



# INFORMATION:

Getting from

“The What” to the “So What”



## Facilitating Decision Making and Organizational Improvement<sup>1</sup>: The Indispensable Role of Information

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<sup>1</sup> Module 1 of the Nuventive/NCCI program draws on the work of Dr. Brent D. Ruben, *Excellence in Higher Education Guide: A Framework for the Design, Assessment, and Continuous Improvement of Institutions, Departments, and Programs*. Stylus, 2016; and in *Sustainable Change in Higher Education: Principles and Practices of Collaborative Leadership*. Stylus, 2022. Used here by permission of the author.

## Introduction

The focus of the Nuventive/NCCI program “Information: Getting from “the What” to the “So What” is on the critical role of information and its use by higher education leaders and improvement facilitators in their efforts to support effective decision-making, to advance organizational aspirations, and to inspire and guide incremental and transformative change.

## Organizational Vision

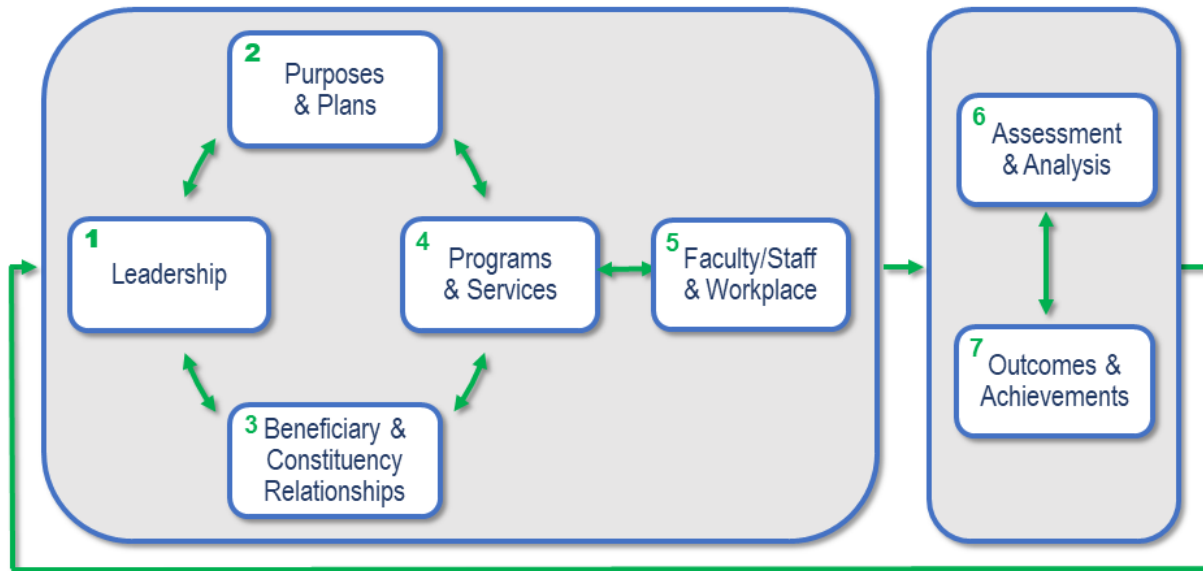
Three of the most critical considerations in leadership decision-making and improvement are: (1) understanding and leveraging the dynamics of organizational change; (2) committing to acquiring and applying competencies in collaborative leadership; and (3) formulating a clear and shared organizational vision (Ruben, 2022, in press). Information plays an indispensable role in each of these, and more generally in the pursuit of effectiveness and excellence.

## Where Information Fits with Organizational Improvement

The Malcolm Baldrige model is a well-known and widely-tested framework to assess and improve organization effectiveness. It provides a systematic approach for leaders and their colleagues in guiding review, strategy formulation, planning, and improvement in organizations of all kinds.

Of the various approaches for understanding and improving organizations of all kinds none has been more influential than the Malcolm Baldrige model. Sponsored by the National Institute of Standards and Technology and named after Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, the Baldrige Performance Excellence framework was developed in 1987 to advance quality in organizations nationally (Baldrige Foundation, 2021; Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021; DeCarlo & Sterett, 1989; Lassiter, 2017; Reimann, 1992). The framework represents a synthesis of scholarly concepts related to organizational theory and behavior, principles from the professional literature, and collected insights from successful organizational and leadership practices.

The Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) framework (Ruben, 2016, 2022) is an adaptation of the Baldrige model for the culture, challenges, and opportunities of higher education. Similarly, the Excellence in Higher Education framework benefits from being theory-informed, time-tested, and practically useful. The EHE model adapts the Baldrige model to the culture and terminology of university and academic health and medical settings, aligning with familiar practices of institutional and program review, assessment, strategic planning, accreditation, and organizational design. The model has been shown to be applicable for any academic, administrative, or support department, program, service, center, or school, or an institution as a whole—in normal times and also in periods of health care crisis (Ruben, 2016a, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; 2022, Ruben, Mahon, Gigliotti, & Goldthwaite, 2020).



