Creating and Maintaining Assessment Programs

This chapter explains how to build, deploy, and assess an institution's new or existing assessment program.

Building Assessment Programs

Every organization has a preferred and traditional method for launching new initiatives. The launching of a new assessment program should follow local institutional customs and practices so long as they allow leaders to clarify the purpose of assessment and specify requirements of assessment user groups, build a supportive organizational culture, create a strong leadership structure for the assessment program, identify and reach consensus on assessment program elements, make visible direct and indirect costs of assessment, avoid information overload, manage risk, and build an ongoing two-way communication plan.

Clarifying Purpose and Specifying Assessment User Groups

Chapter One explained how external and internal user groups generally use assessment. With the help of senior leaders, assessors must decide who the unit's important assessment users are and areas of organizational performance important to each group so that they can design an assessment program that meets all their needs. Assessors can use Worksheet 1.1 to help them identify assessment user groups and Worksheet 5.15 to identify areas of performance important to each group.
Building a Supportive Organizational Culture

The success of any assessment program requires broad employee involvement and support. Whenever an organization launches a new assessment initiative or formalizes existing assessment practices into an organized assessment program, members of the community naturally become concerned for a variety of reasons, all of which must be addressed by assessment leaders. Sink and Tuttle (1989) call some of these concerns “measurement paradigms”: measurement is threatening; measurement has a single-indicator focus; subjective measures are sloppy; standards operate as a ceiling on performance; if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it; and language isn’t important. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Measurement Is Threatening
Sink and Tuttle (1989) argue that measurement per se is not threatening; the use of measurement is what is threatening. They argue that people generally like to get feedback on how they are doing. What they actually fear is misuse of measurement data by someone else.

Wheatley (2005) argues that measurement is threatening but feedback is not. Feedback is also more useful in encouraging organizational vitality. Unlike measurement, she argues, people see feedback as something they generate themselves, not something imposed externally; they also see feedback as more adaptable than measurement.

In an organizational culture characterized by little or no fear, assessment is a welcomed activity because of the valued feedback it provides. The truth is, however, few organizations enjoy a fear-free culture, and assessors must therefore move cautiously when introducing assessment initiatives. One way assessors can reduce fear about assessment in the workplace is to encourage two-way communication between assessment user groups and members of units under review early in the assessment design process. Leaders and members of the unit should be forthright about how they intend to use assessment findings. Senior leaders of institutions migrating to incentive-based budgeting systems should be particularly sensitive to and aware of growing concerns of unit members who are apprehensive about how performance results conveyed through a new assessment program will affect their unit’s future funding. Ongoing two-way communication between assessment users and other members will go a long way toward reducing fear, minimizing misuse of data, and strengthening support for assessment, all of which are critical for assessment to succeed and survive in the long run.

Kaplan and Norton (1996) argue that another way of building a supportive culture for assessment is to include the parties most affected by change in the process of identifying strategic goals, per-
formance indicators, and reference points. This not only increases support for assessment but also builds support for future changes.

**Measurement Has a Single-Indicator Focus**
According to Sink and Tuttle (1989), organizational performance is complex, and measurement should therefore reflect that complexity. A good assessment program provides multiple indicators because organizational performance is complicated, organizational missions in higher education are multifaceted, information needs of assessment users are varied, and organizations have numerous critical success factors. Furthermore, multiple indicators are needed because assessors must monitor unintended outcomes that may result from intentional changes introduced into the system.

**Subjective Measures Are Sloppy**
Sink and Tuttle (1989) argue that as the focus of measurement shifts to knowledge work and service organizations, there is an increasing "need to measure softer dimensions of performance . . . such as employee morale and customer perceptions" (p. 59). They contend that measurement of attitudes and perceptions is not necessarily sloppy. In fact, it is well established in the field of industrial psychology and can lead to highly reliable and valid indicators. Good measurement of organizational performance does not require as much precision as engineers, scientists, and accountants require in laboratories, they argue. The basic purpose of organizational performance measurement, according to Sink and Tuttle, is to "tell the organization whether it is headed in the right direction" (p. 59). Performance indicators used as examples throughout this book are both subjective and objective. Questions about validity associated with any performance indicator should be raised and tested by everyone affected by assessment findings.

