

Katy Oliveira-Lambert ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to Next Practices Data Informed Strategies to Shape the Future of Higher Ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institutions. I'm your host, Katy Oliveira.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([00:28](#)):

So many different places across a university or a campus community are putting data in and pulling data out at any given time. And if you don't have a shared understanding or a shared belief about what you're supposed to do with that data, it's only gonna be as good as what you put in. And there has to be some sort of holistic commitment to investing and putting in the right data and using it in the way that you all agree to. So that's gonna be key when you're looking at a strategy and you're starting with that commitment that's gonna set the stage.

Katy Oliveira ([01:04](#)):

Today on the show. I'm talking to Dr. Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar, former president of the University of Central Oklahoma, and CEO and principal consultant at ARC C-Suite Advisory. We discuss what leaders should be thinking about when it comes to building a financially healthy institution, new and alternative approaches you should consider when developing financially sustainable student success initiatives, how to overcome common challenges to financially healthy student success approaches, and what pieces you need to have in place to establish a student success model that supports the financial wellbeing of your institution. And to help you share these ideas with your team, we've created a downloadable brief that walks you step by step through ways your team can begin to shift your approach to student success, to support the financial health of your institution. You can download it now by visiting the show note right there in your podcast app. Patti, welcome to Next Practices. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to share your experience and your wisdom with us.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([02:12](#)):

Yeah, thanks so much for the invitation. I appreciate it. It's good to see you.

Katy Oliveira ([02:16](#)):

So I'd like to start by just taking a moment to have you introduce yourself to our audience, and, um, two, tell us a little bit about who you are and your background with higher education.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([02:27](#)):

Sure, sure. So I, I'm Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar I have been a, a president at the University of Central Oklahoma, uh, for three and a half years. I recently have left that position and have stepped into consulting. So my experience in higher ed goes all the way from an entry level position through presidency. I was at the university for almost 16 years, and prior to my role as president, uh, immediately prior I was the CFO So my experiences heavily on the administrative side, uh, but working very closely and collaboratively with faculty, of course.

Katy Oliveira ([03:02](#)):

So today I'd like to center, given your experience, um, and your really the breadth of your background in higher ed, I'd really like to center our conversation around what it takes to build a financially healthy institution. As we know, many institutions have fewer resources and they need to stretch those resources further. And traditional ways of doing that, like growing enrollment, are becoming more and more difficult. It's becoming more and more difficult with the impending enrollment cliff and shifts in demographics in the labor market and the aftermath of the pandemic, to find those new students. So I'd like to start by exploring a little bit about what should leaders be thinking about when it comes to building a financially healthy institution?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([03:48](#)):

Goodness. Well, you just listed, uh, a huge list of reasons why this is so difficult, uh, for even the most experienced and established, uh, universities and leaders. This is a challenge. Everyone is sharing this mission to serve students, to serve their state or their city, uh, to serve their constituents, whoever they may be. And we're all looking for the magic pill. It doesn't exist. And what I would tell you is that any institution that wants to do more with less is going to have to really, really focus on prioritizing what they have and how they're using it. In Oklahoma, where my institution was, we have a demographic shift that's looking a little different from the rest of the country. We are expecting a little bit of leveling off, if not a little bit of growth after a few more years. And so the overall average for the state that I was in is a little bit brighter.

[\(04:49\)](#):

Outlook has a little bit brighter outlook than some of the other states in the country, but what I'll tell you is that you can't out recruit the big guys. That's the tough part. As there are fewer and fewer people who are either interested in higher education or are fewer people are able to take advantage of higher education for whatever the reason that might be. You have to be more strategic with the students that you have. Anybody who is in recruitment will tell you it is far easier to retain a student than it is to recruit a student. Not to mention it's less expensive to do that. Right. So when you're talking about a financially sustainable model, why would we not focus more intently on retaining those students? I know that institutions are tracking stop outs all the time, right? You're, you're looking to see if students didn't show back up, where did they go?

[\(05:44\)](#):

And more and more students are just choosing not to go anywhere after they leave. They'll be in good academic standing. They may even have time and availability to be in school, but they're, they're choosing not to. And the stop out rates are increasing at schools, uh, like regionals and smaller schools around the state, which are the majority of those schools, we don't have a huge number of flagships compared to the vast number of those other schools. We're all competing for the same student. The ones that you have are the ones that have already bought into your mission. They already have experienced the care and concern and investment that you have ready for them and that you're making in them. So for some financially sustainable institution, let's shift that focus to what can we do to help the students we have be successful and get across the finish line?

