

"Coding the Kingdom"

The Digital Transformation of Seminaries & Institutes of Religion

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EXECUTIVE CORE FINDING

The "magic" in S&I reporting systems was never located in the technology itself, but in the people who interpreted discrepancies, translated local realities into institutional categories, and sustained the infrastructure through everyday labor. Data systems do not just record data—they actively construct institutional reality, shaping what an organization can know about itself and how its priorities are defined.

THEMATIC KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Power & Limitations of Data Systems

- **Reshaping Knowledge:** Information systems fundamentally altered institutional knowledge, changing what leaders could see, what counted as meaningful evidence, and how governance decisions were made.
- **Governance by Numbers:** Enrollment, attendance, and participation metrics increasingly drove high-level decisions, dictating staffing, curriculum, and administrative strategy.
- **Shaping Interpretation:** Forecasting models, dashboards, and assessments actively coached leaders on how to interpret organizational trends and student behavior.
- **The Visibility Trade-off:** Global dashboards expanded top-down visibility but ultimately flattened important local differences and obscured critical context.
- **Invisibilities in the Data:** Institutional categories dictated what could be seen; students with adapted needs, as well as complex issues related to race and ethnicity, remained difficult to analyze because stable reporting categories simply did not exist.

2. The Illusion of Digital Simplification

- **Layered Complexity:** Digitization did not eliminate organizational complexity. Instead, early digital systems layered new technologies directly onto older routines, frequently generating inconsistencies across fragmented platforms.
- **Labor Redistribution:** Rather than automating processes to eliminate work, new digital systems merely redistributed labor, shifting technical and interpretive burdens onto local personnel.

3. The Vital Human Infrastructure

- **Local Expertise:** Historic paper systems depended entirely on local expertise, relying on teachers and administrative assistants to manually compile, interpret, correct, and transmit information across organizational layers.
- **Essential Interpretive Labor:** Administrative assistants performed the indispensable labor of reconciling discrepancies, training personnel, maintaining continuity, and translating messy local realities into institutionally usable forms.