



Building and sustaining a culture of assessment: best practices for change leadership

Building a
culture of
assessment

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Received 2 July 2012
Revised 27 July 2012
29 July 2012
29 July 2012
Accepted 31 July 2012

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of using Kotter’s eight-step model for change leadership to create a culture of assessment that is embedded in the organizational culture of an academic library.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a conceptual paper that examines the potential application of a business change model to an academic library change context. Each step of Kotter’s model is described within the context of building a culture of assessment, supported by examples and suggestions from the literature of libraries, higher education, organizational behavior and change leadership.

Findings – While building a culture of assessment is critical for libraries in the current environment, it is a difficult and complex process that requires grassroots initiative, top-down support and strong leadership. Kotter’s model for change management provides a pragmatic structure for culture change through behavioral change and change leadership regardless of positional authority.

Practical implications – This paper includes best practices for facilitating a culture of assessment, including necessary resources and possible approaches.

Originality/value – While the literature contains articles about building a culture of assessment, no studies have applied models of change leadership from the management literature to this unique cultural process. This is the first paper that suggests concrete steps for libraries towards building a culture of assessment, even in the absence of an ideal organizational culture. The focus is also on enabling change leadership regardless of whether the change agents have positional authority.

Keywords Assessment, Change management, Organizational culture, Academic libraries, Change leadership

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Accountability has been a guiding force in the world of higher education for 30 years (Marrs, 2012). Where colleges and universities were once thought of as public goods, they are now being held up to scrutiny, asked to show that they are spending money wisely and demonstrate the value they provide to students. In support of this focus on accountability, regional and disciplinary accreditation agencies began requiring that assessment be conducted in all areas of higher education, including in the classroom. Beyond simply offering assignments and giving grades, faculty are increasingly expected to be able to document what students learned and how that contributes to program-level and campus-wide learning outcomes.

In spite of this greater focus on accountability, few institutions of higher education have developed a true culture of assessment. Many faculty have not internalized the value of assessment for discovering more about student learning; instead they view assessment as something mechanistic that they have to do because it is required by



administrators or accreditors. For some, assessment mandated from above goes against their beliefs in shared governance, academic freedom and independence of the professoriate. It seems that the well-intentioned actions of accrediting agencies may have shifted the focus for many away from the true purpose of assessment – to improve student learning (Haviland, 2009a).

At institutions where the culture has not embraced assessment, faculty may conduct assessments, but these stand-alone efforts are not the cornerstones of faculty and institutional decision-making. At many institutions, those who believe in the value of assessment come together in committees and task forces to do projects around assessment, but are rarely able to change the culture through this leadership by example (Ennis, 2010). Sometimes entire departments embrace assessment and are seen as models at the University, but other departments do not necessarily follow suit.

Libraries, like other academic departments, are expected to conduct assessments and act on the results. And like most of higher education, few libraries can claim to have developed a culture of assessment. Frequently a microcosm of the universities of which they are a part, the library is subject to the same pressures and limitations as teaching departments. Individual units of the library or individual librarians may embrace evidence-based decision-making and assessment of student learning, but until that culture pervades the library assessment will not become a self-sustaining venture.

Many articles in the library literature suggest that organizational culture is to blame for the lack of assessment cultures in many libraries (Castiglione, 2006; Hiller and Self, 2004; Jantti, 2005; Lakos and Phipps, 2004). While this is likely true of quite a few institutions, changing culture may not be the most efficient way to build a culture of assessment. In fact, a culture of assessment could instead be used as a lever to change the organizational culture. Changing attitudes and behavior towards assessment, getting librarians to internalize its value and altering organizational structures could actually achieve culture change, as the benefits of a culture of assessment are far-reaching.

John Kotter's eight-step model for creating organizational change puts behavioral change before culture change, but ensures that change is embedded in the culture with a thorough consideration of culture throughout the process. Kotter (1996) describes this as "grafting the new practice onto the old roots while killing off the inconsistent pieces" (p. 151). Kotter's model provides a pragmatic paradigm for change, especially for librarians charged with leading assessment efforts who are not administrators and cannot effect system-wide change.

This article explores the idea of using Kotter's eight-step model for change leadership to create a culture of assessment that is embedded in the organizational culture. Each step of the model will be described within the context of building a culture of assessment, supported by examples and suggestions from the literature of libraries, higher education, organizational behavior and change leadership. Classic and recent examples of library or institutional success with assessment will illustrate the value of Kotter's model to libraries. This change model provides a pragmatic opportunity for leaders, whether they have positional authority or simply influence, to make a tremendous change in the organizational culture through creating a culture of assessment. The article begins with an overview of what is meant by "a culture of assessment."