Katy Oliveira [\(06:35\)](#):

Absolutely. I know my backgrounds, anybody who's listened, the podcast knows. I came from a student success background as an advisor and advising leader for many, many years. And the metric that I was responsible for was first year retention. And I know that first year retention, retention in general, but first year retention can be really tricky to grow and drive. And if we look at the numbers of the last 10 years, those really have plateaued across institutions. I know that there are definitely institutions and pockets of institutions doing really great innovative work and taking alternative approaches who have seen movement of the needle, but by and large, overall across the country, those numbers have been fairly stagnant when it comes to addressing retention. What approaches, alternative approaches to the status quo or combinations of approaches should leaders really consider as they work towards fiscal sustainability?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar [\(07:30\)](#):

Yeah, that's a great question, Katie. When we looked at retention, we noticed that it's a common ailment with regional schools. And I'll, I'll speak about the university, but I will tell you as an experience with other regional universities and talking to colleagues across the country, that we share this struggle, that when we look at what we are doing with the resources we have, are we truly using them as strategically as we could? So for instance, are you distributing your financial aid as effectively as you could? There are a lot of schools who may not be able to determine what their aid is going to look like in the coming

years. It's possible that you're waiting to see if your state is going to give you more money or take away money. Uh, it's possible that your endowment may be shrinking and you may not be able to, uh, give the same amount that you used to give in the past, but that kind of commitment to some sort of continuity for students can make all the difference.

[\(08:28\)](#):

I am aware of institutions that have made great strides in increasing first to second year retention simply by adjusting the amount that they're giving students, who they're giving that money to or that aid to. And, uh, giving some, giving students some predictability about what they get when they come to you, that makes a big difference. Um, they're, they're always flattered to get the offer to come, and they're thrilled to get a little bit of help. But if every year they're trying to look for the, the place that's going to give them the most, why not step out there and put that out upfront and say, look, if you come to us, we are going to do this for you every year that you come for for four years, whatever the number might be for you. And then making sure that you're giving the right amount.

[\(09:15\)](#):

And thinking about this from a strategic standpoint, we don't want to necessarily give more money to students who are already planning on coming, right? So this is the nitty gritty behind the distribution. You wanna make sure that the money you're spending is going as far as it can. So help the students who haven't made that decision yet. That's part of what we do. Making sure that we are spending appropriately, that we are raising enough money to make the most impact. Another thing that universities and colleges can do is to focus on success initiatives. I know this is not a novel idea and a lot of schools are doing great work in this, but we have some focuses that our student populations across the nation can really benefit from. Whether that is on an underserved ethnic group, is that on particular areas in your community? What is it that you know could help certain groups of students be more successful?

[\(10:12\)](#):

Do you have more students from an inner city area? Do you have more students from a rural area? What does it take to help those students make the transition and stick? So anytime you can focus a little extra effort on prioritizing the care for the students as they come into you, it's gonna make a difference. And then a third element of this would be making sure the relationship between faculty and the student affairs or student success team is cohesive. Faculty are your first line of defense. They really are the, the people who are going to observe those students who are going to get a sense for what the struggles are, and then be able to have a relationship with somebody in the, in the student success area to hand that student off and to have the trust that something's gonna be happening for that student. We're gonna reach out, you're gonna ask that student What's going on? We notice maybe you're not showing up all the time, or maybe you're late on your assignments. How can we help you? What's going on in your life? So those are three elements I would tell you are really critical no matter what tools you're using, those can be done at any institution.