**Standards Operate as a Ceiling on Performance**
This paradigm is rooted in the belief that standards act as a ceiling when they imply absolute desired levels. This paradigm most likely emerged in the 1980s after W. Edwards Deming insisted that leaders eliminate work standards that cap the amount of improvement to be achieved (Scherkenbach, 1986); such caps, Deming argued, confuse a person's understanding of the job. Sink and Tuttle (1989) contend that standards are less likely to operate as a ceiling when they are viewed as targets or benchmarks linked to and derived from strategic goals that are understood and accepted as a means for the organization to achieve its competitive position in the environment. However, Thor (1993) warns assessors to use care when generating competitive benchmarks because organizations do not operate in identical environments, nor do they conduct work in exactly the same ways. Thor suggests that
continuous improvement should be stressed everywhere in the organization regardless of its position in the industry and the benchmark.

**If You Can’t Measure It, You Can’t Manage It**

According to Wheatley (2005), organizations today are crazy about numbers. “The search for measures has taken over the world as the primary means to control systems and people. We depend on numbers to know how we’re doing for virtually everything” (p. 156). She claims that organizations are driven by a prevailing belief that if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it. Too many organizations have “lost the path to quality because they have burdened themselves with unending measures” (p. 158). But measurement is critical, she concedes, because it provides essential feedback required of organizations (as open, living systems) to survive and grow. And feedback, as explained earlier, is different from measurement because it is viewed as self-generated and adaptable.

**Language Isn’t Important**

Benjamin and Hersh (2002) warn assessment designers not to import assessment or efficiency rhetoric from business and K–12 education. The culture of higher education is unique, they argue, because of the nature of teaching, learning, and scholarship in the context of college and university cultures.

Scholars in higher education have always resisted rhetoric (and practices) invented by others, particularly those from the business world. For example, in the late 1980s, institutions began struggling with concepts and rhetoric associated with “marketing” borrowed from the business world. Even though most institutions desired increased enrollment and improved institutional reputation, they struggled with the notion that marketing, regarded as a business practice, was appropriate in higher education. Some of the struggle pertained to acknowledgment that institutions needed to market themselves at all. Some of the struggle pertained to language embedded in marketing itself. Possibly the most difficult struggle was articulating quality in terms meaningful to people outside the academy.

Possibly even greater resistance to language came soon thereafter with the introduction of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM, much like marketing, came from the business world. TQM had a whole new set of terms (process management, quality, empowerment, customer) that many scholars in the academic world still find offensive today. Early TQM advocates, who saw themselves as change agents, found it necessary to literally translate the language of TQM into more acceptable terminology for members of the scholarly community.

Assessors in institutions where assessment is new or becoming more formalized are serving their institutions as change agents. They
must recognize that language is important and use language that fits the organizational culture. Many of the terms and definitions in this book do not fit some organizational cultures. For example, the term customer, when applied to currently enrolled students, is still a volatile term in the higher educational community. However, the concept behind the term customer and the definition used in this book (anyone who receives or experiences the system's outputs) is important in assessment because it presents two opportunities for measuring organizational performance: customer satisfaction and quality of outputs. Needs, preferences, and perceptions of students and other customers, such as organizations that sponsor research and contract for services, are used as reference points for evaluating customer satisfaction and output quality. Productivity is another controversial and emotionally loaded word. To some people, the mere mention of the word implies job losses and decreased quality. Nevertheless, productivity is an important area of organizational performance to measure, particularly in comparison with other areas. As explained in Chapter Five, a highly productive organization may or may not be very effective.

Because language is important in assessment, many assessors find it helpful to return to language embedded in the organization's mission statement and guiding principles. For example, assessors might use the term students and end users in lieu of customers.

Building a Strong Leadership Structure for the Assessment Program

Most senior leaders agree that the success of any new initiative requires the skilled leadership of one or more qualified persons. Launching a new initiative in assessment requires such leadership in the form of assessment coordinators and steering committees.