**Figure 1:** The Excellence in Higher Education Framework  
*Source: Ruben (2016a), updated 2022.*

### **EHE: The Framework and Categories**

As illustrated in Figure 1, EHE provides a systems framework that focuses on seven themes that are foundational elements in a guiding vision for a program, department, center, school, or for an entire institution. In addition to identifying seven critical components, the framework advances a view of the critical contributions of each of the elements to a generalized vision of organizational excellence and effectiveness within any higher education organization. The EHE framework provides a focus on organizational change and collaborative leadership, stressing the need for shared ownership of aspirations and a commitment to the processes necessary for realizing them. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the seven themes in the model.

**Table 1: Dimensions of the Excellence in Higher Education Framework**  
(Source: Ruben, 2022)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative <i>leadership</i> to facilitate the creation of a clear and shared sense of organizational mission, aspirations, strategic priorities, and core values, including communication, community-building, and the meaningful engagement of faculty, staff, and students; reinforce the importance of disciplinary/technical and organizational leadership competencies; encourage the development and engagement of leadership at all levels; promote a commitment to continuous review, innovation, and constructive change; and emphasize the importance of social and environmental consciousness.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive <i>planning</i> with strategies and plans that translate the organization's purposes, aspirations, and values into clear, ambitious, shared, and measurable priorities, with goals that are understood, aligned, and effectively implemented.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong <i>relationships with beneficiaries, collaborators, and other stakeholders</i> who benefit from or influence the success, reputation, and standing of the organization; attention to monitoring the needs, expectations, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels of the groups served by the organization; operating practices that are responsive to these needs and expectations; and assessment processes in place to remain current with, anticipate, and be responsive to the changing needs of these groups.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High standards and a commitment to regularly assessing and enhancing <i>mission-critical and support programs, services, and other initiatives</i> with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency, appropriate standardization, documentation, and regular evaluation and improvement, taking account of the needs and expectations of beneficiaries and stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged <i>faculty, administrative, and professional staff</i> with appropriate knowledge and skill and a <i>workplace culture</i> that encourages, recognizes, and rewards excellence, through attention to employee satisfaction, engagement, professional development, and pride, and the creation of a welcoming and inclusive community.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Processes, methods, and systems for gathering, organizing, assessing, and analyzing</i> organizational outcomes, trends, peer comparisons, and pertinent environmental factors, and making this information readily available within the institution to support data-informed decision making, evaluation, accountability, and planning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Documenting and using information on outcomes, comparisons, and environmental conditions</i> to track organizational progress, stimulate innovation and change, foster accountability, enhance coordination, and facilitate communication with internal and external communities.</li> </ul>

## **Information for What? And, Who Needs It? The Indispensable Role of Information in the Pursuing and Sustaining Aspirations**

Information is beneficial in decision-making by nearly everyone associated with a college or university—whether as a faculty or staff member, formal or informal leader, or by stakeholders such as students, prospective students, members of scholarly and professional communities, regulatory and governmental agencies, and the general public. Members of each of these groups makes important decisions about a college or university and its programs and services, over time, and ideally each of these decisions would be informed by relevant and well-organized information.

Component 6 of the EHE framework is focused primarily on gathering, organizing, and disseminating information based on internal outcomes related to the performance of the organization as a whole, or for specific programs or projects, as well as pertinent information environmental issues.

Component 7 of the EHE framework focuses on the uses of information to guide change and to formulate strategy, plan, enhance accountability, improve alignment, and communicate the organization's story within the institution and beyond. More generally, information helps leaders and their colleagues to identify reasons to celebrate and causes for concern—where improvements are needed to advance the organization toward its short- and longer-term aspirations and goals.

Beyond considering the way the institution or unit conducts assessment and monitors environmental circumstances, a critical issue is how this information is integrated into the culture and life of the organization. For all of these reasons, methods for organizing information to track and communicate the progress and success of project, program, department, or institutional accomplishments are important as are mechanisms to gauge how these achievements compare to trends and goals, and how they relate to the accomplishments of peers and aspirational organizations. A further focus of attention is how institutional, unit, or project results should be viewed in the context of broader higher education and environmental trends, policies, and issues, and how these insights can be used to leadership decision-making and organizational improvement.

### **A Topic of Increasing Attention in All Sectors**

Higher education has been slower than other sectors to recognize the strategic value of information. However, assessment has become a central focus within higher education over the past several decades (Alsaleh, 2016; Asif et al., 2013; Benati & Coccia, 2019; Brusoni et al., 2014; Calvo-Mora et al., 2005; Escalada, 2014; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Middaugh, 2010; Mizikaci, 2006; Ruben, De Lisi, et al., 2021; Teay & Al-Karni (n.d.), following trends in business, health care, and government (Coe & Letza, 2014; Kaplan, 2010; Kinsey, 2021; Poister et al., 2015). Within higher education, concerns about rising costs, accountability, transparency, and the need for innovation—amplified by questions about purpose, perceived complacency, and scarce resources—have been persuasive influences encouraging colleges and universities to be more purposeful and public in evaluating their performance (Massy & Zemsky, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2006a).