Katy Oliveira [\(11:16\)](#):

Yeah. And I know that oftentimes having the right tools in place to be able to do that is critical, especially when it comes to student success. It can be really opaque and hard to know what students need help, what kinds of resources to provide them, and then how to connect them to those resources and get them to engage can be really challenging. So like knowing who needs help is the first step, but you need even more than that. What kinds of resources, data, technology, tools do institutions and leaders really need to have in place in order tackle these challenges, in this intentional data informed way that helps them to be more precise with their strategies? I know that following best practices and painting with a broad brush to kind of help all students, what you were saying is how can we help specific groups of students that really need our support the most? And having visibility into that can be really difficult. So I

guess getting to the core of the question again, what is it that leaders need to have in place to be able to do that kind of level of precise work?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([12:28](#)):

A couple of things I would tell you first off are data and communication. Both of those rely on each other. If I start with data, and that's something that is a growing importance in all of higher education, we have to make data informed decisions about the smallest things, but especially about big important things like student success. So when you look at data for a lot of institutions just now growing up and figuring out what data can do, where data is, is housed, who's responsible for data, where is it coming from? Do we even all agree on what that data is or should be or what even the definitions of certain things are? You would think a word, like first time freshman would, uh, phrase, like first time freshman would be pretty easy to parse out. But if you ask three different people in faculty, in student success and in, uh, institutional effectiveness or ir, they're gonna tell you something a little bit different in each one or they're gonna ask you for more information.

([13:29](#)):

So making sure that we all share definitions around data. We have a single source of data. It would be really fantastic if you can find out or create a single source of data. You will have won a major battle in this war. This is really a challenge though, because some of these schools, a lot of these schools are not equipped to either invest in or to leverage what they have in a way that makes it as powerful as it can be. So data has to tell the story. Data has to lead you where you need to go. The second part of that is communication. What do you do when you find out what that data is telling you? Another important element in that is that you are communicating with students. Once you know what that data's telling you about them, do you have what it takes from a functionality from staff, from software?

([14:24](#)):

What are your resources to be able to reach out to those students? Do you have an early alert system? Often schools are investing in something where a faculty member can simply raise some sort of digital flag and that will go to an advisor and at that point the advisor can, can reach out. Well, if you don't have that system, you're immediately behind the curve there. The second part of that is if you're not paying attention to the system, that's gonna be a problem. But early alerts are just of it. How are you reaching out once that flag goes out? What are you doing to reach out to that student? Are you relying on phone calls? I mean, I don't know if you've tried to reach a 20 year old on the phone and had them pick up and have a conversation lately, but I can't tell you a, a student who would want to pick up and have a phone conversation today unless they initiated it.

([15:12](#)):

They're looking for something quick, something that they can read while they're on the go. Something that is kind of on demand. They can pick and choose when to pay attention to you. They don't have to stop what they're doing. And so having tools like texting your students, being able to reach out in the way that they want to be communicated with is going to be key. Some schools are just now investing in this. So if you haven't had that, you're having to start back at square one. And some of this also relates to what you're recruiting, what's what's coming from recruiting as well. These tools are going to work well for communicating students with students across the, the gamut. But data and communication are your top two things for student retention when it comes to making good financial decisions.

Katy Oliveira ([15:58](#)):

Yeah. And to expand on that, in an earlier conversation before this podcast, you shared with me this concept of a, of a living process. So it's not even just at like a point in time, like we get the data, we outreach to the student and we just rinse and repeat. There's an intentionality, a strategic decision making that happens based on the data. And then, uh, then we, we make sense of that. We, we, we put

forward strategy, we enable our frontline teams to have data informed tactics that they deploy, take actionable data, be able to do something with the information. Then we have to adjust and measure and assess that to see if it's actually working. And then we rinse and repeat. Right. Do you mind sharing a little bit more about the communication and data underpin this like larger collaborative work that happens and taking a more attentional approach, I think to this?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([16:55](#)):

Sure. Absolutely. Well, thank you for recovering all that already. Now, I don't have to do all that, but <laugh>, I, I'm glad to know that, that that conversation stuck. You know, those are some really important steps. Sometimes they feel a little basic, but it, you'd be surprised how often we get in a hurry and we don't pay attention to each of those. And it's really important that you start from a holistic perspective. This cannot be a quest of one division or one department to make a difference or to use data differently. Because so many different places across a university or a campus community are putting data in and pulling data out at any given time. And if you don't have a shared understanding or a shared belief about what you're supposed to do with that data, it's only gonna be as good as what you put in.

([17:41](#)):

And there has to be some sort of holistic commitment to investing and putting in the right data and using it in the way that you all agree to. So that's gonna be key when you're looking at a strategy and you're starting with that commitment that's gonna set the stage. The other part that steps into when you start to commit to this strategy is to realize, just as you and I talked about earlier, a strategy is a road. It's a choice of a direction. Your vision is where you're headed. Your strategy is the road to get there. If something gets in your road when you're driving down the street, what are you going to do? You're gonna turn, you're gonna move, you're gonna swerve, right? You may stay on the same path, or maybe a new and exciting road or shortcut has just opened up over here and it's really cool.