Assessment Coordinator

The assessment coordinator organizes and supervises the overall assessment program. The institution should have a single assessment coordinator, who has direct access to senior leaders. The coordinator should be a person who enjoys a high level of respect and who possesses strong skills as a communicator and project manager. The coordinator should also be knowledgeable about assessment practices in higher education and skilled in database management, qualitative and quantitative research design, statistical analysis, and other aspects of educational research. However, it is not uncommon for effective coordinators to rely heavily on the technical and research skills of institutional researchers and willing faculty members.

The role of the assessment coordinator is to serve as a staff consultant and trainer to unit personnel engaged in assessment activities.
The coordinator is responsible for auditing, coordinating, and monitoring all assessment activities that take place throughout the institution. The coordinator is also responsible for building and maintaining strong partnerships with the assessment program’s upstream systems.

As a staff consultant, the assessment coordinator provides advice, clerical support, and data collection and analysis assistance. As a trainer, the assessment coordinator offers both formal training through workshops and meetings and informal training through one-on-one interactions to help unit personnel develop assessment skills. The goal is for unit personnel to ultimately become proficient in conducting their own assessment without the help of the assessment coordinator. Assessment is ultimately the responsibility of the unit’s leadership system, not the assessment coordinator.

**Assessment Steering Committee**
Assessment also needs a steering committee made up of representatives from various units in the organization. The committee should include someone familiar with the institution’s mission, vision, guiding principles, and strategic plans. It should also include people with technical knowledge of current administrative systems, databases, and other computing resources; academic program review and accreditation standards, schedules, and procedures; human resource policies and procedures; and institutional planning and budgeting processes, particularly if the institution is migrating to an incentive-based budgeting system. The committee should also include selected representatives from units currently and formerly under review. Steering committee members should be appointed by the president for at least a three-year term initially.

The purpose of the assessment steering committee is to provide credibility to the assessment program. The committee’s primary responsibilities are as follows:

- To clarify purposes and goals of assessment
- To formulate assessment policies, procedures, practices, and schedules
- To identify resources required to build and maintain assessment across the institution
- To measure and evaluate the performance of the assessment program

**Decision Making**
Many decisions are made in the design, deployment, and evaluation of assessment. Decisions are made about who should coordinate assessment efforts, what policies and procedures are best, what areas of
Creating and Maintaining Assessment Programs

performance are critical to success, how to measure and evaluate performance, and who should know about performance results and when.

The best decision-making process in assessment is based on decision rules and criteria established long before decision making begins. Decision rules make visible the criteria for correct decisions. They encourage decision makers to debate and reflect on desired results before engaging in specific decisions. Decision rules help decision makers minimize the political aspects of decision making or at least move political considerations to the discussion of decision rules and criteria. For example, before selecting an individual to coordinate assessment efforts, decision makers should decide what qualifications the person needs: required levels of technical expertise, prior experience in assessment, level of respect among peers and the institution's leadership team, ability to work well with technical experts, and so forth. When the time comes to actually select the person for the position, decision makers merely have to decide which candidate best fits the decision criteria. Another example is the application of decision rules to selected performance indicators and reference points. For example, decision makers might consider decision rules that require that performance indicators and reference points be aligned with and support accreditation standards, program ranking criteria, NCAA eligibility requirements, and so forth.

Identifying and Reaching Consensus on Assessment Program Elements

When building an assessment program, planners must clarify and reach consensus on the program's internal and external system elements as described in Chapters Two and Three. Clarification of system elements is required to measure the program's performance.

Exhibit 6.1 provides examples of mission, vision, guiding principles, strategic goals, and organizational structure for an assessment program at the institutional level.

Making Visible Direct and Indirect Costs of Assessment

Assessment costs can be a measure of assessment effort but not a measure of assessment effectiveness. The total cost of assessment is a combination of direct and indirect costs. Direct costs are outlays for assessment personnel, equipment, supplies, travel, professional development, and other line-item expenses. Indirect costs are infrastructure costs (electricity, heating and cooling, parking, office and lab space), activity costs of campus personnel engaged in assessment activities, and opportunity costs of work not being performed because people are engaged in assessment. Exhibit 6.2 provides examples of
Assessing Organizational Performance in Higher Education

Exhibit 6.1
Examples of Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles, Strategic Goals, and Organizational Structure for an Assessment Program

Mission
The mission of the assessment program is to provide coordination, consulting, and training services to university personnel engaged in assessment activities that will enhance the institution’s ability to account to others and improve its programs and services.