2. What is a culture of assessment?

Despite the increasing prevalence of assessment bureaucracies and mandates in higher education, too often, a “culture of assessment” is seen by institutions as something mechanistic (Haviland, 2009a). A culture of assessment means more than simply doing assessment. A library can conduct assessments regularly without it becoming a pervasive part of the culture. At some institutions, assessment is primarily done because it is an administrative imperative for accreditation (Deardorff and Folger, 2008). This does not mean that assessment is done in a meaningful way or that its results are used to learn and influence change. In a culture of assessment, assessment becomes the norm and a valued part of planning and teaching. New services are planned for with consideration for how they will be assessed. The library does not just collect data; it acts on and learns from that data.

Librarians at institutions in which a culture of assessment is the norm do not wish to simply rely on assumptions about what students need or how they learn. They assess because they want to know how they can improve their teaching and change library services to maximize student learning. Inherent in this is a customer service focus and a willingness to change based on assessment results. Ennis (2010) suggests that “assessment culture’ is code for not just doing assessment, but liking it.” This indicates that building a culture of assessment frequently requires changing attitudes as well as behavior.

The benefits of building a culture of assessment go well beyond getting a good report from the accreditation team. In the current economic climate, libraries need to be nimble and provide services that offer the greatest return on investment for students and faculty (Lakos and Phipps, 2004). It is difficult to know which services are providing the greatest value for the effort without assessing them. When library administration uses assessment results in their decision-making, it makes those decisions more transparent, both to patrons and library staff. In using evidence, library administration can make better-informed decisions that appear fair to both staff and patrons.

Most libraries can no longer take for granted their status as a public good or the heart of the campus. Libraries have seen significant budget cuts, shrinking staff, branch libraries closed, and other units moved into the library. In an environment where it is no longer good enough to be “the library”, libraries need to demonstrate how they contribute to the primary goals of the institution, including student success. By building a culture of evidence, libraries will be able to show administrators how their work positively impacts students and faculty and contributes to those things academic administrators are most concerned about (Oakleaf, 2010). For libraries arguing for more funding or new positions, having evidence of that need or the value it will provide is critical.

For the individual instructor, assessment provides information that can help improve teaching and student success. Certainly, when teaching a class, an instructor can see how engaged student are simply by looking at them, but without assessment, they do not know whether and what students are actually learning. Assessment can provide insights about what aspects of one’s teaching are working well and what are not. Librarians providing one-shot instruction sessions frequently do not know how much students in the classes already know about research. Formative assessment can help librarians tailor their instruction to the needs and experience levels of the students in a class.

Assessment results can also be used to advocate for better integration of information literacy instruction into a particular course or curriculum. At this author’s

previous institution, the results of a student learning assessment were used to demonstrate the inadequacy of a one-shot model for teaching information literacy in English 101. At Wartburg College, an institution known for its work with assessment, “the culture of assessment [...] reassures the converted while persuading the reluctant with data, not anecdotes” (Schroeder and Mashek, 2007, p. 92). By providing faculty with evidence of the efficacy of library instruction, librarians can make significant progress towards the goal of curricular integration of information literacy instruction.

Finally, at institutions where librarians want to be seen as partners in teaching and learning, it is important that we hold ourselves to the same standards as other academic departments. At many institutions, libraries are not required to provide the same assessment data as other academic units. However, libraries should not see this as a pass, but as an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to assessment. The information literacy program at Wartburg is not only assessed by the library, but undergoes external assessment by the General Education Committee (Schroeder and Mashek, 2007). In providing that data and participating in campus-wide assessment, librarians demonstrate that they are partners in promoting student learning.

3. The role of organizational culture

Building a culture of assessment is a delicate and complex process; indeed, building a proper culture of assessment, requires the cooperation of the entire organization. Faculty and staff must feel empowered to develop their own assessment program and measures, and administrators need to lead by example and support their efforts. Through it all, the focus must be on student learning, rather than accreditation or other external pressures.

Organizational culture is a major determinant of the success or failure of any change initiative. Change initiatives developed without considering culture often lead to negative outcomes (Lakos and Phipps, 2004). Organizational culture refers to the artifacts and behaviors, espoused values and assumptions of an organization (Schein, 1992). To those inside the organization, the culture may be invisible, but it exerts a powerful force on how they respond to change (Lakos and Phipps, 2004). The culture is influenced by the attitudes of the individuals within the organization, norms in operations and communication as well as shared history, and it, in turn, influences how things get done and how the organization responds to change or perceived threats.

An organizational culture that can facilitate the creation of a culture of assessment is one that trusts its members, where members are motivated to learn, and where members are customer service-focused. Librarians must be curious about student learning and unafraid of what they might discover. They must also be willing to change based on what they learn from doing assessment. This requires significant emotional risk and comfort with ambiguity (Shepstone and Currie, 2008). In an environment in which individuals do not trust each other or do not trust their leaders, such risks would be unthinkable. In an environment in which librarians do not feel supported to experiment and make changes, the assessment loop will not likely be closed.