Increased attention to these concerns led to mounting pressures from internal and external critique, along with voices pointing to the need for more rigorous assessment (Ruben, Lewis, et

al., 2008). These issues were not new to accrediting agencies; indeed, accrediting standards had referenced this theme for many years. Nonetheless, the idea of assessment has not always been a popular one within higher education (Haynes & Proitz, 2016; Lucas, 2014; Ruben, 2007b; Ruben, Lewis, et al., 2008).

The term can still be controversial, partly because it was initially used to refer primarily to the evaluation of student learning outcomes (Ruben, 2007b). This narrow interpretation gave rise to strong reactions: concerns related to perceived intrusions into an area of faculty autonomy; confusion about the distinctions between assessment and traditional grading practices; anxieties about potentially troubling uses that might be made of assessment information; and ambiguities as to whether “assessment” would focus on student learning, faculty performance, or institutional effectiveness (Ruben, 2020c; Ruben, Lewis, et al., 2008).

### **Increasing Support for Assessment Practices**

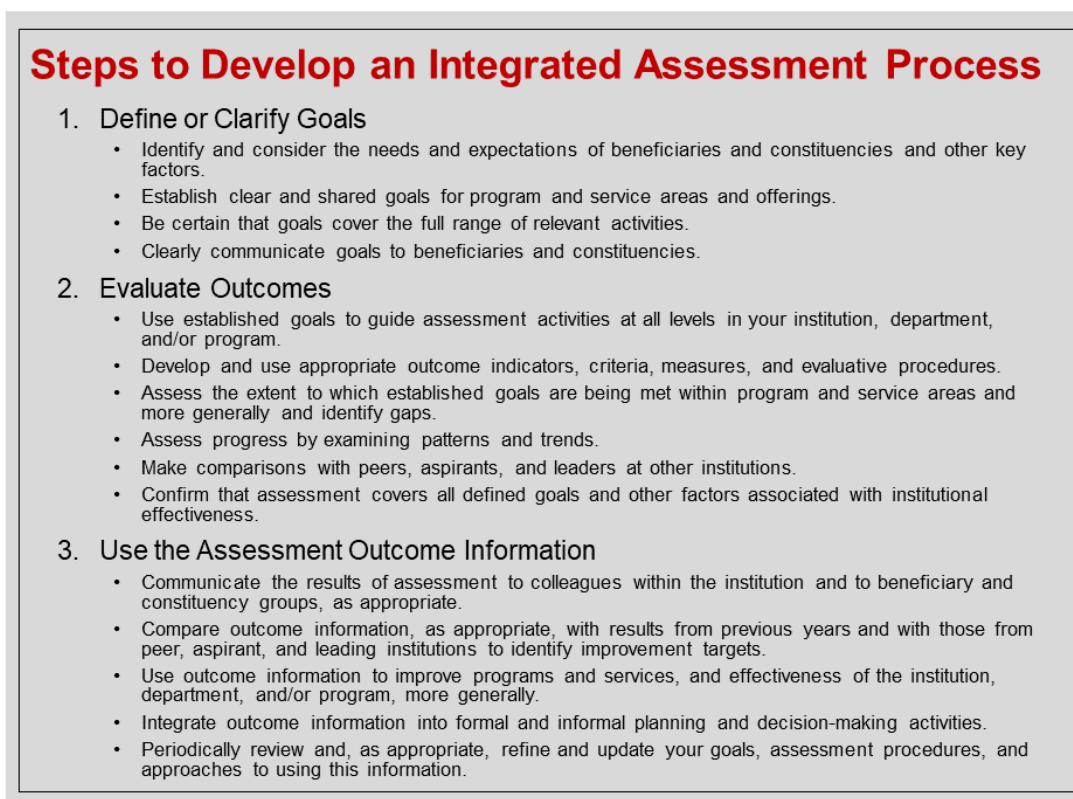
Within the business community, the push for assessment was framed more broadly to refer to the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes for strategic organizational strategies, goals, programs, services, or processes (Kaplan, 2010; Kaplan & Norton 1992, 2008). This general view of assessment was a fundamental emphasis of the Baldrige framework from the outset (Cragg et al., 2013; DeCarlo & Sterett, 1989). Over time, these more inclusive ways of thinking have led to greater appreciation of the potential benefits of assessment within the higher education community (Middaugh, 2010; Ruben, 2016a; Ruben, De Lisi, et al., 2021). The recognized value of collecting, sharing, and using outcomes and environmental information include:

- Stimulating dialogue and clarifying the organization’s mission, aspirations, and priorities.
- Heightening the shared sense of the purposes of programs and services.
- Developing a shared perspective on the appropriate standards and indicators of excellence and effectiveness.
- Identifying current strengths.
- Prioritizing improvement needs.
- Providing meaningful comparisons.
- Heightening personal and collective responsibility.
- Encouraging, monitoring, and documenting progress.
- Providing a foundation for fact-based planning, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- Focusing, energizing, and motivating leaders and their colleagues.