Vision of Performance Excellence
- Assessors in all organizations, including the institution as a whole, are actively and appropriately engaged in effective, productive, and high-quality assessment activities.
- Assessment users are extremely satisfied with the quality of assessment reports they receive.
- All assessment users fully and accurately understand the performance of their organizations.
- The overall campus environment is supportive of assessment.

Guiding Principles
Beliefs
- We believe that assessment is a core research initiative for learning organizations that are innovative.
- We believe that assessment for learning is much more powerful than assessment for evaluation.
- We believe that organizational performance is complex and should be measured through a family of performance indicators.
- We believe that a supportive organizational culture is essential to the long-term survival and success of assessment.

Values
- We respect the concerns and talents of the people we work with and serve.
- We value the talents and diversity of each other and the people we serve.
- We prefer to agree on decision criteria before making difficult decisions.

Norms
- We will respect the talents and diversity of each other and the people we serve.
- We will hold all assessment findings in confidence.
- We will honor important decisions made by unit leaders about what and how to assess performance and who receives what information and when.
- We will engage in ongoing professional development to constantly expand our knowledge, skills, and abilities in assessment.
- We will be professional in our work, as explained in the institution’s code of ethics.

Strategic Goals (First Year)
- To create an organizational culture supportive to assessment
- To strengthen senior leaders’ role and necessary skills required to successfully build, deploy, and assess a new assessment program

Organizational Structure
The institutional assessment program is staffed by a full-time coordinator classified as an administrator who is aided by two full-time classified support staff. The institutional assessment coordinator reports directly to the president and regularly participates in meetings of the president’s cabinet and the academic council. The institutional assessment coordinator works closely
with the provost and other vice presidents, the director of institutional planning and research, and the chief information officer. The institution's full-time assessment staff are served by and work closely with an assessment steering committee whose members are appointed by the president for a three-year term. All important decisions about what and how to assess a unit's performance and who receives what information and when rests within the authority of the leadership system of the unit under review.

Exhibit 6.2
Examples of Direct and Indirect Assessment Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Costs</th>
<th>Indirect Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Personnel costs (compensation and benefits) of assessment coordinators and support staff</td>
<td>• Infrastructure costs (electricity, heating and cooling, parking, office and lab space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equipment purchase and maintenance costs (including computer hardware, software, printers, scanners, phones, and fax and copy machines that assessment staff primarily use)</td>
<td>• Costs of employees engaged in assessment-related tasks and activities (academic personnel administering standardized tests or reviewing student portfolios, steering committee members discussing policies and reviewing results, institutional research staff gathering and reporting data, computer programmers writing programs related to assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Office and assessment supply costs (such as standardized tests and test readers)</td>
<td>• Opportunity costs or costs of work not performed because people are engaged in assessment activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Travel costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

direct and indirect assessment costs. Exhibit 6.3 offers examples of internal and external elements of an assessment program at the institutional level.

In an era of declining resources, assessment leaders should make assessment costs as visible as possible in the institution’s budgeting process. Visibility increases awareness of the scope of assessment effort and gives organizational leaders another opportunity to make their support (or lack of support) of assessment visible. Visibility also provides another opportunity for analyzing the costs and benefits of assessment investments.