Organizational culture is fairly static and notoriously difficult to change (Lakos and Phipps, 2004). When the library culture is not conducive to creating a culture of assessment, leading change can seem a daunting task. Lakos and Phipps (2004), who wrote the seminal work on organizational culture and assessment, describe the

prerequisite culture and conditions for building a culture of assessment, but do not suggest concrete steps towards creating that culture. While the suggestions to move towards systems and strategic thinking are valuable, they seem more focused on the administrator than the assessment coordinator or head of instruction. Phipps has written elsewhere about the tremendous and positive organizational culture change that took place at her institution, the University of Arizona, but this change came initially from the top and involved the entirety of library operations and culture (Phipps, 2004). At many institutions, those tasked with building a culture of assessment are not administrators and do not have the ability to initiate such a system-wide change. The library administrator(s) may be supportive of building a culture of assessment, but the task of creating it is frequently delegated.

Many organizations do not exemplify the ideal culture described by Lakos and Phipps, but this does not mean that they are unable to move towards a culture of assessment. Kotter's change model requires a deep awareness of the library's culture in order to develop a vision, communication plan, and steps towards change, but it does not require a specific type of culture in which change can happen. Certainly, administration must be strongly supportive of the idea of building a culture of assessment and willing to walk the talk, but the change process can be led by individuals operating through influence rather than positional authority.

4. Change leadership and Kotter's eight-step model

Leading change is a difficult business. Choi (2011) argues that the majority of change-related failures are caused by implementation failures rather than the failure of the initial idea. Therefore, the steps that leaders take to build consensus and support for change are critically important. Change leadership refers to the approach a leader (or leadership team) takes with regard to a specific change initiative. After working with and interviewing over 100 diverse businesses on their change processes, John Kotter (1995) defined an eight-step process for organizational change:

- (1) establish a sense of urgency;
- (2) form a guiding coalition;
- (3) create a vision;
- (4) communicate the vision;
- (5) empower others to act on the vision;
- (6) plan for and creating short-term wins;
- (7) consolidate improvements to create more change; and
- (8) institutionalize new approaches.

Originally written as an article in *Harvard Business Review* (Kotter, 1995), Kotter wrote several follow-up books that expound on his change leadership model (Kotter, 1996, 2002, 2008). This model is focused on embedding change in the organizational culture and is ideal for libraries wanting to more than simply change behavior.

The literature is full of glowing reviews of Kotter's work and it is cited frequently as a leading change model. One of the very few critiques (Kelman, 2005) focuses on his reliance on anecdotal evidence rather than rigorous scholarship. While it is true that

Kotter's model relies on his own observations, these observations come from more than 100 businesses of various sizes and types in various situations.

While Kotter's model is quite popular and well-known both inside and outside of the business world, only a handful of librarians have written about applying it to facilitate a change in a library (Horn, 2008; Nussbaumer and Merkley, 2010; Sidorko, 2008) and each of them admits to only utilizing pieces of the model. Reflecting on the model after the change process, Sidorko questions whether a sequentially-ordered model is practical when situations are so diverse, and another study using Kotter's model actually used the steps in a different order to great success (Uys, 2010). This speaks to the idea that perhaps the steps do not necessarily have to be undertaken in the exact order recommended. Like Sidorko, this author concedes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to change, but Kotter's model provides helpful, concrete steps toward change that have been used successfully in many organizations.

In the world of education, Kotter's model has been used as a framework for analyzing already existing case studies focused on change. Nitta *et al.* (2009) demonstrate failures in the change initiative of the Little Rock School Board in its adoption of a reorganization plan by looking at it through the lens of Kotter's model. In higher education, Kotter's model has been used to implement an open source learning management system at Charles Sturt University (Uys, 2010), put faculty developers at the center of educational change (Dawson *et al.*, 2010), and to transform the University of Puerto Rico School of Dental Medicine's clinical assessment system (Guzmán *et al.*, 2011). All of these case studies illustrate the potential of Kotter's model for creating change in diverse areas of higher education.

Step 1: build a sense of urgency

Edgar Schein (1979), a noted expert on organizational development suggests that "the reason so many change efforts run into resistance or outright failure is usually directly traceable to their not providing for an effective unfreezing process before attempting change induction." (p. 144). So getting the change process off on the right foot is a necessity. A sense of urgency is an important first step in which employees determine whether it is worth the effort to change. When employees evidence a sense of urgency, they come to work each day excited about contributing to the change effort. Complacency tends to be a problem for mature organizations with significant history like libraries. It is easy to develop tunnel vision and not see beyond the library's walls. Creating a sense of urgency may require shifting the library faculty and staff's focus towards the external: for example, towards student learning as opposed to library instruction.

For some organizations, the urgency is created for them. In the 1970s, Northeast Missouri State University (now Truman State University) was transitioning from a teacher's college to a comprehensive university (McClain and Krueger, 1985). This shift required tremendous change in a variety of areas and gave the new President, Charles McClain, the opportunity to turn what could have been seen a crisis into an opportunity for positive changes in student learning. McClain insisted that the University had an obligation to prepare students to be successful in their professional employment and that that the University should be able to demonstrate its impact on student success (Magruder *et al.*, 1997). He created change simply by asking the faculty how they know that they are preparing students adequately. This required faculty to look outside of

the classroom and to think about how their very individual instruction contributes to the larger goals of the University. Sometimes all it takes is for faculty to see their work from a different perspective.

