

Creating a Culture of Assessment: A Case Study for Building a Sustainable Model for Communicating Results to Guide Change

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ABSTRACT

Programmatic and curricular assessment, as mechanisms of continuous quality improvement, are essential and require input from multiple stakeholders. Despite its essential nature, there are few resources to help guide the development of a sustainable model of assessment. The aims of this organizational case study are to describe a sustainable model. Data was collected from various stakeholders of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program. Results were compared between and within groups to determine level of agreement and yearly trends. These results were discussed at the faculty assessment retreat. The outcomes included data collection timelines that have been operationalized and systematized. Five out of nine faculty participated in a post-survey. All respondents (100%) indicated a favorable impression of the event. Building a culture of assessment requires an intentional and sustainable plan. A retreat was an effective method to communicate the results of the assessment and to build trust and transparency.

KEYWORDS

Assessment, Curriculum, Physical Therapy, Program, Retreat

INTRODUCTION

Assessment in health-care professional education programs is essential to developing competent health-care providers (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). This is true for assessments related to individual course learning objectives as well as for programmatic and curricular assessments. Programmatic and curricular assessments can serve as mechanisms of continuous quality improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2020). To do so, they require input/data from multiple stakeholders that can be analyzed and evaluated to determine appropriate action items (Schuwirth et al., 2017). Developing a culture of assessment is even more complex. A culture of assessment is most often described in the literature in one of two ways—either theoretically or based on empirical research of the practices, resources, processes, and/or factors identified as contributing to a culture of assessment (Fuller et al., 2016). Further complicating the construct of a culture of assessment is the underlying motivation for the assessment, which is likely multifaceted (Kline, 2019).

DOI: 10.4018/IJITLHE.337288

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Theoretical Descriptions of Culture of Assessment

According to Banta's culture of assessment theory, a culture of assessment includes individuals who believe in the value of assessment and who influence assessment practices. It includes an organized process that supports quality assessment (Fuller et al., 2015; Fuller, 2013). A culture of assessment requires planning for the assessment process, effective communication, simplicity of the model, credibility of the data, and accountability of the assessment team (Amin, 2023). Maki identifies assessment as meaningful when it is anchored in the educational principles of the institution, intentionally designed, and woven into roles and responsibilities across an institution (Maki, 2012; Fuller et al., 2016).

Empirical Research of Culture of Assessment

The resources involved in a culture of assessment vary. Rudolph et al. (2019) surveyed colleges and schools of pharmacy to assess the current structures and resources committed to assessment. The results demonstrated a wide variety of resources, from zero to six or more positions dedicated to assessment and zero to four or more committees tasked with assessment. Within these positions, there was even more variability in which position (dean, faculty, or assessment coordinator) was responsible for the assessment. The authors acknowledged that there were many resources associated with assessments and that this is likely in response to accreditation changes. While these researchers were able to ascertain the number of resources from a large sample size of pharmacy programs (84% response rate), these results were not correlated to program outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2019). Although institutions with cultures of assessment are often associated with quality (Simper et al., 2022), magnitude of assessment resources does not equate to having a culture of assessment.

One way to capture stakeholder values and beliefs regarding the value of assessment is to utilize the *Survey of Assessment Culture*. This tool was developed in 2011 using Maki's Principles of Inclusive Commitment to Assessment (Maki, 2012; Fuller et al., 2016; Fuller & Skidmore, 2014). The tool has 21 questions; each question has a 5-point Likert scale response. Fuller and Skidmore surveyed 917 respondents associated with assessment across the United States and then completed an exploratory factor analysis. The survey results generated a three-factor structure with good internal consistency. The three assessment culture factors identified from this survey were clear commitment ($\alpha = 0.93$, 95% CI [0.92, 0.94]), connection to change ($\alpha = 0.92$, 95% CI [0.91, 0.94]), and vital to institution ($\alpha = 0.71$, 95% CI [0.65, 0.77]) (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014).

The theoretical descriptions and empirical research regarding cultures of assessment offer significant overlap. For example, clear commitment and connection to change are demonstrated with communication. Having a variety of resources may indicate that the role/responsibility of assessment does not fall to just one or a few individuals at an institution; rather, it is the work of many, in multiple capacities. This overlap offers veracity to the underlying construct and demonstrates the complex nature of a culture of assessment.

Accountability

A remaining component to consider when trying to understand a culture of assessment is the rationale for assessing. Maki identified assessment practices for a variety of reasons, including accountability, accreditation, reputation, access to financial resources, and/or inquiry into what students learned (Fuller et al., 2016). The value of assessment in higher education (and health-care professions education more specifically), for whatever reason, has risen in recent history (Rudolph et al., 2019). Brown (2017) argued that this was a result of calls for increased accountability in higher education. Accountability comes from multiple levels both internal and external to the organization. Using a framework from organization theory (institutional logics), the authors identified seven silos for accountability within higher education: assessment, accreditation, institutional research, institutional effectiveness, education measurement, evaluation, and higher education public policy. Within each silo, the market, the state,

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