

Introducing the Mishaps Map: *Taking Your Technology Project to the Doctor*

It's the telltale sigh. It's the tight grimace, the exasperated hands thrown in the air, and the all-to-common metaphors: "a train wreck," "a dumpster fire," "a real slog." It is, in short, the familiar song and dance of a technology implementation gone awry.

However, though we may all know the lines of this particular ballad, our individual stories can often be quite different. "It's like the old Tolstoy quote," one CIO noted, "the one that goes: 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' That's the story of off-track technology implementations."

In other words, technology implementations can go off-track for a variety of reasons. As a result, solutions to off-track implementations can be equally varied.

So where do we start?

In short, while technology implementation challenges may come in every size and shape, turning those challenges around begins with the same first step: **Accurate, specific diagnostics.**



The "**Mishaps Map**" is a tool developed by The Ada Center to help pave a path forward for off-track implementations by figuring out:

1) **What**, specifically, is going wrong?

2) **Why** are these challenges are arising?

Then, equipped with this knowledge, we can then start to think strategically about which next steps and solutions make the most sense for our specific issues.

Student Success Technology Mishaps Map

Features do not work as expected

Configuration issues

Permissions don't align with college's data access needs, key information fields have not been set up, etc.

Misaligned user expectations

End users' expectations exceeded reality, or vendor overestimated the tool's interoperability or backend sophistication

Poor Integration

Tool does not integrate with other core systems and requires manual efforts; college lacks process/bandwidth for this effort

Data Hygiene Issues

The college lacks data quantity and/or data quality, and/or the data is not formatted to allow for third-party tool access

Vendor Delivery Issue

Vendor does not deliver key features and/or key features get delayed on the vendor's product development roadmap

Buy-in lacking

End-users do not use tool because they do not want to (e.g., too cumbersome, does not meet needs, issues)

Awareness lacking

End-users do not use tool because they are not aware that it (or certain features within it) exists

Incorrect tool usage

End-users leverage the tool, but do not use it as intended, dampening impact or creating unintended consequences

Poor impact measurement

The college does not have a process to track and/or analyze key success indicators, including tool usage and end-user feedback

Budget

The college does not have adequate resourcing for the full cost of the tool (e.g., all critical features, training, human resources)

Turnover

Implementation relies heavily on a select set of champions or product experts who transition out of the college or key role

Political/Cultural Barrier

Leadership challenges or resistance to change across key stakeholder groups impede implementation

Poor Prioritization

Multiple initiatives strain institutional financial, IT/IR, and human resources, stalling all projects in the pipeline

Non-technical readiness

College attempts to implement technology without critical advising vision or processes in place or clearly articulated

Features work, but lack scale and impact

Incomplete implementation

Choose Your Own Adventure

Using the Mishaps Map: A High-Level Guide

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Consider Your Most Likely Root-Cause

Which of the following most represents what's going awry in your implementation? Circle all that apply.

Create a Plan to Unpack Unknown Unknowns

How do you know your root cause hypothesis is right? Who at your institution might be well positioned to help inform your diagnostic? Create a list of individuals and allow them to offer their input. (Suggested: IT, IR, End-Users)

Brainstorm Aligned Solutions

What actions are most likely to help resolve the specific root-cause issues you have identified? Brainstorm a list and prioritize this list based on how impactful you believe the actions will be in resolving the issue.

Assess Feasibility and Determine Next Steps

What will it really take to implement the solutions you've listed? Consider resources, stakeholders, communications efforts, coordination, partners, etc. Do you have all you need internally, or are external supports needed (e.g., contracted data or IT implementation support)?

Related Resources



Navigating Student Success Technology: Curricular Resources for Higher Education Practitioners: A five-part series developed by The Ada Center in partnership with Complete College America. The resources aim to answer some of the most common questions and address some of the most persistent student success technology-related challenges.

www.theadacenter.org/curriculum

- *Module 5.3: How Can We Fix Off-Track Technology Projects: Step-by-step guide for using the Mishaps Map*
www.theadacenter.org/module-5