Urgency is not driven by fear or anxiety, but by opportunities and a sense of possibility. Therefore, a change message designed to create a sense of urgency should not be fear-producing. Fear tends to lead to fight or flight thinking, which produces chaotic and disorganized work (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993). At Northeast Missouri State University, President McClain created urgency with a clear vision for the institution, not with a fear of failure (McClain and Krueger, 1985). Dutton and Duncan (1987) believe that a good change message must clearly convey the urgency of the action and a sense of confidence that the organization can achieve the desired end state. This requires the members to agree on what that desired end state should be, to see visible support for the effort, and to see how the change will benefit them.

Kotter (2008) argues that getting buy-in is not enough because it only engages the head, not the heart. Most librarians have probably been in a meeting where everyone agreed to a course of action, but when it came time to form a task force to do the work, no one volunteered. People can logically agree to something without wanting to personally put any effort towards it. The change message must speak to people's passions, and thus, must be based on an understanding of what drives people in their work. To create a sense of urgency, the person conveying the message should let their passion show and try to humanize the message with humor and a focus on the human impacts. Kotter suggests using data sparingly and only those that might shift people's perspectives. Beyond the verbally communicated message, it is possible that the change leaders can provide experiences that communicate the same message. This could involve outside speakers and learning opportunities, or even tasks that illustrate the necessity of the change (Armenakis and Harris, 2002). The more times the need is emphasized to the library faculty and staff, especially by different sources, the better.

Step 2: form a guiding coalition

Hill (2005) conceives of the leader as a “fixer” who works outside of existing hierarchies to decrease barriers to and encourage participation in assessment. This role can be exceedingly difficult and leaders or fixers can be prone to burnout. Strategies to prevent burnout include having two or more leaders involved at any one time (Anagnos *et al.*, 2008) or having the role rotate periodically (Hill, 2005). Kotter (1996) suggests that a guiding coalition is a more effective unit than an individual pushing change forward alone.

The key ingredients for becoming an effective leader are trust and political capital (Hiller *et al.*, 2006). Both can take significant time to build (Galford and Drapeau, 2003), which is why it is rarely a good idea to task a new employee with leading change. To build trust and political capital, leaders must be consistent in word and deed, lead by example, communicate openly and deal with conflicts transparently. Leaders need to build people's faith in their competence and loyalty before others will be willing to extend themselves in support of that leader's change initiative. Trust is also incredibly delicate and one misstep can negate years of good work (Galford and Drapeau, 2003; Hill and Lineback, 2012).

While some libraries have assessment coordinators, many have chosen to form assessment committees so that the responsibility for spearheading assessment efforts

is better distributed (Hiller and Self, 2004). Libraries frequently form task forces based on the goal of representativeness; they work towards having members from each unit involved in the change. While diversity is important, in most cases it should be secondary to choosing the right people. Kotter (2002) suggests that an ideal group would contain people with vision and a sense of what is happening outside of the organization, credibility within the organization, political knowledge, formal positional authority, and good communication skills. Some people may exemplify more than one of those qualities, but each of those qualities is essential for developing a strong vision and communicating it persuasively to the rest of the library. The members also need to be able to work collaboratively together and commit fully to the change vision.

Step 3: create a vision

The task force should develop a vision that reflects a strong understanding of organizational culture and what its members value (Kotter, 1996). According to (Awbrey, 2005), employees ascribe meaning to the organization in which they work, and the key to creating successful change is to understand that meaning and incorporating it into the change vision. The vision needs to be clear enough that it could be described in just one minute (Kotter, 2002). When the vision is unclear, librarians can quickly become fatigued by ambiguity and initiatives that seem unconnected. The vision should provide a clear picture of what the change will look like, while at the same time speaking to the things that make librarians value their work.

Step 4: communicate the vision

The next step in Kotters change model asks the task force to engage with stakeholders in dialogue about the potential impact of the change vision and what skills librarians need to feel effective in these new roles (Moran and Brightman, 2000). They should speak transparently to any potential or stated concerns; if everything is not put on the table at this point, lingering skepticism could poison the whole endeavor (Kotter, 2002). The vision can be communicated in a variety of ways – in reports, lectures, group discussions and one-on-one chats. This is a point when having a task force is more valuable than a single individual, because people will respond positively to different members of the task force. Different communication methods can be employed based on the responses of librarians. If group communication breaks down, it might be wise to meet individually with librarians who had been vocal in their criticism. Sometimes, those resisting change simply need to feel that their concerns have been heard by the change leader(s).