([18:27](#)):

Maybe it's gonna take you over a new bridge. Maybe there's something over there that you really wanna see, but there are opportunities for you to adjust and still arrive at your destination. I think universities often get stuck in thinking, well, that's not part of our strategy, right? We, we have to go this direction. That's what we said we were doing. So the belief that your strategy is a living process is key to your ability to be agile and to respond to these opportunities and threats that come up. You know, whether it's a demographic cliff, whether it's a new employer in town, you've got opportunities all around you. How are you going to build those into your existing strategy? So knowing that your strategy is a living process is key, regularly assessing what you're doing is going to be important. You mentioned one of the steps that we talked about was action, right?

([19:16](#)):

So you're gonna enable that action. And in order to do that, you have to make sure that it's the right action when you're doing it. And after you take an action, did it work? Did it not work? What could we do differently? Because chances are you're gonna need to do it again and again and again. Your strategy is trying to get to the point where you don't need the playbook anymore. It's just part of who you are and how you operate. What we have found is that enabling that action often reveals a gap, a gap between accountability, a gap between responsibility and authority. We want people to be accountable for this. We say, oh, it's everyone's responsibility, right? Recruitment and retention, it's everyone's responsibility. And philosophically, that's a fantastic place to be. And if everyone says that you've made one good step toward it, but the reality is it's not everyone's responsibility to track it.

([20:12](#)):

To know those students, to be able to reach out, to take action on things and to be able to make decisions with what you see and hear from those students, often we've given advisors the responsibility

of reaching out, but when it comes to can they make edits and where that student is headed, can we make some adjustments in their learning plan? How can we get them across the finish line? And maybe we need to make some changes. We haven't given them the authority that matches that responsibility to say, look, here's what your power is. You can help a student find a direction in any one of these ways. So making sure that we've aligned that authority with the responsibility, going back in assessing what we're doing to make sure it was the right thing or that it worked, or if there are opportunities to do it better and then adjusting.

[\(21:00\)](#):

We can't just look at it and say, wow, that that didn't work, or that was great without committing to the next action after, you know, you say rinse and repeat and it's, it's the truth. Strategy has to be something that you are constantly putting back out into the universe, right? Very rarely is a strategy going to be done. If your vision is somewhere off in the distance. You're gonna have several strategies, several iterations before you get to where you're going and, and once you start to arrive there, you're gonna have to take on new strategies that embrace where you're, where you've arrived. So it is a living process. It's really important to know that it's a collaborative and holistic approach to student retention that's gonna get us all across the finish line.

Katy Oliveira [\(21:45\)](#):

There is no set and forget it student retention and student success.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar [\(21:49\)](#):

That is correct. Yes, that's right. That's right.

Katy Oliveira-Lambert [\(21:55\)](#):

This podcast is brought to you by CITAs Learning. CITAs learning empowers colleges and universities to achieve transformative levels of student success to reshape higher education for decades to come. CITAs learnings student impact platform brings institutional data together for a clearer picture of each student and situation, equipping institutions to take data informed action and lead with a new purpose to impact student success, ready to help students succeed every day. Visit CITAs learning.com to get started.

Katy Oliveira [\(22:32\)](#):

I know you said that this is very basic and I think we, we hear this all the time, but the truth is we know there's sticky spots and there's places where this becomes really difficult. In your experience, what are those sticky spots? And if you have any advice or any recommendations, what are some ways that institutions and leaders can alleviate some of those places of friction to make that a reality? You know, it's one of these things that sounds good on paper, but it's not always happening. Where are people getting stuck and how can we unstick them?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar [\(23:04\)](#):

Yeah, we all get stuck. No matter how great you are at this, you get stuck somewhere. The question is how do you get out of it and who do you take with you? Who helps you get yourself out of that? What I would recommend that any institution do when you're thinking about where are you getting stuck, there's a, there's a natural friction point that happens in higher ed and when it comes to retention, it's typically between student success or your student affairs group and your academic group. And they understand philosophically we are all trying to achieve the same goal. We want those students to get an education, we want them to become productive citizens in the world. We want them to get across that graduation stage. So we all share that occasionally there is a natural friction point about how to get there. And academics will often tell you, this is the best way to do that.

