The Criteria for Good Practice Outcomes-Based Program Review (OBPR)

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1. While the institution may serve many purposes, its primary priority is to demonstrate that it is a learning organization committed to human flourishing for all and to continuously investigating how it can improve high-quality student learning and development for all of the students it serves.
   a. The institution embodies evidence that it is a learning organization, engaged in continuous collaborative and reflective inquiry and dialogue and finding ways to improve its inquiry and dialogue processes, as well as committed to the professional development of all of its people.
   b. There is notable differentiation in the processes used to collect and report for compliance purposes and in the use of that same data as well as OBPR data to inform decisions for improvement.
   c. Evidence of intentional cultivation of human flourishing for every being that is associated with the organization is apparent.
   d. Every meaningful piece of data is scrutinized and investigated for its system connections (e.g., connections across department/division lines).
   e. Authentic generative questions are posited to investigate where improvements can be made or to explore what other questions need to be asked.
   f. There is a passion to discover how to improve and a playful curiosity in discovering how to improve it.
   g. Evidence of a meta-assessment of the organization’s own inquiry process or that it is continually researching how well it embodies a learning organization is present.
   h. The organization posits lines of institutional research inquiry and refines processes to better understand how well it is creating what was intended.

2. The institution considers the primary purpose of OBPR to be assuring the educational quality of its students through a meaningful assessment
of the many processes, policies, and practices that are required to assure student success.

a. All organizational members are committed to discovering how each student best learns and develops.
b. The institution defines student success in one or many ways and identifies how those definitions are measured.
c. Program learning outcomes are articulated for each possible pathway to degree and/or certificate completion that the college/university provides.
d. Students can relate to at least one institutional definition of student success and can also explain how the courses and the out-of-class experiences they choose contribute to that definition.
e. Students can explain the set of program learning and development outcomes that have been articulated for their chosen degree/certificate pathway and can also explain how the courses and the out-of-class experiences they choose contribute to those learning and development outcomes.
f. Students can describe their expected levels of achievement for each outcome and the importance of meeting those levels so their post-graduation plans can be realized.
g. Functional areas within the institution that are not directly related to student learning and development include evidence of how the areas indirectly support student learning and development. If they are unable to do so, then it is expected that the institution will state the purpose of that functional area among its multiple institutional purposes and appropriate evidence of that functional area’s organizational learning will be examined in a separate process.

3. The institution demonstrates that evidence of student learning and development obtained is appropriate for the certificate or degree awarded and also consistent with the level of achievement expectations of relevant stakeholders, which includes students, faculty, administrators, staff, parents, guardians, alumni, donors, partners, siblings, offspring, employers, graduate schools, and other community members not specified here.

a. There are clear mechanisms for how students inform how OBPR outcomes are written, how evidence is gathered and interpreted, and the decisions of how evidence is used.
b. There are clear mechanisms for how faculty, staff, and administrators inform how outcomes are written, how the evidence is gathered and interpreted, and the decisions of how evidence is used.
c. There are clear mechanisms for how community partners (employers, graduate school admissions faculty, community service leaders, parents/guardians, etc.) inform how outcomes are written, how the evidence is gathered and interpreted, and the decisions of how evidence is used.

4. The institution collaboratively creates learning and development outcomes that inform curriculum design (both in and out of the classroom) which are intended to result in transfer, a degree, or a specific learning and development experience.
   a. The institution ensures that data collection is embedded in day-to-day activities to cultivate habits of inquiry.
   b. The institution aggregates and disaggregates data by identity characteristics and the intersecting of those identities, as well as by programs, in order to fully understand which students are achieving which learning and development outcomes at the expected level and how, as well as which students are not and why in order to ensure acting on results that contribute to HAAS.

5. The institution demonstrates responsiveness to OBPR findings by prioritizing subsequent action plans as well as corresponding resource allocation and reallocation to ensure data-informed needed improvements.
   a. There is evidence that OBPR results are used in decisions to improve programs as well as to assure that students are achieving what they came to postsecondary education to achieve (graduation with a degree, transfer to a four-year program, admissions into a graduate program, job placement, creation of a new job/company/service industry/social movement, transformation of their lives, transformation of their communities, etc.).
   b. Improvement plans/action plans include what will be done, personnel responsible, resources allocated or reallocated, time lines, deliverables, and measurement of action plan success. This ensures the institution has determined its capacity to make this improvement and has also prioritized it.

6. The institution demonstrates evidence of changing or refining institutional administrative policies and practices to enhance student learning and development, as well as advocating for changes in system/district, state, or federal policies and practices that might hinder students’ successful progress toward meaningful degree attainment, including transferring from one institution to another.
   a. There is an understanding of how and why policy decisions have been made among those who are impacted by these policies.
7. The institution is committed to developing its own leadership at all levels who can enact the change that the learning organization’s inquiry process shows is required while cultivating human flourishing for all.
   a. Leaders at all levels compassionately listen to internal and external community members, examine data making connections across systems, leverage strengths, and provide development where opportunities for growth have been identified.
   b. Leaders at all levels are committed to improving student learning and development and also know how to empower and support those who can make needed improvements.
   c. Leaders at all levels are emotionally intelligent and engage in accurate self-assessment resulting in an investment in their own professional development.
   d. Leaders at all levels will not tolerate illegal or unethical use of data and accept responsibility for any evidence-based decision that leads to harming human lives.

