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Leading in Turbulent Times

In Search of a Navigation System for This Critical Moment in the History of U.S. Higher Education

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Executive Summary

These are challenging times—of that, there is no doubt. The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on virtually all facets of our lives. We are also confronted with painful reminders that racial and economic cleavages pose their own persistent and daunting challenges for the United States and many other countries throughout the world. Moreover, each of these pervasive problems intersects and amplifies one another in numerous ways.

This paper focuses specifically on the fundamental challenges facing higher education as a consequence of COVID-19. For some institutions, the pandemic's challenges are existential, and nearly all colleges and universities—even a number of the largest, oldest, and most prestigious—face significant financial shortfalls as they struggle to determine how best to fulfill their traditional roles and responsibilities. Given these converging challenges, efforts to regain their footing will require many institutions to engage in a fundamental reexamination of directions and operations, and to search for concepts and tools that will be helpful to leaders as they endeavor to confront these difficulties.

To say that this complex array of interwoven problems poses formidable challenges for leaders is an understatement. That said, this difficult moment in time also offers opportunities for meaningful change.

This paper aims to contribute to this effort by presenting a framework for organizational review, strategy formulation, and change planning during a time of turbulence and disruption, such as we now confront. The paper focuses on the role information, communication, and technology can play as a part of a larger framework of strategy development and organizational renewal. A catalogue of actionable questions to guide in this work is also presented.

As future-oriented options are contemplated within colleges and universities and their constituent divisions, schools, and departments, questions will arise that are likely to suggest a need for new directions, new alliances, and new support systems. Will the core missions or aspirations of an institution need to be revised? Will programs that have served residential, student life, transportation, athletics, and other on-campus functions need to be ramped up, reinvented, expanded, downsized, or eliminated to accommodate new realities? How will vital connections among students, faculty, and staff be maintained in the face of greatly diminished opportunities for on-campus interaction? How will leaders guide the community through a process of systematic review and renewal while maintaining core values and a sense of community, and what information, communication processes, and technological support will be needed to facilitate these tasks in a systematic yet expeditious manner?

To do this important work well, it will be necessary to find a high ground from which to survey the landscape of our institutions, to assess current realities and prospects, to look toward the horizon and contemplate alternative paths, and perhaps even to contemplate new destinations. In this process, leaders will need an effective planning framework, useful information, sound plans, and facilitative technology, which collectively will serve as elements of a navigation system to guide travel into what may be largely uncharted and unstable terrain.

During “normal times,” The Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) framework (Ruben, 2016a—an adaptation of the Malcolm Baldrige model (Baldrige Foundation, 2020)—has proven to be a useful guide for colleges and universities and their constituent units in their efforts to review, plan, and improve. This paper describes an adaptation of the basic EHE framework—termed EHE-R (Excellence in Higher Education-Renewal)—that extends the core principles of the Baldrige/EHE framework to guide institutions in the face of crises such as those we now face.

EHE-R collects and catalogues critical questions related to a review of strategic direction and planning, potential changes in programs and services, adjustments in faculty and staff responsibilities in the face of shifting needs and priorities, approaches to information and measurement, and considerations for leaders at all levels in guiding and supporting the community through the process of review and reinvention.

Key questions are organized into seven categories: (1) Leadership, (2) Purposes and Plans, (3) Beneficiary and Constituency Relationships, (4) Programs and Services, (5) Faculty/Staff and Workplace Issues, (6) Metrics, Assessment, and Analysis, and (7) Outcomes and Achievements. In addition to discussing each of these topics, the EHE-R framework presented here also describes processes for using the model at the institutional level and within academic and professional schools or departments, as well as administrative, student life, facilities, IT, human resources, athletics, and other functional areas (Ruben, 2016a; Ruben, 2020).

Strategy for navigation during challenging times requires accessible and actionable information, effective technological support systems, and a laser-focus on communication. The value of information, communication, and technology is widely recognized, and crisis situations underscore how each intersects in fundamental ways with organizational analysis, strategy formulation, and implementation related to each of the EHE categories.