[\(23:55\)](#):

From a pedagogical standpoint, student affairs, student success folks will tell you this is the best way to get there from a developmental standpoint. And so it's important that you acknowledge both of these

are valid, that this friction is natural on some level, but it has to be productive friction. That's where we often get stuck if we just dig our yields in and say, this is what I believe, this is what I believe. And we're never willing to lean into each other. You just aren't gonna make much progress there. I highly recommend getting these folks to the table on a regular basis together. Um, sometimes at universities, the only time these leaders of these areas interact is at a cabinet level or is at the executive level. And that's not the place for this kind of conversation to really take hold. This is far more operational.

[\(24:42\)](#):

This is really digging into methods and processes and people and product. And that's just not the place to do that. So there is an opportunity for a president or anybody at the top level, if it's your chief of staff as a president, whoever has the authority to bring people together in a way to make decisions that needs to be done on a regular basis. If you can pull together representatives, and I'm talking about the vice presidents and their, kinda like their number two from enrollment, from academic affairs, from finance, if you can pull those folks and their second and third in command together on a regular basis, and I'm talking, I don't know where your institution sits. So if you are really in a crunch, it might be a weekly meeting, it might be just a standing every day, every, you know, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, whatever it is, at such and such a clock that you get together and you say what's standing in people's way, you just put it out on the, on the table and you say, what challenges have you heard this week?

[\(25:45\)](#):

What's important is that you create an atmosphere of trust and productive conflict in that room. There are going to be people who are going to be incredibly proud of the work they've done that are gonna feel that they're gonna get a little cramped or their toes might get stepped on when they hear that that's not working well for someone. And so there has to be an atmosphere of, I'm gonna put down my ego, I'm gonna put down my pride. Because we all have to focus on student success at this point, whether it is from a financial perspective, we need students to come in that door, or if it's from an academic perspective, we need more students to get across the stage. We're all in it together. But those meetings really provide an opportunity to have a little more gritty conversation, a little roll up your sleeves, bring out some of the codes in your enterprise resource system, really talk about is it your late fees?

[\(26:34\)](#):

Is it your, uh, you know, late enrollment fees? Is it your application fee? Is it the fact that a student gets dropped from one place to the next? What are those things? And and that's the table to really bring those two and talk about. That's been a huge help in my experience for leadership teams to, to start to build trust on a more intimate level and truly having the, the president or the chief of staff support to get those folks together to understand just how important the relationship of those three leaders is to the institution is really one of the best investments the leader of an institution can make.

Katy Oliveira [\(27:11\)](#):

Yeah, early in our conversation when you were talking about empowering folks to have these kinds of collaborative interactions where they roll up their sleeves and they really get to the heart of the matter, talking about the importance of having a single source of truth. And I've heard this before, we talked about this for listeners, if you haven't listened to the episode with Dr. Tammy Wyatt from University of Texas, San Antonio, this comes up as well in that conversation, the importance of having a unified understanding of what's happening and unified goals and pointing in the same direction so that you together can be working towards the goal, but it doesn't necessarily mean you are dictating how different departments across institution are working for that goal. And, and the way that they coin it at at U T S A is that they have a hub and spoke model where they have this shared, unified vision, shared source of truth, shared understanding of what's happening, and then they go to their, their separate parts of the institution and they chip away at at that and make forward progress. I know that that's easier said than done. Are there any tricks or important elements? I know data is one of them and I'd like

to talk there, that having that single source of truth or data, but that you found help get people all sort of pointing in the same direction.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar (28:30):

I would tell you that that grouping, that needing to get leaders and their number two, number three folks at the same table once a week is absolutely critical. Enrollment. Is that important? Think about any other team on campus, how often are they meeting to do what they do? And all of those things are important for what they're doing, but enrollment is the solution for the whole system, the whole school, the whole university, the whole system for that university. And so to not put this at the top of your priority list almost seems a little negligent to me sometimes. You've taken a little long to get there. That's okay. Just get there. Right? Just get there. That's what I'm, I would tell you is number one, you can't have the kind of honest relationships with these key players if they are not brought together on a more regular basis than a once a week cabinet meeting.