Resistance is a common force in any change initiative. While many early management researchers saw resistance as the cause of failures, more recent studies suggest that resistance is usually a symptom of problems with the change vision or its communication, and how change leaders respond to resistance determines the fate of the initiative. In fact, many scholars now argue that resistance can be a useful learning tool for leaders (Ford and Ford, 2009, 2010; Gandz, 2008). It is important first to decode the resistance – to understand the real reason why the individual is fighting the proposed change. People may resist an idea that is not completely clear to them because of the anxiety created by ambiguity. The simple fix for this is better articulation of the vision. Alternatively, the resistor could be communicating important information about the institutional culture or structures that must be addressed before the initiative moves forward. Also, people may resist because they have legitimate

concerns of which members of the coalition were unaware. It is very possible that the vision will need to be altered based on the resistance encountered.

Resistance can be expected in nearly any change initiative. There is a wealth of literature on faculty resistance to assessment (Bird, 2001; Deardorff and Folger, 2008; Ennis, 2010; Haviland, 2009a, 2009b; Marrs, 2012; Kramer, 2009; Weiner, 2009). The reasons why faculty and staff resist an assessment culture are varied, but regardless of their basis in reality, all must be addressed by administration to ensure faculty buy-in. Library faculty, particularly those on the tenure track, frequently bristle at the idea of what they perceive to be outside interference into their teaching. Academic freedom is a major tenet of higher education and librarians might fear that data could be used by administrators to cut library funding or dictate the direction of the library's instruction program. This fear of losing faculty autonomy may be quite realistic at some institutions (Haviland, 2009b). Librarians may also fear that they will be punished for poor assessment results, especially if the results concern one of the areas on which librarians are evaluated for tenure or promotion. Library administrators must make it clear that it is the act of doing assessment, not individual results, upon which librarians will be evaluated (Becker, 2009). They should work to ensure that the decision to conduct assessment does not feel risky to library faculty and staff (Hill, 2005). Time is a major concern for faculty and an administration that does not help faculty find the time to do assessment will likely see poor participation and/or poor assessment quality.

Feedback and criticism of the vision should be accepted with grace by the task force members; attachment to the finer points is unproductive at this stage and will lead the vision's detractors to dig in their heels (Kotter, 1996). Based on feedback from stakeholders, the task force will likely need to make significant refinements. It is at this point in the process that visible administrative support is critical. This is not unique to building a culture of assessment. Any sort of disruptive change will only be successful with the active support of administration. In order to create an atmosphere of trust, administrators must be consistent in word and deed. Consequently, one of the most important things they can do to support assessment is to lead by example. Library planning can include performance metrics and how those metrics will be assessed. Library administrators can also use assessment results in making funding decisions, planning for new services and improving existing ones. To engage faculty and staff, administrators should keep the focus for assessment on improving library services and teaching. When faculty and staff perceive that the administrators are only motivated to create a culture of assessment for accreditation, cynicism and low-motivation will likely result (Lakos and Phipps, 2004). At the College of St Benedict and St John's University, while faculty were entrusted with the design of the assessment program, it was the Provost's office that provided the call to action and helped motivate faculty by using assessment results to make resource allocation decisions (Kramer *et al.*, 2011).

For instruction librarians working towards a culture of assessment this is likely a good time to develop learning outcomes that describe the information skills, dispositions and abilities students with which should be completing their course of study. The library at Pierce College undertook an effort to design outcomes not only for their instruction program, but for every department in the library. In the end, each librarian had a better sense of the direction, but a clear sense of how each department's activities fit into the larger goals of the library (Flynn *et al.*, 2004). Program-level learning outcomes reflect those things the librarians value and help to determine the

focus of assessment. Working as a group to define these outcomes can be a good team-building exercise (Bird, 2001) that, if nothing else, will give the task force a sense of how the group will work together and what cultural issues need to be addressed. It also creates a common roadmap for student learning and assessment. Alverno College, a model institution for assessment culture, began their work with assessment by defining eight abilities that they wanted their students to master and that could be measured (Loacker, 1985). These abilities influence every aspect of their educational work from instructional design to assessment.

Step 5: empower others to act on the vision

Once a vision has been developed, refined and communicated, Kotter states that the next step is to empower the rest of the library faculty and staff to act on the vision. This requires leaders and administrators to remove any barriers to librarians participating in assessment and to encourage experimentation. Sometimes, organizational structures inhibit people's ability to experiment, share their ideas and reflect on assessment results. Administrators need to ensure that organizational structures reward, rather than discourage, assessment. Sometimes promotion and/or tenure systems actually disincentivize risk-taking and information-sharing. In an environment in which people feel that they have to choose between their job security and change, security will win out (Kotter, 1995). In addition to removing barriers to assessment, administrators may also wish to look at how they can incentivize assessment through systems that reward assessment work and service or teaching improvements made based on assessment data. At some institutions, faculty are recognized for their assessment work with awards, grants or course release (Piascik and Bird, 2008). If the institution values assessment, faculty and staff should be judged by their participation in this area (Anagnos *et al.*, 2008). It's also critical to ensure that faculty and staff are judged by their participation in assessment, not their assessment results. In such a model, individual results would be used solely for the faculty member's professional development. For library decision making they would be used in aggregate. At Northeast Missouri State University, President McClain created an environment where faculty felt safe experimenting with assessment because they knew the results would not be used against them (Magruder *et al.*, 1997).