It is interesting to note in passing that disruption and crisis, such as experienced during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the benefits of broadly based organizational assessment and exposed problems that occur when the kind of information that results from these processes is unavailable or difficult to access (Ruben, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Ruben, Mahon, et al., 2021). The needs that have confronted leaders during these times have also underscored the value of having ready access to information on actions being taken at other institutions and from external sources on environmental conditions, policies, and actions (Gigliotti, 2020, 2021; Ruben, 2020b).

## Basic Steps in Assessing Progress and Outcomes

The assessment process typically begins with a decision about scope and other issues noted in Table 2. Whether an assessment effort is being undertaken for an institution or a specific academic or administrative department, program, function, or initiative, the objective is to integrate the assessment process and results into the culture of the institution in a way that brings focus to shared purposes and aspirations, clarifies the benefits of assessing progress and outcomes, and guides and motivates ongoing evaluation and improvement.



**Figure 1: Assessment Process Steps**

*Source: Ruben (2016a).*

Assessment in academic areas can be focused on a unit or program in its entirety, student life programs and services, major or minor programs, or particular functions, specializations, or courses. The process may include measurement related to departmental or school aspirations and priorities, beneficiary and constituency relationships, faculty and staff satisfaction, and any of a number of other critical indicators.

In administrative, support, or service functions, assessment is equally valuable. In these settings, the evaluation focuses on how the work of particular departments fulfill their administrative or service mission, aspirations, and goals—and how its accomplishments align with institutional purposes and priorities.



## Comparisons and Benchmarking Assessment

Comparing outcomes and achievements over time and with other organizations represents another useful approach to assessment (Algarni & Talib, 2014; American Society for Quality, 2021b; Bender & Schuh, 2002; Harper, 2019). The most obvious sources for comparisons are other higher education institutions. Comparisons might focus on approaches or organizational outcomes of peers and aspirant institutions or departments, or competitors. Benchmarking in academic areas might compare metrics and practices related to teaching and learning, research productivity and influence, disciplinary or social impact, contributions of collaborative partnerships, clinical affairs, or other core areas.

In student affairs, libraries, and administrative and support areas benchmarking would highlight comparisons of core functions and processes of those units. A broad range of information is available for these areas and for human resources, physical facilities, development, athletics, information technology, and many other functional areas. Comparative assessment can often be facilitated through the use of national databases maintained by professional and academic associations, governmental agencies, other sources, and ideally collected, curated, and contextualized locally.

Comparisons with similar functions in organizations in other sectors can also be extremely useful. Even when the organizations selected for comparisons may not have educational functions as their primary mission, analogous processes or functions may exist within them that can trigger useful translations into a higher education context. For example, research and development, leadership and professional development programming, human resource planning, instructional program development and delivery, social media strategies and methods, stakeholder communication, and assessment are all activities that are undertaken in various organizations across sectors. Such comparisons can provide insights and stimulation in one's own organization.

## Environmental Monitoring

Another type of information to support organizational decision-making and improvement can be derived from environmental scanning by a unit or an institution. Colleges and universities are affected directly or indirectly by a range of regulatory and policy issues emanating from state and federal agencies. They can also be affected by evolving accrediting standards, environmental disruptions, and a broad range of social, economic, and political developments at the community, state, national, and sometimes international levels.

Typically, individual leaders establish personalized strategies for acquiring information pertinent to disciplinary, specialty, and environmental developments in areas of interest. These informal "information systems" have considerable value, but the insight and guidance they provide only benefit those who have knowledge of and access to these sources. More systematically structured, centrally coordinated knowledge management platforms can be of considerable value by enhancing the effective capture and sharing of information from relevant external information sources of all kinds. External developments often impinge on academic and administrative functions within colleges and universities. How these external issues are monitored, and how information on such topics is organized and made accessible is another important consideration for leaders.



