving customer service.

Instead, when you automate tasks with low-code, you free your team members to focus on work of a higher value. Moreover, you bolster your time value. Think of the benefit of completing tasks in seconds or minutes rather than hours or days.

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Modernize higher education operations

Even if enrollment is flat[3], it doesn't have to be. Higher education is seeing a significant rise in expenses versus revenue. Yet, students continue to demand improvements in services and service quality. The pressures of costs paired with increased expectations require a new perspective around the right solutions to produce improvements in service delivery.

Unquestionably, there are countless examples of tasks your team can automate with low-code workflow automation:

- Transfer Credit Approval
- Course Approval
- Registration Overload
- Graduation Process
- Change and Declare a Major
- Student Visa

3 https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-04-25/college-enrollment-stays-flat-at-69-continuing-a-decade-long-trend

With low-code workflow automation, you can improve the job quality and add some balance back to faculty, staff, and administrators. You can develop sophisticated apps without incurring disruptions or costly implementations. Once you identify processes to automate, you will start to find other functional areas which can benefit from automation.

This is about enhancing service quality, and efficiency, throughout your entire institution. Increasing student satisfaction is key to improving enrollment rates and revenue. Automate uploads, cash control reconciliation, HR processing, journal entries, reconciliation of department revenue and more. If you can reduce your monthly processing hours from over 100 to two hours, what would you do with that extra time?

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What automation means for higher education

Many industries are already seeing significant economic growth through the implementation of automation. In higher education, we have still seen a lot of paper and pen usage whether it is tracking attendance to grading or processing progress reports.

Administrators have a variety of responsibilities like enrollment, organizing educational events, processing invoices, managing recruitment, and more. It's a lot of busy work and peak seasons can be overwhelming.

Instead, you can eliminate mundane administrative work, and transform your institution into a driver of innovation. Isn't this what you teach your students? How to innovate? Isn't it time to lead by example?

Consider these use cases

Enrollment

There isn't any question that enrollment is time consuming and cumbersome. Plus, all the paperwork leaves so much room for error. Validating documents, reading the application forms, and confirming eligibility is exhausting just to think about.

What you can do is digitize many of the monotonous methods by using low-code workflow automation to check forms, provide validation, analyze eligibility, and more.

Admin

There are the faculty meetings, the board meetings, the student meetings, and others to organize. Then, there is planning, scheduling, emailing, sharing the times and dates. If there are any changes, the process starts again. How can your team better spend this time?

You can use a low-code platform to automate the scheduling of meetings or create an app to draft emails. If needed, create an app to check the work schedules of the attendees to optimize attendance.

Attendance

Higher education must regularly track attendance. This isn't only to measure student output, but also helps with determining compensation. All stakeholders should engage in productive and relative time management. Reconciling hand written attendance sheets is mind-numbing.

By creating an attendance tracking app, higher education can use the data to understand student interest and also determine determine compensation for every educational stakeholder.

Registrar's office

Student behaviors like changing majors, or switching classes overwhelm the registrar's office with paperwork. The same is true in terms of transfers or non-routine student data revisions. However, you can automate many of the associated workflows to decrease the workload at the registrar's office and expedite the outcome of these processes.

Financial aid

Tuition assistance is a key process that has helped thousands of prospective students gain access to higher education. It can also benefit from low-code applications to automate processes that can impact the future of your prospects.

Student Success

Another dull process is compiling the progress reports of every enrolled student. Progress reports distract educators from providing more meaningful learning opportunities. Why not create an app for data entry and data collection?

Educators can now experience higher job quality as they will have more time to focus on productive work. What does this mean? When you can automate high-volume tasks, meet deadlines, and work faster, you get to improve your bottom line.

Team members have more time for strategic work. You can also optimize your returns through automation. Tasks can be executed 24/7 without mistakes or required rework. When your institution is known for performance excellence, it's much easier to increase enrollment and profits.

What about marketing and communication?

Personalize the student and admissions experience using unique behaviors and interests. Today, prospective students are searching for universities who can offer more relevant experiences within their desired field of study.. For instance, a student interested in marine biology will want the opportunity for real-world experiences studying ocean health.

Moreover, in the digital era, prospective students use keywords to search for their desired institution type. Higher education needs to use targeted marketing campaigns that match these keywords and interests.

You can automate landing pages, social media campaigns, and more to align with student interest areas. Next, create tools that will point your prospective students in the right direction. Create an app that tracks visits, clicks, and sign-ups so your team can craft more data-driven marketing strategies..

Prospective students want to learn about the types of opportunities you offer outside the classroom. Highlight interesting opportunities like internships and work placement statistics to attract their attention.

Keep your prospective students engaged. With automation, you can respond to inquiries 24/7 then use relevant team members to respond to more complex inquiries and follow up. In what ways can you keep in touch with students after they stop by for their initial in-person visit or virtual tour? How can you direct prospective students to the right career page?

Automation can help your team build powerful email campaigns that captivate potential students. Perhaps you have an email that shares additional, relevant information. You might have another email asking for feedback and another email sharing additional opportunities to connect with educators and staff or current students. In the digital era, email campaigns are crucial but also time-consuming.