Another important role for administrators is to provide library faculty and staff with the resources they need to conduct meaningful assessment and learn from and act on the results. Whether intentional or not, the existence or lack of necessary resources speaks volumes to faculty and staff about the level of commitment library or university administration has to building a culture of assessment. One of the most important resources faculty and staff need to support assessment work is time. It takes time to develop assessment tools, conduct assessments and analyze, reflect on and make changes based on the results. Studies have shown that the less time librarians are given for assessment, the less meaningful the process will be (Moran and Brightman, 2000). Corners will be cut. Faculty and staff may conduct assessments as requested by administration, but with time at a premium, those results will likely go unused. With limited time, faculty will look to using assessment tools that require the least investment of their time rather than those that will provide the most meaningful data. Given daily operational and business needs, time is often one of the most difficult things for administrators to provide, but if building a culture of assessment is a strategic priority, other responsibilities might need to be deemphasized.

As important as time is to creating a culture of assessment, without education, an assessment program will never produce meaningful results and change. Faculty and staff do not intuitively know how to conduct meaningful assessment and most library and information studies programs do not require an assessment course. Faculty and staff need training in the best practices, as well as the methods and modes, for developing assessment tools, analyzing results and using those results. Even faculty who individually take the initiative to assess their courses frequently articulate a need for further training in assessment design (Ebersole, 2009). Jantti (2005) describes how staff development was the main catalyst for building a culture of assessment at the University of Wollongong. Through training in assessment tools, techniques and statistical analysis, librarians developed a sense of self-efficacy and enthusiasm for assessment work. Becker (2009) describes how the assessment team at his institution spent two years simply learning about and discussing assessment theories and techniques. He reports that it was not just the learning that was valuable, but the act of becoming “a community of learners” that helped build an assessment culture (p. 2). Learning about assessment as a group can help faculty and staff develop a common vocabulary and common frame of reference, both of which can help build consensus in the development of an assessment program.

At many institutions, incentives are needed to encourage faculty and staff to be actively involved in assessment. At Ohio State and Ball State Universities, funding is earmarked to incentivize individual and department-wide assessment work (Banta, 1997). Ennis (2010) sees this as the darker side of building a culture of assessment; the idea that “where community fails, compensation can succeed, and effective assessment programs and services can and sometimes must be purchased, the state of the institutional culture notwithstanding” (p. 15). On the one hand, it may not be wise to pay faculty and staff to do things that the library will later want them to do as part of their jobs. On the other hand, busy librarians may simply need to have the experience of conducting an assessment to see its value, an experience some would not pursue without incentives. The faculty at Alverno call this “fund[ing] creative starts” (Locker, 1988). Offering incentives may also indicate to faculty and staff that the administration values assessment, which is also a powerful motivator to participate.

In their study of how ARL libraries are positioned to use assessment results, Hiller *et al.* (2008) found that few librarians were able to analyze and present data effectively. There are many technologies in existence that can help faculty and staff to collect and analyze assessment data. Purchasing assessment technologies and training faculty and staff in their use will help to ensure that data actually gets used. In addition, it is vital to have individuals on staff (whether in the library or at the institution) who have expertise in data analysis and can support those seeking to learn from their own results and departments seeking to learn about their program holistically. A report on the early results of a major grant-funded program for community colleges focused on building a culture of assessment found that the greatest barrier to participating institutions was their lack of ability to easily retrieve and analyze assessment data, which was largely attributed to inadequate information systems (Brock *et al.*, 2007). Investing in technologies and people to provide useful data to individuals and departments is critically important to those seeking to close the assessment loop and actually act on the results.

Encouraging librarians to experiment is also a critical part of step five of Kotter’s change model. Experimentation allows librarians to try out assessment tools in a safe and low-accountability environment. At the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University, librarians involved in instruction were given several assessment tools and asked to use some of them during a one-year experimentation period. After that time, they met as a group to discuss what they learned from the assessment work and to choose those tools that were most effective at measuring student learning. Through their efforts, they were able to foster “a creative, collegial, and supportive environment that emphasizes programmatic success over individual performance evaluations” (Ariew and Lener, 2005).

Step 6: create short-term wins

In that initial work towards the vision for change, Kotter (1995) stresses the need for “short-term wins” to increase faculty and staff motivation. Planning for visible successes early on can keep up the momentum towards the larger vision. At the beginning, it may make sense to start small and focus on things that are easier to assess. Kramer (2009) calls this idea of small exposures to assessment over time “building assessment anti-venom.” While they might not be the most rigorous or valuable assessments that could be done, there may be some value to assessing “well-lighted sites” at the start of an assessment push (Allen, 2007). Selecting questions that are easier to answer through assessment or using tools that are easier to administer and analyze can build the confidence of faculty and staff.