(29:28):

That's not the place to discuss those things. And so unless you're going to force them to go eat lunch together every Friday, you really need to bring them in and say, how do we build this? How do we build a relationship together? So that's what I tell you is your number one thing. It's the people, your people are going to solve this problem. Your people are gonna use products, right? Your people are going to employ processes, but it's your people. So have you made the right choice about the people? Are you doing everything you can to foster relationships among those people? And do they feel that they have the kind of support that they need to do what's needed for the institution?

Katy Oliveira (30:05):

You said this in an earlier conversation. Does the authority match the responsibility? Do people feel empowered to be able to solve these problems and take action and then do they have the information that they need?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar (30:16):

And I would tell you in those meetings, those need to be action oriented meetings. You put decision makers there, you put people with the authority to make decisions in that room so that if an, if a barrier comes up, they have the authority to remove it, to change it, shift it, delete it, what whatever it needs to be. They have the authority to do what needs to be done in that moment. If it's, like I said, if it's talking about application D, you figure out your application fee is not the right price, whether it's too low or too high, you need to have someone in that room who is authorized to say, raise it, lower it, discount it, whatever it might be. But that room has to be filled with action and solutions. You have to leave that room with an action plan. And when you come back, you talk about how the action happened.

(31:05):

Did you hit any barriers, what can we do to help move it forward? And there has to be that level of accountability. So when you're in that room, someone has to leave the room with the job, right? You say, Bob, okay, this sounds like it's coming from your area. Can you take care of this? Great. Then Bob, next week when we get together, we want you to share with us how that went and if you need the help between now and then reach out to any of us and we'll do what we can to make that work.

Katy Oliveira (31:29):

Yeah. So important. I know a really important part of that is having folks have the right kind of information and data and that there is varying levels at institutions of data literacy, of data, trust of

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar (31:43):

Data integrity, <laugh>

Katy Oliveira (31:44):

Data integrity, access to data, access to data in a way that's useful and understand, easily understandable. And that in especially academic circles, having the data, the evidence to know what works, what doesn't work is critical. In your experience, you have a long career in many different kinds of roles and I've probably seen the evolution of the use of data and data informed practice. What has been a successful approach that you've seen that leaders can take to help to strengthen the use of data in decision making, in strategic planning, in the tactics, taking data informed action across a campus and getting folks to, to trust it and buy in
Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar (32:29):

<laugh>, I don't know if there's a way to get everyone to trust the same data at the same time from the same place, but we've gotta try, right? The beauty of of campuses is that you have a community full of people who typically love data, right? These are people who rely on data. These are people who write and build theories on data. This is a community ripe for using data. So number one, making sure it's available, but how do you get it to them? How does, how does a faculty member know what the, what the numbers need to tell them? How are they making decisions in a department based on what programs they need, based on what jobs are available in the market? How, how are they using that information? Do they even know it? So we have to, as universities, equip our people with the right tools.

(33:18):

And so having, like we said, a single source of truth is really if, if you can get to that, that's the gold standard. And so I would tell you that CITAs actually has been a very helpful thing in my history to be able to show people this is what data can do for you. What we have to do is get to that holistic commitment. That's where things like cabota are really going to flourish and show people what the true path forward can be. You have to be able to share an understanding of what things are. So in order to fill in the blanks, there have been institutions that pulled together teams to do kind of what they call a data dictionary. Okay? So they pull together, whether it's finance, whether it's enrollment, whether it's academics, and each of those may have their own teams. You need to create your dictionary of data that you use so that we can all have that out in the open, right?

(34:16):

That's why we use dictionaries today so that we use words correctly when we're talking between us. And so having each of those units create definitions is going to be a key place to start. Now like I said, you're gonna have some differing definitions of the same thing. So when you have multiple definitions of one thing, that's when that's another opportunity to bring those data definers together in order to say, do we need to create another layer of a definition? Do we need to just agree on a definition and and not parse this out in the way that we have? Are we really talking about two separate things? That's when you take it to that next level. So having a tool like CITAs can help you understand what the data is, what you can do with it, where the opportunities are. This is so key to higher education today, to have a source of data and to trust it.