## The Critical Role of Information and Information Systems

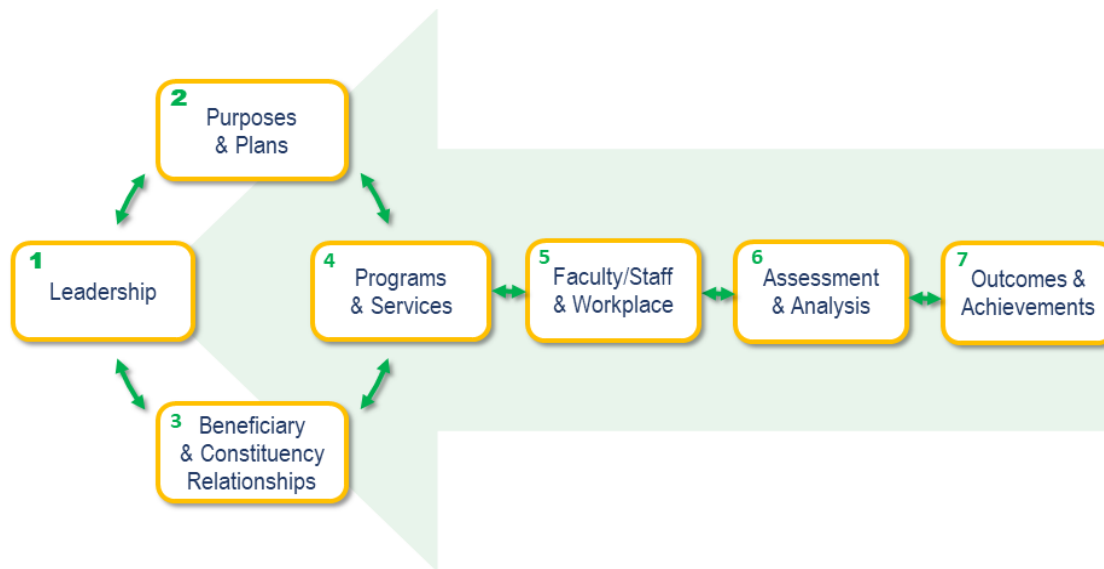
Establishing effective and efficient methods for acquiring, organizing, and circulating information on internal outcomes and external conditions is a significant challenge and an area for improvement at many—if not most—institutions. The goal, of course, is to have systems and processes in place to assure that needed information is readily available, addresses leader needs, and is structured to specific organizational contexts (Parnell, 2021; Raney, 2021). An information-rich culture of this kind can be indispensable for leaders and their colleagues in day-to-day decision-making, strategy development, short- and long-term planning, stakeholder relations, and faculty and staff planning.

## The Concept of Continuously Looping Feedback System

Effectively using information requires identifying needs and opportunities for advancement. Outcomes information must also be organized and channeled back to decision makers. This process is often referred to as “closing the loop.” This so-called “looping” process is analogous to the feedback function of a thermostat in a home heating and cooling (HVAC) system, through which information on the current temperature is “fed back” to a thermostat to guide the system.

In HVAC systems, a thermostat makes continuing comparisons between the temperature in a room and the desired temperature. When gaps between the current and desired temperatures are detected, the thermostat activates the heating/cooling unit so that the gap is eliminated. Thus, the HVAC system makes continuous use of information as feedback to guide progress toward established goals. This iterative process is the essence of continuous quality improvement framework.

Feedback regulating processes are common in adaptive systems across a wide range of mechanical, biological, and social systems (Beer, 1966; Bertalanffy, 2015; Maruyama, 1960; Ruben, 2003a; Ruben & Kim, 1975). In an organizational improvement system, leaders function in a role similar to that of a thermostat, monitoring feedback on outcomes and making decisions necessary to advance the project, department, or institutions toward established goals and aspirations. As suggested above and illustrated in Figure 2, this iterative feedback “looping”—comparing information on outcomes to goals as the basis for decision making—is the fundamental mechanism of continuous improvement.



**Figure 2 Feedback Process**

In organizational and social systems—as distinct from mechanical or biological systems—decision-making is not generally an automated or automatic process. Instead, it is a process—one that (generally) requires a human decision-maker to exercise subjective judgments. If they are equipped with accessible and relevant outcomes and gap information, along with data on progress, available resources, environmental conditions, peer comparisons, and a clear sense of long-term aspirations, leaders and their colleagues synthesize inputs and are able provide knowledge-informed guidance. This, of course, is the essence of organizational leadership. Leaders and their colleagues determine which identified gaps are priorities, which gaps point to opportunities for change or innovation that may require transformational rather than incremental change initiatives, and which gaps require a reexamination and perhaps a revision of goals and aspirations (Maruyama, 1960; Ruben, 2003a; Ruben, 2022, Ruben & Kim, 1975). Indeed, this “looping and guidance process” allows leaders to utilize their expertise and experience as they make data-informed decisions about actions, goals, priorities, and plans.

Facilitating leadership information processes, looping, and decision-making is one of the most critical functions in organizational improvement. This process is also one of the most critical functions for those whose positions and aspirations are to facilitate and support leadership and organizational advancement—as individuals or in various institutional roles. As Kanter notes: This dynamic “continuous improvement [process] is not merely a good thing for a handful of ... [organizations] but a survival strategy for every organization, as the only way to create organizations capable of rapid adjustment to rising standards and changing conditions” (2020b, p. iv).