Avoiding Information Overload

One common criticism of assessment programs is they are data-rich but information-poor. Assessors can use several strategies to address this common problem. First, assessors can focus measurement
Exhibit 6.3
Internal and External Assessment Program Elements

**Internal and External Assessment Program Elements**

*Upstream Systems*
- Strategic planners
- Institutional researchers
- Senior leaders
- Departmental assessors
- Information Services Department
- State Board of Regents
- Local governing board
- Accreditors
- Governmental agencies
- Assessment test manufacturers

*Inputs*
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Equipment and supplies
- Physical space: offices, conference and work rooms, storage
- Energy
- Information

*Key Work Processes*
- Consulting
- Training
- Data collection and analysis
- Report preparation and dissemination
- Communications
- Program management

*Outputs*
- Reports (written and oral)
- Assessment policies and procedures
- Advice and support
- Training workshops and consults
- Guest speaker program

*Customers*
- Senior leaders
- Administrators and managers
- Faculty and staff
- Departmental assessors
- External assessment user groups

*Stakeholders*
- All external and internal assessors and assessment user groups

*Competitors*

*Students and alumni*
- Taxpayers

*Outcomes*
- External assessment users achieve their goals of holding organizations accountable and supporting policy, resource, affirmation, and choice decisions.
- Internal assessment users achieve their goals of accounting to others, managing strategy, managing organizational culture, allocating resources, controlling quality, improving programs and services, and supporting personnel decisions.
efforts on critical success factors. Second, they can focus on performance areas that have the greatest impact on strategic execution. Third, they can be careful about selecting performance indicators that measure what is important, not just what is easy to measure. And finally, assessors can develop processes for obtaining prompt feedback from assessment users about quality, quantity, and distribution of assessment reports.

Managing Risk

Assessment designers should also anticipate all the possible unintended and potentially dysfunctional consequences that can occur from program deployment. The assessment coordinator and members of the steering committee should be prepared for possible negative or unintended consequences and take every precaution to avoid them. This prevention task is known as risk management.

When designing assessment programs, designers should set aside time to brainstorm, as a group, answers to the following questions, in the following order:

1. What can possibly go wrong?
2. What contingencies can we put into place to prevent those things from happening?
3. What can possibly go wrong with these contingencies?
4. What contingencies can we put into place if those contingencies fail?

This approach to assessment design not only prevents some problems from occurring but also increases the leadership team’s readiness to deal with problems when they do occur.

Building an Ongoing Two-Way Communication Plan

As stated earlier, ongoing two-way communication between organizational leaders, assessment leaders, assessors, assessment users, and everyone else affected by assessment is crucial to the success of all assessment programs. Communication should be planned and two-way; it should also take place before, during, and after assessment is deployed. With assistance from the assessment steering committee, the assessment coordinator should develop and execute a good communication plan.

The assessment communication plan should identify all important players involved in and affected by assessment. It should identify all the needs of important assessment users, including what information is needed, when and where, and how it is to be obtained.
Chapter Four offered suggestions on various formats and channels for disseminating assessment findings. Assessors must recognize that the needs of assessment users can change at any time during the development and deployment of the assessment. The coordinator must therefore continually adapt the communication process to the changing needs of all its important players.

The communication plan should also incorporate two-way mechanisms for leaders to receive information as well as disseminate it. Two-way communication is essential if the assessment system is to continually improve. A good communication plan identifies what is needed to improve assessment, from whom, and when. It also provides structure for receiving feedback from important users after reports are disseminated.

Worksheet 6.1 will help assessors build their unit's assessment communication plan.

Deploying Assessment Programs

When deploying assessment programs, assessors should consider ways to encourage broad involvement, be systematic, adopt an experimental approach, and rigorously monitor strategic partnerships.

Encouraging Broad Involvement

Because the assessment steering committee is basically a policymaking body and the assessment coordinator is mostly a consultant and trainer, much of the day-to-day assessment work is generally performed by a broad range of people, most of whom work in the unit under review. Leaders of successful assessment programs understand that people engaged in and affected by assessment must believe they have a say in what is important to measure, how it should be measured, when it should be measured, and how and to whom results should be conveyed. Furthermore, they must support the goals assessment is trying to achieve.

Being supportive of assessment is not enough, however. People actively engaged in assessment tasks and activities must feel confident in their skills and abilities as assessors. They must believe that they are making a difference, are being recognized for their assessment work, and are being rewarded in ways that are meaningful to them. Finally, they must be made aware, on a regular basis, of the quality of their work and the extent to which it is helping the assessment program achieve its purposes for both the institution and the unit under review.
Being Systematic

When deploying a new or more formalized assessment program in a unit, assessors, with the guidance and assistance of the assessment coordinator, should be systematic in their deployment approach. In fact, the following sequential deployment steps are recommended:

1. Using Worksheets 1.1 and 5.15, identify all important assessment user groups and areas of organizational performance important to each group.