Similarly, Deardorff and Folger (2008), suggest that faculty focus their assessment work initially on questions they have and develop assessment tools designed to answer those questions. Since the focus of enquiry emanates from librarian interests, assessment is non-threatening, but still provides experience, which is vital to get faculty and staff to ultimately internalize its value. Frequently, people will not recognize the value of assessment until they actually use it in their classes and learn from it. Even something as small as a one-minute paper, a classic classroom assessment technique can yield valuable insights about what students learned.

Whatever approach is taken, administrators should give faculty and staff the freedom to determine their own assessment goals so long as they are consistent with the overall vision (Ebersole, 2009). Librarians are more likely to buy into assessment when they have the freedom to chart their own course and the ability to make assessment meaningful to them. Especially at institutions where librarians have faculty status, initiatives that are tightly controlled by administrators tend to result in strong resistance from the librarians expected to implement them (Ndoye and Parker, 2010).

Step 7: consolidate improvements

This initial work with assessment does not signal the end of the change process, but the opportunity to use early successes as a lever to keep up the momentum. Kotter (1996) describes many change initiatives that failed because the leaders declared victory too soon. Assessment should start to be seen as a continuous process rather than something done before an accreditation cycle, and at this point, librarians are probably ready to start refining their assessment tools and selecting more challenging questions to answer. The task force members can continue to remind people how what they are doing fits into the larger vision (Kotter, 1996).

Whether and how the collected assessment data is used by the library can determine the success or failure of the change initiative at this point. Institutions of higher education collect tremendous quantities of data for various reporting agencies. Most

libraries are very good at collecting data, but many are not quite as good at using that data to make decisions about funding, services and collections. While assessment should ideally inform planning, too often the two are unconnected (Middaugh, 2009). This can be hugely problematic, both in terms of making solid decisions in libraries and building a culture of assessment. In a survey of institutions that have built a culture of assessment, 72 percent said that the use of data was important to creating an assessment culture (Ndoye and Parker, 2010). At Queens University of Charlotte, a recent project to tie assessment to resource allocation led to a 97.7 percent return rate for assessment plans and reports (Slater *et al.*, 2011).

Oakleaf and Hinchliffe (2008) examine the reasons why individual instruction librarians do not use the results of assessments they have conducted. The reasons identified included a lack of time, lack of knowledge about assessment, lack of support, and a lack of clear expectations. Many also did not feel confident that the assessments they conducted adequately measured student learning. This speaks strongly to the need for education and administrative support.

Data can also be shared with stakeholders. This may lead to useful conversations about how to improve library services. Sometimes librarians are too close to the results to notice something that an outsider might see. While librarians may interpret assessment results one way, other stakeholders may see them differently, which could lead to alternative strategies for improvement. At Wartburg College, the information literacy coordinator visits with department chairs annually to share assessment results. This has also given the coordinator the opportunity to discuss how to improve student information literacy in each department through better integration (Schroeder and Mashek, 2007).

A culture of assessment is a culture of learning, and librarians can benefit tremendously by coming together with their colleagues to discuss assessment design and results. Teaching tends to be very individual work, but sharing their methodology and results can both help others to design effective assessments and can offer valuable feedback to guide improvement. According to Locker (1988) “at Alverno, because assessment is designed to work throughout the entire curriculum, faculty collaboration has become a dramatic outcome of the assessment process. Collaboration in turn has become a growing cause of effectiveness” (p. 29). Universities that have successful assessment programs, such as the University of Maryland University College, have invested heavily in their centers for teaching and learning to provide faculty with training and spaces for collaborative learning (McDaniel *et al.*, 2000). Librarians can learn from both failures and successes, but librarians need to feel comfortable sharing both, which requires a culture where experimentation is valued and failure is seen as a learning tool.

This step is also a good time to remind librarians why they are doing what they are doing (Kotter, 2002). If the task force can show faculty and staff what positive changes have come from the assessment work done thus far, it will increase their confidence in the change process. Assessment results often result in positive changes not only for students, but for faculty and staff. At the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, knowing that they had good data about student learning built faculty confidence about making changes to departmental goals and curricula (Mentkowski, 1991). At Northeast Missouri State University, the assessment program reminds faculty and staff time and again of the centrality of student learning to their mission, something that can be easy to forget in a world of competing priorities (McClain and Krueger, 1985). The visibility of assessment results and their impact continually keep the focus on student success.

Institutionalize new approaches

The final step that Kotter defines involves making the new approaches part of the institutional structure. This means embedding assessment in the library's culture so it is a regular part of what the library does. For administration, this may mean using assessment data in decision-making and requiring any new service proposal to come with possible assessment metrics. For the instruction coordinator, this may mean determining how new hires will be trained in assessment to orient them to the library's assessment culture. For library faculty and staff, it means seeing assessment much like they see working at the reference desk or collection development; an integral part of their work as librarians. The communication strategy that started with step four should continue, with a focus on the positive impacts of the assessment work (Kotter, 1996). This is the point at which assessment is ingrained in the culture and its value for improving student learning is generally accepted.