## The Value of Documentation and the Systematic Use of Outcomes

It is easy to undervalue the disciplined approach to information acquisition, analysis, and use. So often, those who are “in the trenches” feel they have a good sense of what problems must be addressed and what new initiatives are needed. Sometimes these perspectives are informed through systematic data collection, but often not. Cost, time, and sometimes extreme confidence in one’s own perspectives can be impediments to systematic knowledge-based decision-making and improvement. Very often, organizational perspectives grow out of daily interactions and anecdotal reports from senior leaders, colleagues, and stakeholders, all of whom are likely to have unique (but potentially limited) views on what priorities are most critical for improvement. Clearly, it is tempting to go with one’s perspective experience as a guide to decision-making. This can be a way of saving time and money in the short term—but the longer-term costs can be significant.

Another explanation for resistance to systemic approaches to information gathering and use is that they do not always contribute to immediate change or a visible advancement of the organization. Patience and persistence may be required. Also, a barrier is the absence of a clear and shared vision of what effectiveness and excellence mean and how a leader helps an organization navigate systematically toward these aspirations.

Leadership decision-making models that favor alternatives such as intuitive, anecdotally based, or “firefighting” strategies for priority-setting are nearly always a mistake—in the moment and in the longer term. Without information on outcomes relative to goals and aspirations, and on peers and environmental conditions, how would a leader be able to meaningfully prioritize goals and actions, track progress toward their realization, and reset the agenda for further improvement and innovation over time?

Intuitive, anecdotal, and “fire-fighting” priority-setting approaches also diminish the opportunity to colleagues and stakeholders in a shared vision of what needs to be done and why, earning and sustaining their commitment to those purposes, and enabling them to act in a way that aligns their day-to-day actions with the broader organizational agenda (Ruben, 2022). Additionally, the systematic and colleague-engaged approach helps leaders and their organizations cope more successfully with the disruptive effects of leadership transitions than would otherwise be possible. The knowledge-driven systems approach to improvement enables leaders to invest in an enduring and self-sustaining operational vision for the long-term effectiveness of the organization (Brusoni et al., 2014; Middaugh, 2010; Mizikaci, 2006; Seymour & Bourgeois, 2018).

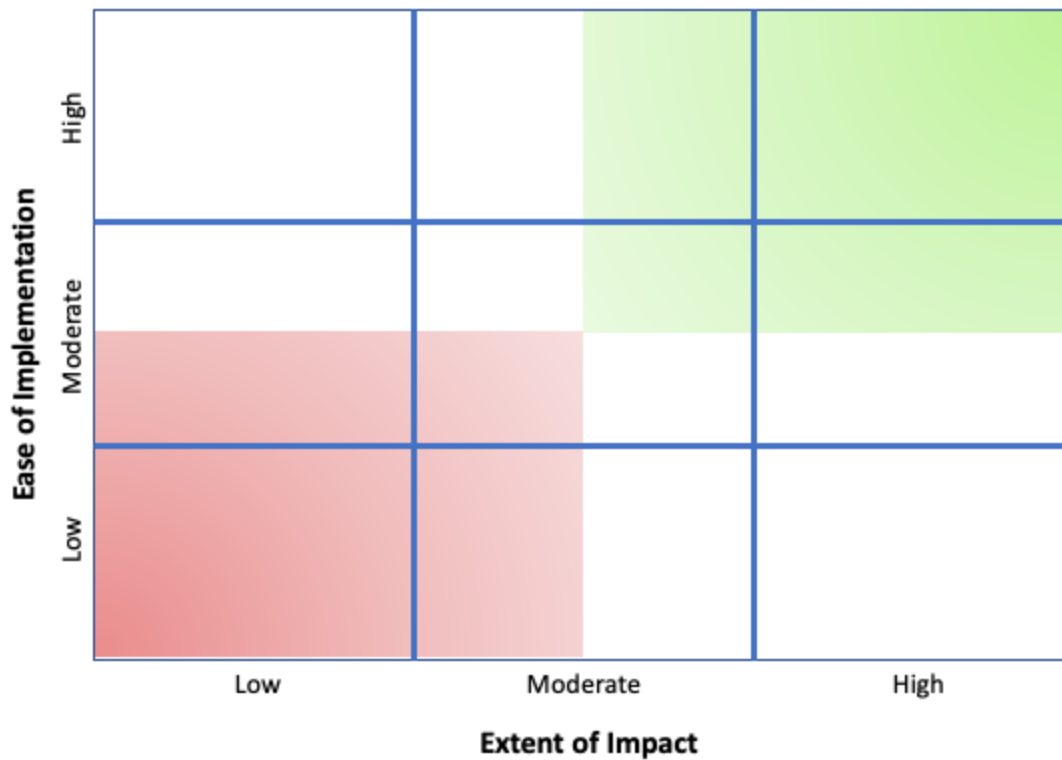
The value of a knowledge-guided leadership decision making system becomes particularly important in the wake of disruptions triggered by external or internal changes (Ellucian, 2020; Gardner, 2020; Gigliotti, 2021; Ruben, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Ruben, Mahon, et al., 2021; Scoblic, 2020). As has been made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, well-organized and easily accessible organizational and environmental information is particularly critical when addressing issues that require urgent attention.