Give your email campaigns, and marketing strategy, wings through low-code and automation. There are other channels for connecting with prospective students from chat to video conferencing to videos, to images, to guides and whitepapers.

Give wings to your email marketing strategy through low-code and automation. You can customize every marketing workflow to create more personalized responses based on the student's set of actions. Reduce the pressure on your marketing staff by automating answers to common questions. Therefore, your institution can experience a consistent flow of communication.

Now, you can more efficiently target the right prospects, with the right information, at the right time to help increase enrollment. These strategies can also help with student retention, alumni communications, donor relations, and more.

Keep your current students more engaged with newsletters and announcements personalized to their department and field. Let your current students sign up for the news they are interested in, and automate distribution.

Change the meaning of how higher education carries out operations

Improve your processes first, then automate. Change the roles and responsibilities of your team members so they are less focused on mundane tasks such as requesting student transcripts and focused more on solution design, change management, and analysis.

Reduce process time from weeks to days, hours, or minutes. Improve courses with customized apps. Give the procurement department some time back by automating manual reference checks. Empower educators to focus more on their passion: Teaching.

Stop working in catch-up mode, and start providing more personalized experiences for your students. Route communications more efficiently and intelligently. Use low-code to facilitate the necessary automation to meet expectations of both parents and students.
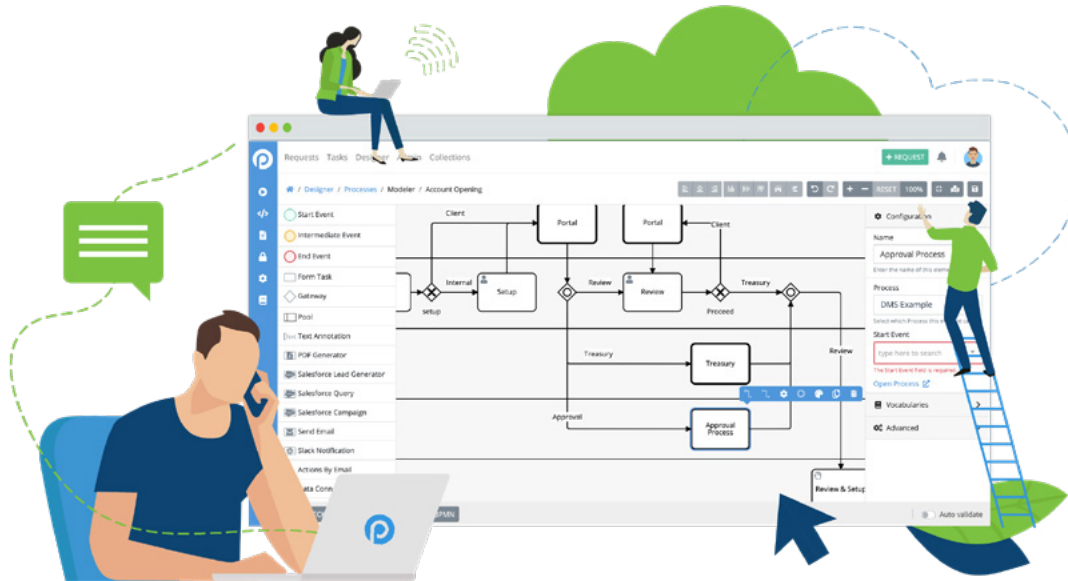
Automate the right processes at scale

It's critical to automate routine processes to ensure predictability of execution. Although, not every process is created equal. There are some manual processes that lack the scale to warrant automation. Then, there are other tasks that automation can perform without needing to sleep or take a break. As a result, you can achieve flexibility, agility, and scalability.

Where do you begin?

1. Start with an analysis of your current business processes. Good candidates are those that are rules-based, time-consuming, involve multiple people, and need to be performed frequently.

2. Now that you have executed the above activities, it's time to create a workflow roadmap. Think of how they intersect. Figure out how long it takes to complete each stage of the process. Include conditions that should be met before moving to the next stage. Note the departments who are responsible for these workflows.

3. Create a pilot, and assess the outcome.

4. Engage your process owners.

5. Determine the impact of automation.

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In conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has created disruption, at every level, in higher education. But, it also comes with valuable lessons for a post-pandemic world. The first is higher education should increase digitization. The second is to improve services, and service quality, even when students and staff continue to learn and work from home.

The current experience only serves to accelerate the need for digital transformation, but cost is also a factor. Low-code workflow automation can help to improve the student experience across your campus while driving the highest levels of productivity and efficiency.

The time has come to end reliance on time-consuming, mind-numbing, and error-filled manual processes. Transform your processes, institution-wide, with low-code workflow automation.

About ProcessMaker

ProcessMaker is low-code BPM and workflow software. ProcessMaker makes it easy for business analysts to collaborate with IT to automate complex business processes connecting people and existing company systems. Headquartered in Durham, North Carolina in the United States, ProcessMaker has a partner network spread across 35 countries on five continents. Hundreds of commercial customers, including many Fortune 100 companies, rely on ProcessMaker to digitally transform their core business processes enabling faster decision making, improved compliance, and better performance.

Find out how we can elevate your business today. Learn more at **processmaker.com**

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