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Technology for Change Supplement
Being a Digital-First Leader
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of Chicago. "They have all these one-offs, but there's no long-term planning around building databases or even storing data in a way they can use in the future." Goerge says this is more common for small nonprofits with fewer departments, but that a persistent problem is developing a "common structure [that can] address all needs." This echoes another finding from the survey: Organizations that have "fully aligned" strategies informed by robust data are the most likely to succeed.

What does it mean to have a fully aligned strategy? For Angel-Johnson, it meant getting the Girl Scouts' 113 separate nonprofits to work together as a unified entity. And Salesforce, she says, was at the heart of that transformation, because the first step was to pull all of their data and their customer insights together, which the Salesforce platform enabled her to do. "If you can't understand the insights of your business and your customers, it is very difficult to move forward in a transformational way," she says. But if you can channel the power of 1.8 million girls, she adds, "you can change the world."

THE GREAT MEGAPHONE

How can nonprofits adopt a digital-first strategy? For starters, it's about the strategy, not the technology, says Alva H. Taylor, faculty director of the Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. "You first have to start with a great understanding of what you're trying to do, what your goals are," he says. "And then digital is the tool that expresses and executes your strategy."

Adopting this perspective can be a problem for nonprofits, Taylor says, because the way they measure success—success by which they plan future programming—can vary widely. For example, if you are measuring the impact of a program on the health of a particular population, you won't know if you've done it right until a few years down the road. "So, it's important in that environment, for both funding and execution, that you're clear that everything you do focuses on your promise to your constituents," he says. "And digital should support that."

Angel-Johnson agrees with this sentiment. "I don't want to talk tech first," she says. "It's about the human that you're trying to impact from a social perspective." Human-centered design thinking needs to drive the iterative process of finding solutions to problems, she says, to benefit the human experiencing the

digital innovation. And in order to connect with that human, Taylor adds, you need "a clarity of voice, mission, and brand"—which is what digital truly excels at, he says. He calls digital a "great megaphone," which is excellent at broadcasting a message, but if your strategy is not clear at the outset, "then you are just yelling as opposed to communicating."

The flip side of clear and consistent communication means that consumers now expect this standard from both profits and nonprofits alike. "You can't just be giving people a quarterly project update," Taylor says. "You've got to have a system set up so they know where you are in the project." If someone can order lunch via Postmates and know where their food is every step of the process, then they will expect to know how, where, and when their money is being used to further a cause. That's the level of specificity people now expect, and if you can do this via the technology you implement, "the easier it is for these companies to

work with you, the easier is for constituents to work with you, and the easier it is for people to fund you," Taylor says. "If you want to grow, that's not an option."

The majority of nonprofits see scaling as essential. And, accordingly, says the *Nonprofit Trends Report*, 41 percent of them are scaling their technology and infrastructure to meet the growing needs of their constituents. They have no choice: Modern nonprofits face a new landscape with many pitfalls and challenges, the fate of the world seemingly in the balance.

"I think that nonprofits are changing even faster than for-profits," says Angel-Johnson. "And so that means nonprofits are going to have to change the way that they scale and grow to have deeper social impact than ever before." But with radical change comes new opportunities. "Only one person in history is ever going to be able to say that they digitized the hundred-year-old cookie program," Angel-Johnson says. "That's huge to me." ●

Being a Digital-First Leader

The adoption of new technology requires nonprofit leaders to embrace humility and nurture a flexible and adaptive culture.

BY ADRIENNE DAY

If you are in the business of shepherding a nonprofit into the next decade and beyond, you will likely hear the phrase "change management" a lot. That's because transforming a nonprofit still wedded to pen and paper into a thriving digital-first operation takes a good deal of both "change" and "management" to succeed.

Aparna Kothary, director of technology operations at Global Citizen Year, has first-hand experience with change management. She had to implement new technology to help her nonprofit, which organizes gap year study-abroad programs for high school seniors, measure the impact of their work. The task forced her to realize that she not only needed to get buy-in from top-level management, but also to approach the process itself with patience and acceptance of setbacks.

"When you put a lot of work into building something, you think it's great and you want everybody else to think it's great, but approaching it with humility is so important," she says, "because people are going to poke holes in it and see things that you didn't see." In addition, people learn in different ways and have different skill sets, and so foisting online trainings on staff without support in place isn't fair, she adds. "If our end goal is user adoption, it's our responsibility to train people in a way that works for them."

Setting expectations for new technology adopters is also important. Early on, things can be "a little messy," Kothary says. A demo or early iteration of a new tool is frequently not the final version of that tool, and so being explicit about that expectation is vital. In her own case, she has found that really listening to stakeholder input around the development of new tools is "really, really powerful."

"Instead of saying, 'Here's this shiny new tool we are going to use forever,' maybe say, 'This is phase one of a three-year project, and every year we're going to improve a little bit more, and here are the things we're going to look at, at the end of the year to understand how it's working, and what can be made better,'" she says. If stakeholders know that their input is valued, it results in a better end product.