2. Using Worksheets 2.1 through 3.3, define this unit’s internal and external system elements as described in Chapters Two and Three. Reach consensus on the accuracy and completeness of each definition.

3. Using Worksheet 4.1, determine critical success factors and reach consensus on their priorities.

4. Using Worksheets 5.1 through 5.16, identify a family of performance indicators that measure selected areas of organizational performance needed for the assessment users identified on Worksheet 5.15. Reach consensus on the validity, reliability, and priority of each performance indicator.

5. Also using Worksheets 5.1 through 5.16, identify reference points for each performance indicator, and reach consensus on the appropriateness of each reference point.

6. Determine who will gather data, how data will be gathered, and what sources will be tapped for each performance indicator and reference point; then decide who will compile the data into assessment reports and who will distribute what reports to whom and when. When all this is completed, using Worksheet 4.2, build an assessment report schedule.

7. Decide how organizational performance results will be stored and who will be responsible for maintaining and securing the records.


Adopting an Experimental Approach

There are several approaches for deploying new assessment programs, but one of the best is experimental. Using this approach, leaders start small and experience some inevitable mistakes before expanding the program. Deming (1993) calls this approach the “PDSA cycle” (PDSA stands for “Plan, Do, Study, Act”). According to Deming,
the PDSA cycle is a tool for learning and improving a product or process. The PDSA cycle calls for leaders to develop a plan of action, do it (or parts of it), then systematically study it to see how things are going, and finally take actions to make it even better before expansion.

Monitoring Strategic Partnerships

Assessment is a program that capitalizes on the skills and knowledge of many people throughout the institution. One of the important responsibilities of the assessment coordinator is to manage partnerships with important upstream systems. Exhibit 6.3 gives examples of important upstream systems to an institutional assessment program. Three partnerships are particularly important to the success of assessment: partnerships with strategic planners, institutional researchers, and senior leaders.

Strategic Planners
It is important that leaders engaged in strategic planning and those engaged in assessment foster strong partnerships. The outputs or deliverables from strategic planning, as described in Chapter Two, are strategic goals typically stated within the context of a set of planning assumptions, performance indicators, and performance expectations defined in reference points. Strategic goals, by definition, are derived from careful consideration of factors in the organization’s external and internal environments. Their purpose is to move the organization toward a more competitive place in the external environment. Assessment, by contrast, is an analysis of an organization's past performance. One of the main purposes of assessment is to provide feedback on progress toward the achievement of an organization’s strategic goals. It measures progress through performance results framed as performance indicators evaluated within the context of reference points aligned with organizational mission, vision, and guiding principles.

Institutional Researchers
It is equally important that assessors forge partnerships with institutional researchers. According to Brenda Rogers and Karen Gentemann (1989), institutional research offices play important roles in assessment, particularly when supporting assessment activities such as faculty evaluations, program and curriculum reviews, self-studies, and analyses of faculty workload and salary comparisons.

Institutional researchers are generally skilled at research design, data collection, statistical analysis, policy analysis, and report writing. They are also familiar with databases existing throughout the institution. These are critical skills and knowledge necessary for assessment.
If a formalized program of assessment is a new initiative for an institution, the workload, goals, and resource requirements of critical partners, such as institutional researchers, will be greatly affected. It is wise for assessors to build and closely monitor the strength of these important partnerships.