The ultimate goal is the creation of a culture that supports systematic, data-informed planning and decision-making, and continual improvement—an information culture—throughout an institution (Burnette, 2021; Parnell, 2021; Raney, 2021). A focus on evidence related to progress and outcomes, information from environmental scanning, and knowledge regarding the actions of peer institutions provides an invaluable guide for forward-directed plans and goals across most situations. Accessible, well-organized, and context-specific information enhances virtually all leadership and organizational functions.

## Documentation, Display, and Prioritization

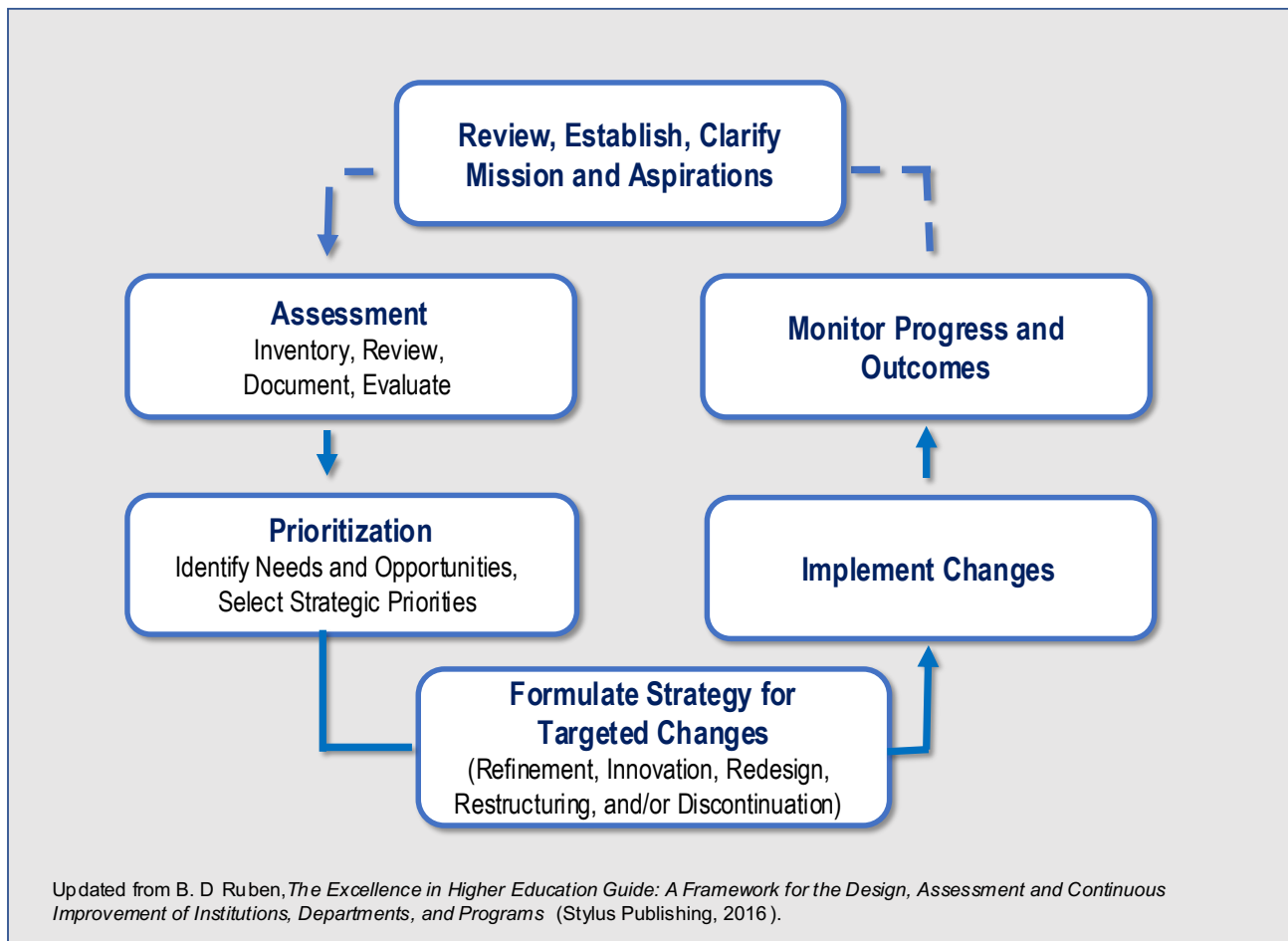
Easy-to-access and use formats are essential to effective loop-closing and ongoing improvement through the documentation and display of outcomes, comparisons, and environmental information. Beyond documentation and the aggregation of outcomes information, prioritization is a critical step. Which of the many possible improvements that have the potential for addressing gaps or elevating current organizational practice in pursuit of its aspirations should be priorities for action? The most logical approach is to focus change efforts on targets that have the greatest potential for impact. This might mean attaching high priority to goals that emerged from specific assessment outcomes in a systems model, such as clarifying and making leadership goals more transparent, more broadly engaging faculty and staff in planning processes, or devoting greater attention to primary sources of student dissatisfaction. The prioritization process could also point to the need for a critical review and possible reimagining of current programs, services, or support technology to focus on improvements related to faculty and staff culture or climate, or broadening access outcomes assessment and analytics information.