TECH LEADERSHIP

Improving an organization's culture this way requires leadership. According to the second annual *Nonprofit Trends Report* produced by Salesforce, leadership must not only lead the adoption of new technologies but also help nurture a culture that is open to embracing new technology in the first place. But 45 percent of nonprofits state that they lack the flexibility and adaptiveness that the adoption of new technology demands.

Alva H. Taylor, faculty director of the Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, also stresses the role of leaders when introducing new technology to an old organization. "Leadership has to understand it and know the importance of it, and also communicate [that importance] to everybody in their organization," he says. Part of this transmission might involve showing how the new tool is compatible with how they've done their work in the past, while "really trumpeting the benefits" of adoption, Taylor says, so that new users can see how the new tool might make their lives easier or save them time. Management might even put a running counter or have a board that shows how something has been improved by the implementation of a tool, to help speed the tool's adoption by staff. But the challenge is ultimately about management "communicating or even overcommunicating" the importance of a new tool, and then giving people kudos once they've mastered it, Taylor says.

The *Nonprofit Trends Report* shows that, on average, different departments have different rates of adoption of new technologies. While 79 percent of nonprofits have a customer relationship management (CRM) system in place, a smaller percentage use CRM strategically across departments or to report back to their funders. Without "full adoption of technology," the report suggests that nonprofits may not get the maximum return on investment, adding that "71 percent of respondents state that the technology they use at home is more productive than what they use at their nonprofit."

So, how do nonprofit leaders speed the adoption of promising new tech across all departments? As the only dedicated IT staffer at Global Citizen Year, Kothary says that showing leadership the return-on-investment (ROI) of a technology project can help with leadership buy-in. Unfortunately, showing ROI prior to implementation of a tool is a problem for 40 percent of the nonprofits surveyed in the report. For nonprofits facing this problem, Kothary suggests thinking about the status quo and current processes around a particular task, and then trying to assess any positive change that might come with the implementation of a new tool.

"How much time does it take someone to, say, put contacts into Salesforce manually, and what else could they be doing with that time?" she says. "And then, say, here's what we suggest in terms of an implementation, and this is roughly how much it's going to cost and how much time it's going to take to build and train [staff on it]."

Kothary adds that if you run the numbers and it doesn't seem like you'd break even over the next three to five years, then maybe it's prudent to consider another solution—or perhaps even do nothing at all. She says to be mindful of implementing a "really expensive solution for a very small problem," and to maybe wait for a better solution to come along.

ROCKS BEFORE PEBBLES

With leadership must also come planning. Of the nonprofits surveyed in the *Nonprofit Trends Report*, 85 percent say that technology is key to the success of an organization like the one they work for, but only 23 percent say they have a long-term vision for the technology they plan on implementing. This can lead to what Sarah Angel-Johnson, chief information officer at the education nonprofit Year Up, calls the "rocks and pebbles" problem.

When Angel-Johnson started at Year Up in June of last year, she found a lot of "rocks and pebbles" that had been piled into a metaphorical jar "the wrong way." There were hundreds and hundreds of tiny projects, she says, all in unintegrated silos across the entire enterprise, jammed into the "bottom" of the jar, so that the "big rocks"—i.e., the big projects or solutions—couldn't also fit inside the jar. Staff were so busy with the little proj-ects—none of which were integrated into a larger business plan—that they had no time to address the important stuff. "Let's not talk about the technology or the architecture first," Angel-Johnson says. "Let's talk about the human on the other side [experiencing a digital innovation]."

"If you have a jar and you fill it with sand first, then pebbles and rocks, it won't all fit," Angel-Johnson says. "But if you fill the jar first with rocks and the pebbles and then finally sand, it will all fit." In other words, leadership needs to establish priority projects and execute on them before pivoting to anything else. So Angel-Johnson had her staff design end-to-end "user maps" to understand the complex interrelations of all stakeholders, including students, corporate partners, donors, staff, and more. "Once we start seeing that user journey, we can then start prioritizing [issues], if there's a business case behind it, or there is an ROI, whether it is financial or mission impact, using the human as your north star," Angel-Johnson says. She's halted the majority of her team's work so she can pay attention to filling the jar with the "biggest rocks" first. "Now, there is one Year Up technology strategy and road map, period," she says. "An IT [department] that has its own strategy makes no sense to me."

Developing a nonprofit-wide strategy can be difficult, but it's critical to an organization's long-term success and can only happen through leadership buy-in. Jarrod Bell, chief technology officer at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, elaborates on how his organization achieved what he calls their "journey of transformation" to become a tech-savvy nonprofit. "Painting what the vision was for technology at our organization, tying that to the mission, having that message come from our president and CEO, having that message resonated by our board, finding evangelists in the business who understood that vision … that have large peer networks and have them reverberate those messages as well, and then repeating it over, and over, and over again," Bell says.

Such a campaign demands enormous investment, but there may be no alternative. "Transformation is difficult, because transformation is change, and change is hard," says Becky Johnson, vice president of constituent experience and digital transformation at the American Heart Association. But "the world has changed," she says, "and we have to change with it." ●