**Senior Leaders**
Senior leaders are important partners in assessment. Without their leadership and visible support, assessment will not succeed and survive over the long term. Senior leaders are important assessment users who, as described in Chapter One, use assessment to account to others, manage strategy, support resource allocation decisions, and manage organizational culture. They are also partners in the design and deployment of new and more formalized assessment programs. Their job is to help the community understand how it can use assessment for learning as well as evaluation. Their job is to open doors for assessors; to encourage administrators, managers, faculty, and staff to participate in assessment activities; and to provide meaningful recognition and rewards for their contributions. Finally, their most important job is undoubtedly to demonstrate their visible support for assessment. Their beliefs, values, and behaviors communicate support (or lack of support) for assessment. Another visible demonstration of support is their funding (or lack of funding) of assessment initiatives. Finally, they demonstrate support in their day-to-day use (or misuse) of assessment data in reaching many difficult decisions they make that affect the lives and future success of the institution’s employees, customers, and stakeholders.

As new and more formalized assessment programs emerge, senior leaders need to recognize their evolving assessment-related leadership roles and responsibilities. They must carry out their roles and responsibilities in ways that are visible to assessors and other members of the organizational community while simultaneously maintaining their constructive use of assessment as end users. It is wise for assessment leaders to garner support from their senior leader partners and to build strong partnerships that clarify and recognize senior leaders’ evolving roles, responsibilities, and contributions as the assessment program develops and matures on campus.

**Assessing Assessment Programs**
Assessors must constantly assess the performance of the assessment program. Furthermore, they must follow the same assessment principles and practices they would in assessing any unit of analysis, be-
ginning with the identification of system elements, critical success factors, performance indicators, reference points, assessment users, and so forth. Exhibit 6.1 offers examples of mission, vision, guiding principles, and strategic goals of an institutional assessment program. Exhibit 6.3 provides examples of internal and external system elements of an institutional assessment program. Exhibit 6.4 gives examples of factors critical to the success of assessment that inform selection of areas of performance to measure.

Exhibit 6.5 presents examples of a wide range of performance indicators for measuring performance of an assessment program. Actual selection of critical success factors, performance indicators, and reference points depends, of course, on the mission of the institution, intended purposes of the assessment program, longevity and history of assessment at the institution, and specific requirements of assessment user groups.

**Exhibit 6.4**

Examples of Critical Success Factors for an Institutional Assessment Program

- Clarity in assessment goals and a campus culture supportive of assessment and those goals
- Confidentiality of assessment findings
- Quality of assessment data housed in systems controlled outside the assessment program
- Quality of assessment findings (reliability, validity, timeliness, accuracy, usefulness, readability) as perceived by assessors and assessment user groups
- Extent and appropriateness of assessment user group’s use of assessment findings
- Quality of the assessment program’s leadership system
- Quality of consultation and training services provided by the assessment coordinator and support staff
- Customer satisfaction with consulting and training services and assessment processes and reports
- Quality of support (visible and ongoing) demonstrated by senior leaders
- Quality of support and direction provided by the assessment steering committee
- Quality of two-way ongoing communication between unit members and leaders about the design and use of the assessment program and credibility of assessment findings
- Quality of cooperation of unit personnel engaged in assessment activities
- Currency of technology
Exhibit 6.5
Examples of Performance Indicators for Measuring Assessment Program Performance

Effectiveness (see Exhibits 5.1 and 5.2)

- Intended Outcome Achievement
  - Percentage of selected external assessment user groups giving positive responses when asked if their use of assessment helped them achieve their goals of holding organizations accountable; supporting policy and resource allocation decisions; imposing sanctions for noncompliance; supporting choice decisions; affirming accreditation, rank, and so forth; and validating research
  - Percentage of selected internal assessment user groups giving positive responses when asked if their use of assessment helped them achieve their goals of accounting to others, managing strategy, managing organizational culture, allocating resources, controlling quality, improving programs and services, and supporting personnel decisions
  - Percentage of actively engaged assessors at the department level giving positive responses when asked if they had sufficient assessment-related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to conduct assessment activities

Strategic Goal Achievement
- Percentage of organizational constituents reporting positive attitudes toward assessment at the institution
- Working hours senior leaders spend discussing and learning about their leadership role in assessment
- Percentage of senior leaders reporting they are comfortable with and understand their leadership role in assessment

Productivity (see Exhibits 5.3 and 5.4)
- Average cost per unit served
- Number of units served per assessment staff FTE
- Number of universitywide assessment reports published each year per assessment office staff FTE
- Average cost to prepare and disseminate routine universitywide assessment reports