8. The institution demonstrates accountability transparently by the ability to use OBPR data to inform how it has reached a specific level of achievement for each performance indicator or how it determines to do so with its action plans and/or policy changes.
   a. There is evidence of a value-added experience for the students who attend and for the faculty and staff who work there.
   b. The institution posits lines of institutional inquiry to further research when data gathered do not clearly indicate what needs improvement.
   c. The institution refines inquiry processes to better understand how well they are creating what they intended or expected.

   In essence, good practice institutions establish a process to self-evaluate how well the internal inquiry processes they have in place are moving them in positive and meaningful improvement directions while also informing transparent public accountability. So, while this book was written to establish inquiry processes that are programmatic in nature (which could have many definitions—see chapter 2), it is imperative that the institution as a whole self-reflect about how well the inquiry processes it has in place are contributing to its own ability to demonstrate that it is a learning organization.

The Guiding Questions

1. What is the mission/purpose(s) of our learning organization? Alternatively, has it been selected for us and we simply need to ensure that we
are hiring people committed to that already predetermined mission/ purpose(s) as well as reviewing and retaining people in accordance as well?

2. What is it we specifically want to create? What are our values? What do our constituents value? Or have the answers to these questions already been predetermined? If so, see question 1. Examples of what we want to create could include the following:
   a. Open access
   b. Two-year transfer promises for all of our students
   c. Four-year degree attainment processes for all of our students
   d. Assurance of workforce skills (but not within a specified time line) for all of our students
   e. Generation of new knowledge
   f. Service training programs for the local community within which we reside
   g. Winning student athletes
   h. Collaboratively designed start-up companies
   i. Six-year degree attainment with no student loan debt incurred
   j. Pathways of inquiry that create new jobs and/or new professions
   k. Human flourishing for all
   l. Employees with whom employers are highly satisfied
   m. Young scholars who collaboratively publish and secure grants with their faculty mentors or in collaboration with other young scholars
   n. Poet laureates
   o. Fulbright scholars
   p. Award-winning performing artists
   q. Community activists
   r. A top, 10 college-university as defined by . . . [fill in the blanks]
   s. And so on (this list can go on and on . . .)

3. Given all that we want to create (or have already agreed to create), how do we prioritize those intended areas of creation according to our current capacity to create them?
   a. How well are we determining our institutional capacity to deliver what we want to create?
   b. What do we do when we currently don’t have the capacity to create what we want to create or is expected of us to create at a high-quality level? Does it become a strategic planning initiative (complete with a business plan or development plan)? Or do we let it go?
   c. Is there any facet of our organization that doesn’t seem to be aligned with what we are about to create? If so, what do we want to do about that?
d. How well does what we want to create align with our current funders’ or resource providers’ expectations of what the funding or resources are supposed to/expected to create?

4. Whom does what we create or want to create serve (remember to consider groups of identities within each category and the intersecting of those identities)?
   a. Students
   b. Faculty
   c. Staff/administrators
   d. Employers
   e. Prospective graduate school faculty
   f. Community members
   g. And so on

5. How well do our existing policies and practices support what we want to create? Or are creating?
   a. How do we change what needs to be changed?
   b. What other practices or policies might we need to craft in order to assure quality creations?

6. How does what we create or want to create best serve each group, subgroup, and intersecting identities of each group? To answer this, we need to examine the categories of how we deliver what we intend to create and get more specific about what each component does (e.g., outcome-delivery map):
   a. Courses
   b. Out-of-class experiences
   c. Professional development seminars or skills-building workshops
   d. Circle of trust dialogue processes
   e. Planning retreats
   f. Visioning teams
   g. Development teams
   h. Mentoring/coaching (groups and individual)
   i. Specific prescribed pathways of support
   j. Start-up costs for labs and businesses
   k. Formative assessment check-ins for all groups, subgroups, and intersecting of group identities, along with prescribing interventions, if necessary, based on formative assessment results
   l. Tutoring/supplemental instruction
7. How well do we serve each group, subgroup, and intersecting identities of each group? This response might be informed by data collected through:
   a. OBPR documentation and dialogue
   b. OBPR-generated improvement plans/action plans
   c. OBPR-generated viability reports
   d. Reflective student learning and development portfolios
   e. Reflective staff learning and development portfolios
   f. Reflective faculty learning and development portfolios
   g. Predictive analytic analysis

8. Are we collaboratively dialoguing about what all this evidence means with regard to what we want to create in comparison with what we are creating?