Structural elements of the library that impact individual and unit behavior can be altered to encourage assessment and stress its importance. At Wollongong University, position descriptions were revised to place emphasis on assessment and other strategic goals (Jantti, 2005). When a new dean arrived at the University of Arizona in the 1990s, goals related to assessment were written into the strategic plan and resources were specifically allocated towards assessment activities (Phipps, 2004). Promotion and/or tenure requirements can be amended to include participation in assessment work as an evaluative criterion. Building assessment into the structures that govern the library and the work of librarians will help to make it a cultural norm.

A commitment to a culture of assessment requires a commitment to inculcating new faculty and staff. There will be turnover at the library and new members of the culture need to learn what the institution now values. The faculty at Alverno College developed a paper entitled "Partners in learning: staff collaboration in promoting student learning across the college" that is to be read by and discussed with every new hire at the institution (Wagner, 2009). New faculty and staff are required to go through significant training regarding their curriculum and assessment model, which makes the values of the institution clear from the start. Sustaining change is particularly difficult when change leaders leave the institution, which is another reason why it is so valuable to put responsibility for the change process on a task force rather than an individual. This is also a reason why it is valuable to give faculty the reins when it comes to assessment program design. Losing an individual largely responsible for the assessment program can have drastic consequences, but when the program is powered by faculty initiative, it is less vulnerable to leadership changes. The goal of the eighth step of Kotter's change model is to ensure that the project is no longer held together solely by the task force – in other words, that it can have a life and sustainability beyond the change leaders.

5. Discussion

This paper provides a proposed application of Kotter's change model for building a culture of assessment. Given that responsibility for leading assessment is frequently delegated to task forces and/or coordinators, this model seems ideally suited to leadership without positional authority. In Kotter's model, while the administration has to support the change initiative, they do not necessarily have to lead the change. Given the number of middle-managers and front-line librarians tasked with creating change in our profession, this model may work well for a variety of change initiatives.

Many authors write about the impact of organizational culture on the ability to effect change or be innovative (Baird *et al.*, 2011; Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Naranjo-Valencia *et al.*, 2011). Librarians in cultures that do not match the described ideal culture might feel that they cannot lead change until the culture has been transformed by administration. Kotter's model could allow librarians to change culture by changing behavior, rather than the other way around, providing a model that could work for libraries in less than ideal organizational cultures. This author questions whether Kotter's model would truly work in any culture, as some organizational cultures would likely block many of his steps, but it certainly provides more flexibility for change leaders.

Kotter (1996) addresses the fact that his ideas about culture change coming last fly in the face of decades of research, but he argues that he is seen in hundreds of business change efforts that changing culture first does not work. Changing behavior first, with a strong understanding of the culture, allows employees to see the benefits of a new approach, which helps to facilitate culture change. While Kotter's arguments are logical, deciding whether to trust his extensive observations over significant scholarly research is a question each change leader will have to answer for his or her self.

Kotter's model has been successfully field-tested in academia, but it has not been shown to be effective in any library case studies to date. The case for Kotter's change model in building a culture of assessment would be strengthened by case studies from libraries that have successfully implemented Kotter's model, especially in terms of building an assessment culture. Nussbaumer and Merkley (2010) developed their own change model at the University of Lethbridge that was inspired by Kotter, but bore little resemblance to his model as it focused on changing culture early in the process. Horn (2008) led a major reorganization process using Kotter's model, but skipped critical steps such as creating short-term wins and empowering those outside of the guiding coalition. While this author believes that there should be more flexibility in how the model is implemented, these two case studies ignored such critical aspects that, while the changes were ultimately successful, it would nonetheless be a stretch to give credit to Kotter's model. While this paper does not look at the model through the experience of using it in a library change case, the author suggests that case studies are not necessarily a silver bullet for proving efficacy. What works well at one institution may not necessarily work at another. Still, case studies in the library literature would certainly strengthen the case for using Kotter's model.

Change models in general tend to be very prescriptive and no model could possibly be a one-size-fits-all solution for every library. Even if Kotter's model is a good fit, it might not always be possible to follow it exactly. While Kotter suggests that the steps must be undertaken sequentially, this author argues that a good leader responds creatively to changes in the environment rather than mindlessly following a prescription. One could still embrace the essential elements of Kotter's vision without being in lockstep with his model.

6. Conclusion

The literature from libraries and higher education clearly indicates that doing assessment and building a culture of assessment are two very different things, though certainly the latter requires the former. A culture of assessment pervades every aspect of practice and planning and is focused on using assessment for improvement. It

requires a significant investment of resources and administrative support. Most of all, it needs leaders who understand how to shepherd assessment; from creating a sense of urgency and a guiding vision to anchoring change in the culture.

As Kotter's model illustrates, a change process that ends with changes in faculty and staff behavior will not create lasting effects. People will eventually resume their old habits once the urgency has subsided. For a change process to be successful over time, the organization must also change structures and policies to both accommodate the change and embed it in the culture. Building a culture of assessment requires significant investments from every area of the library, but, in the current climate of accountability along with limited resources, most libraries can hardly afford not to make that investment.

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