Using a template such as that shown in Figure 3, the range of potential improvement options can be categorized and displayed. High-impact, easily addressed—“low-hanging-fruit” opportunities—would be placed in the “green zone,” and some or all of these might become high priorities for action. Improvements with a high potential for impact but more difficult to address could become secondary priorities, along with lower impact changes that can be quite easily achieved. A framework such as this can be quite useful for classifying and displaying possible targets in a continuing improvement cycle. This, too, is an activity that should be knowledge-guided, but informed by leadership and organizational goals and aspirations, as well.



**Figure 3: Prioritizing Documented Improvement Needs**

Decisions about improvement and change priorities require nuanced considerations based on criteria determined to be relevant for a specific context and at a particular point in time. These might include potential impact, urgency, ease of implementation, available support, the breadth of benefits, stakeholder needs and expectations, the extent to which the effort is within control of a leader and/or their organization, or any of a number of other considerations (Ruben, 2020b). These might include *cost*, *time requirements*, *sequence considerations*, or *criticality* for students or other stakeholders. Employing specific and transparent evaluative standards and a systematic process for arriving at, communicating, and implementing criteria used for priority setting has substantial benefits for reinforcing the values of information-guided change, collaborative leadership, and aspiration-directed activity.



**Figure 4: Closing the Loop: Continuous Improvement and Change**

## Applications and Case Studies

These dynamic processes and impressive outcomes of looping and knowledge-based decision making are illustrated in any number of case histories and narrative descriptions, and studies of organizational improvement practices in higher education settings in the United States and internationally (Alsaleh, 2016; & Coccia, 2019; Brusoni, 2014; Calvo-Mora et al., 2005; Cartmell, 2014; Hsu et al., 2016; Indumini, 2016; Maciel-Monteon et al., 2020; Middaugh, 2010; Mizikaci, 2006; Ruben, 1995a, 2016a; Ruben, Mahon, et al., 2021; Teay & Al-Karni (n.d.); Tracy, 2006; Yurkofsky, 2020).

Various publications have also provided illustrative discussions and case histories of how the aspiration-assessment-prioritization-planning-improvement process can be systematically and iteratively implemented (Badri et al., 2006; Baragde, 2020; Brusoni et al., 2014; Ehrmann, 2021; Indumini, 2016; Marciel-Monteon et al., 2020; Middaugh, 2010; Mizikaci, 2006; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019d; Seymour & Bourgeois, 2018; Sorensen et al., 2005).

Some publications focus on continuous, information-guided improvement and change in particular disciplines and professional areas (ABET, 2021; ACBSP, 2021; Foundation of the American College of Healthcare Executives, 2015; Gilbert & Oedekoven, n.d.; Weeks et al., 2000). Others case focus specifically on applications of EHE in various academic and academic healthcare contexts (Gigliotti, Ruben, & Goldthwaite, 2021; Goldthwaite et al., 2021; Ruben, 2006c, 2007b, 2016a, 2020c; Ruben, De Lisi, et al., 2021; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019d; Ruben, Mahon, et al., 2021).

## **Using Information to Guide and Sustain Change: Everyone’s Job**

For an institution or a department and its leaders, information gained through internal outcomes assessment, analysis, benchmarking, and external comparisons is essential to guide incremental, continuous, or more fundamental change. This information can be used to gauge organizational performance, identify and recognize advances, highlight areas where change is needed, and communicate progress to internal and external audiences. These kinds of information are also essential to improve the functioning of individual components within the system, to enhance coordination across functions and to promote priority-based resource allocation and greater intentionality in routine decision making. More generally, the use of insights from organizational and environmental outcomes to inform priority-setting, planning, and change is critical.

As described by Swing & Ross:

The complexity of modern higher education demands investment in leadership and staffing for strategic, tactical, and operational decisions... With greater access to data sources and data tools, and increased department-specific data, institutional research products are widely dispersed across higher education institutions... An increasing number of staff and mid-level administrators are expected to use data to inform decisions....” (Swing, 2016, 12).

As suggested directly and by implication, the creation and use of information is a critical function in leadership and organizational advancement. An understanding of the issues involved and the ways of gathering, contextualizing, applying, and using information effectively are not all obvious nor intuitive. The necessary knowledge and skills do not automatically come with experience in a leadership role, nor with leadership training. Providing the knowledge and facilitation necessary to make use of these insights, strategies, and tools often becomes a responsibility of quality improvement staff, institutional assessing and effectiveness offices, and others throughout an institution, prepared and motivated to bring this kind of valuable expertise and support to the work of leaders and their colleagues. More fully equipping individuals to provide this kind of support is the goal of this Nuventive/NCCI program.



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