9. How do we know we are creating what we intend to create?
   a. What are our expectations as well as the expectations of those whom we serve for level of achievement (e.g., performance indicators)?
   b. What are our funders’ expectations for level of achievement?
   c. Are those expectations in conflict? If so, how will we resolve that conflict in a manner in alignment with what we value and the values of those whom we serve?
   d. How well are we collaboratively dialoguing around what the evidence is showing in relationship to various kinds of expectations?
   e. How well are we documenting needed decisions, verifying we have the capacity to implement these decisions, and prioritizing them?

10. How do we use documented information to improve our mission/pose and the process to create?
    a. How well does the following provide this kind of evidence?
       i. External reviews
       ii. Improvement plans/action plans
       iii. Program viability decisions
       iv. Refinements in resource allocation and reallocation
       v. Policy and practice changes
    b. Are we establishing another reflective review in the future where we can determine how well our decisions influenced the needed improvement?

11. How well are we transparently/publicly communicating what we are learning as an organization?
While this list of good practice criteria and accompanying guiding questions (or this book for that matter) do not prevent the continued perceived conflict of what postsecondary education is to provide or the perceived conflicts among the expectations of all of its stakeholders, it is our hope that through a compassionate yet critical thinking–person’s process and a commitment to transparent compassionate dialogue, each postsecondary education institution can engage in some form of systematic inquiry where the provision of evidence of a learning organization affirms the value of a college educational experience, even if it can’t show an increase in its graduates’ ability to be placed into existing types of jobs six months post-graduation.

In closing, I humbly share that in my 30 years within higher education, I have enjoyed the great privilege of working with many people who care deeply that their students or students they just meet briefly once get a high-quality education and are successful in what they do once they graduate. I have also had the privilege of conversing with many policymakers who do know how complex learning and development is and how difficult it is to tend to individual learning of students in class sizes of 30, let alone 500 or more. I have also witnessed how hard high-level administrators work to listen to all the different needs of their campus community, prioritize those needs, and make decisions that they know will anger some of their community members while pleasing others.

In this learning organization cultivation process it is not helpful to make broad general statements about a group of people. They are simply not accurate for every member you might place in that group. It is challenging to navigate polarized conversations in order to move an organization forward in its learning exploration so we can improve what we are trying to create and provide transparent evidence of what we have created and how we will continue to improve and expand that creation. As such, we have one more set of questions for you, the reader, to use in your own self-assessment. The intention is to use this set of questions to check yourself (a) when you notice you are the one closing down needed learning organization dialogue or OBPR inquiry or when you think someone else is, (b) when you are making sweeping assumptions about a group of people, or (c) when you find yourself leaving a meeting or any encounter with another human being saying, “I just don’t care anymore.”

1. How well am I taking care of my own well-being so I can listen as intently as possible to differing perspectives in order to discover what I think I already know?
2. How willing am I to learn about what others do within our organization so I can help make connections across systems to ensure our organizational ability to improve what we want to create and meet expected performance indicator levels?

3. How well am I holding questions for which our organization seems to have no answers in the belief of the possibility for them to be answered?

4. How well am I choosing to continually believe that there is a way to resolve this conflict, address this resource shortage, or explain this decision in a manner that can be understood by all parties? In other words, perhaps I just don’t see that possibility in this moment.

5. How well am I remembering that all these people with whom I lead, serve, and enter these in-class and out-of-class experiences (especially the ones with whom I am in conflict)—are humans who just want to be happy, healthy, and successful, just as I do?

6. What do I need to do in order to take care of myself, so I can be kind, wise, and compassionately engaged in critical inquiry, contributing solutions to this learning organization that seeks to cultivate human flourishing for all?

**Key Learning Points**

1. While there may be a conflict between what various stakeholders are expecting higher education to create and how to demonstrate accountability, that conflict will not be resolved without evidence to illustrate how what is expected is being created within the organization or not and why.

2. There are many good practice criteria that your institutional leaders can consider adapting for use as you evaluate how well you are embodying the principles of a learning organization.

3. A learning organization must produce evidence of what it creates in a manner that can improve creation. To learn how to do that better, a learning organization must evaluate its own internal inquiry processes (e.g., meta-assessment).

4. Positing guiding questions or research questions may help your organization evaluate its own internal inquiry processes (e.g., meta-assessment).

5. Because the industry of higher education is composed of human beings cultivating other human beings’ learning and development, it is important for leaders at all organizational levels to practice compassionate and accurate self-assessment.

**More Questions to Consider**

1. Which criteria might be useful for your learning organization to evaluate its internal inquiry process?

2. Which criteria might be useful for your learning organization to evaluate its external accountability reporting process?

3. Which guiding questions or research questions might your organization posit so that it can improve its internal inquiry process and external accountability process?

4. How well are you evaluating the way you contribute to the learning organization and compassionately improving the way you show up?