(35:11):

The way for any institution to start to trust is to give them exposure to it, to give them the freedom, to kind of feel it out, to pull the levers and push the buttons a little bit. For some reason, there are areas of institutions that are skittish or not as comfortable with data and a lot of that comes from uncertainty. What are you gonna do with this data? There may be even a suspicion of when if this data works against me, why would I even want to touch this data? If in the end it could mean something not positive. So really allowing people to get in there and feel it and touch it and understand the power of it and what it, what can be done for the positive. Some people might be concerned about a department or a program or a project going away based on data. Well what if data told you that it would flourish if it had more resources? And that's an opportunity to look at it and say, what could we do with this data that could really make things grow and blossom?

Katy Oliveira ([36:12](#)):

Yeah, really ground it in evidence and what's happening at your particular institution for your particular students can really uncover opportunities to remove barriers to success that may be traditional best practices or keeping something. Cuz it's always with, this is how we've always done it or the other multitude of reasons folks keep initiatives in place can help us kinda get past those kinds of human biases that can sometimes slow and sometimes even block progress.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([36:41](#)):

Absolutely. We get in our own way a lot.

Katy Oliveira ([36:44](#)):

Yes we can. We can. And it's not that it tells you exactly what to do, it's data informed, right? It's giving you information so that you can use your professional expertise and so that you can do your highest and best work and that it's there to augment human intelligence so that we have a place to start. Uh, one thing that's been shared with me before is it helps us get a consensus around what the problems are we're trying to solve and maybe what are some opportunities to solve them much quicker so that we can get into action and adjustment and measurement faster. And I know you and I have talked about that, you know, we, we don't have a ton of time like we've, we need to impact student success quickly.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([37:26](#)):

That's absolutely right. So when we've talked about getting decision makers together in a room that's based on that same principle, Katie, that we don't have the time to waste and that we never did, but we have even less of it than we, than we had before. So you have to have the information and you have to act. You have to act, you have to act <laugh>. I would tell you another key would be for people who are just now starting to embrace the use of data, or maybe they've just started with a new tool like, like Civitas, to start to ask for data when you're making decisions, just get in the habit. Even if you know you don't have the data in that spot, just to simply say, what does the data tell us about this is a great way to get that in people's mindsets to say, oh wow, I'm, I'm about to recommend something and I really don't have the grounding that I need in order to help other people buy into why we're making this decision. But it also extends us a signal to people that we expect things to be based on data. What does the data tell us? That is a great way to just create the habit and people will start to bring you data no matter how small it is. It doesn't have to be some huge calculation or formula. It's just how many of this, how much of that, what's the impact here? What's the increase or decrease? That's data. It's that simple, but you have to get in the habit of bringing it into your decision making.

Katy Oliveira ([38:52](#)):

Yeah. Well we've covered a ton of ground and I thank you for that. Is there anything we should have talked about or that I missed I should have asked you about that you'd like to share?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([39:01](#)):

Well, I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today and the opportunity to say a little bit more. I, I'll tell you as a C F O in my previous life and then a president in my previous life, that you have to include your finance folks in your academic decisions. In the past we have said we will not let our finances or our budget dictate our academic mission, but instead we will be led by our academic mission and our budget and our finances will support that. The only way for those two things to work harmoniously and to a better end is for them to be on the same page from the very beginning. So even if a conversation doesn't sound like it involves finances, just bring somebody in from finance. And even if it doesn't sound like it doesn't in involve an academic program, just bring somebody in from the academics. It's just a great way for people to see that the whole system relies on each other and the health of one is the health of the other.

Katy Oliveira ([39:59](#)):

You've brought so much good wisdom and experience. How can folks who'd like to continue this conversation or have further questions for you connect with you?

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([40:08](#)):

Thanks Katy. Well, I have an email address I'd love to share. It's Patty ptt I Arc Arc consulting and I'd be happy to reach out and talk to anybody. We can do it via email or phone, email me and we'll be glad to pick up that conversation. But I'm available to talk to people about strategy and organizational performance at any level.

Katy Oliveira ([40:29](#)):

Thank you so much for coming on the show. I really appreciate your time.

Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar ([40:32](#)):

Thanks Katy.

Katy Oliveira-Lambert ([40:35](#)):

Next Practices is are produced by Civitas Learning Access More Next Practices and learn about how transformational leaders are moving student success forward by visiting civitaslearning.com. And if you enjoyed this episode, be sure to share it with a friend and subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts to stay up to date on the latest data informed approaches to student success.