Quality (see Exhibits 5.5 to 5.21)
- Quality of the assessment program's leadership system
- Quality of inputs used in the assessment program
- Percentage of assessment user groups giving positive responses when surveyed about quality (credibility, accuracy, timeliness, readability) of assessment reports
- Number of incorrect reports conveyed to assessment users that had to be redone
- Average cycle time and cost to prepare and disseminate routine universitywide assessment reports

Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction (see Exhibits 5.22 and 5.23)
- Percentage of customers giving positive responses in regard to quality of advice, support, training workshops, guest speakers, and written instructions in end-of-service surveys
- Percentage of new academic and administrative organizations seeking support from the assessment office because of positive feedback from previous customers
- Attendance at assessment training workshops

(continued on the next page)
### Exhibit 6.5, continued
Examples of Performance Indicators for Measuring Assessment Program Performance

| Efficiency (see Exhibits 5.24 and 5.25) |  
|----------------------------------------|---|
| Percentage of assessment coordinator time spent with individual units as compared against target goals |  
| Percentage of assessment coordinator time spent planning assessment program goals and objectives |  
| Percentage of assessment coordinator time spent marketing services of assessment program to potential departmental assessors |  
| Percentage of assessment coordinator time spent assessing and communicating assessment program costs and benefits |  
| Percentage of departmental assessors’ time spent conducting assessment-related activities as compared with non-assessment-related departmental activities |  
| Percentage of departmental assessors’ time spent conducting assessment-related activities as compared with target time goals |  

| Innovation (see Exhibit 5.26) |  
|-------------------------------|---|
| Improved quality and efficiency in data collection and analysis due to acquisition and use of new technology |  
| Improved dissemination of assessment reports to assessment users through new Web-based reporting mechanisms |  
| Increased productivity and quality of training due to new Web-based training programs and discussion boards |  
| Increased communication between and among assessors due to new Web-based discussion boards |  

| Financial Durability (see Exhibits 5.27 and 5.28) |  
|-----------------------------------------------|---|
| Total operating costs of the assessment office compared to actual benefits achieved as perceived by internal assessment user groups |  
| Total operating costs of the assessment office as a percentage of the institution’s total operating costs |  

### Summary

This chapter described many issues and offered several recommendations about building, deploying, and assessing a new or formalized assessment program. In the building phase, it was recommended that assessors clarify the program’s purpose, build a supportive culture, clarify assessment user groups and their specific needs, build a leadership structure for administering the program, clarify system elements of an assessment program, identify and make visible direct and indirect assessment costs, build an ongoing two-way communication plan, design the program so as to avoid information overload, and conduct risk management to prepare for and minimize the impact of unexpected negative consequences. In the deployment phase, it was recommended that the assessment program’s leadership system encourage
broad involvement, be systematic, use an experimental approach, and develop partnerships with important upstream systems. In the assessment phase, it was recommended that assessors use the same process and practices they would use for any unit of analysis. Examples of system elements, critical success factors, and performance indicators for measuring performance of an assessment office were offered.
Worksheet 6.1
Communication Planning

Unit of Analysis: \( \text{(Example: Chemistry Department)} \)

Date:

Use this worksheet to build a communication plan for the unit’s assessment program. In column A, decide who needs to be informed, and in column B, describe what this person (or office) needs to know. In column C, indicate when this person (or office) should receive the information, and in column D, state how information will be disseminated to this person (or office). Finally, in column E, indicate who is responsible for disseminating the information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Needs to Be Informed? (A)</th>
<th>What Do They Need to Know? (B)</th>
<th>When Do They Need to Receive It? (C)</th>
<th>How Will Information Be Disseminated? (D)</th>
<th>Who Is Responsible for Disseminating This Information? (E)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \text{Example:} ) Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Updates on timeliness and problems finalizing assessment reports (such as Student Placement Report) important to the dean for developing the college’s annual budget request</td>
<td>One month prior to budget request deadlines</td>
<td>E-mail and hard copy; through campus mail</td>
<td>Department chair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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