Key principles of the EHE-R framework to be discussed in detail in the following pages can be summarized as follows:

- **Leadership.** Communicating core values and a forward-looking vision that underscores the importance of reviewing, revisiting, reconfirming, or revising purposes, aspirations, and priorities.
- **Purposes and plans.** Creating a time-sensitive process for systematically considering directions, aspirations, plans, strategies, goals, action steps, and measuring progress and outcomes with attention to community engagement.
- **Beneficiary and constituency relationships.** Listening to, understanding, and responding to the immediate and forward-looking needs of students, prospective students, and other key constituencies and collaborators to sustain and ideally strengthen connections and relationships going forward.
- **Programs and services.** Engaging in a review of mission-critical and support programs and services in relation to defined criteria to identify action plans for each.
- **Faculty/staff and workplace.** Recognizing and supporting faculty, staff, and community support needs with a goal of strengthening relationships while reviewing roles and responsibilities and determining needed actions.
- **Assessment and information use.** Assessing, communicating, and using progress, process, and outcomes information relative to initiated changes for refining directions and future planning.
- **Outcomes and achievements.** Documenting, promoting, and sharing information on progress, achievements, and peer comparisons for use in day-to-day decision-making, planning, and future strategy formulation and process improvement.



Leading In Turbulent Times:

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These are challenging times—of that, there is no doubt. The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on virtually all facets of our lives. During this same period, we are confronted with painful reminders that racial and economic cleavages pose their own persistent and daunting challenges for the United States and many other countries throughout the world. And these pervasive influences intersect and amplify one another in many ways.

This paper focuses specifically on higher education and the disruptive impact of challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, strategies available to institutions to regain their footing through a reexamination of directions and operations, and concepts and tools that may be useful in this process. Current realities are such that many institutions are confronted with existential challenges, and some face the possibility of extinction. Even the oldest, strongest, and largest institutions are struggling to rethink how to execute their missions with fewer resources than they have had at their disposal in the past (Cotter, 2020).

To say that this complex array of interwoven problems poses formidable challenges for leaders is an understatement. That said, this difficult moment in time may also offer significant opportunities for constructive transformational change. For this outcome to be realized, a systematic approach to organizational review, strategy formulation, and change planning are required. This article aims to address this need by providing a catalogue of actionable questions to guide constructive efforts to respond to the disruptive influences we confront.

As forward-looking strategies are contemplated within colleges and universities and their constituent divisions, schools, and departments, questions will arise that may suggest a need for new directions, new alliances, and new support systems. Will the mission or aspirations of an institution need to be reshaped? Will programs that serve residential, student life, transportation, athletics, and other on-campus functions need to be ramped up, reinvented, expanded, or downsized to accommodate new realities? What kinds of technical support systems will be needed to address these decisions in a systematic yet expeditious manner? How will vital connections among students, faculty, and staff be maintained in the face of greatly diminished opportunities for on-campus interaction? Perhaps most importantly, how will leaders guide the community through a process of a systematic review, reflection, and reinvention while maintaining core values and a sense of community?

Wanted: A Navigation System to Guide Renewal Efforts

Emergency situations have their benefits. They remind us of many strengths within the organization that are easily taken for granted during more normal times. They also call attention to neglected needs and vulnerabilities that could have been more easily addressed in better times. Crises push us out of our personal and institutional comfort zones, and in so doing, create the conditions for the emergence of out-of-the-box solutions to new and preexisting problems. As colleges and universities emerge from the period of an initial response to the pandemic and move into a longer-term planning and strategy formulation phase, reinvention and renewal represent genuine opportunities if leaders can find ways to identify and respond effectively to the situations that confront their institutions and constituent units.

Comments about the need to move toward a “new normal” are common; however, this mantra is generally voiced at a level of abstraction and with an ambiguity that puts a rather abrupt end to what began as a promising conversation. To move beyond inspirational rhetoric, discussions about purpose, value, and resources are needed. There is also a need for frameworks and principles to guide organizational review and reimagination, and these will need to be supported by tools, technologies, and processes to help leaders think systematically and operationalize strategy with intentionality and purpose.

In addressing these issues, communication, information, and technology will be central—in planning, strategy formulation and implementation, progress tracking, and the evaluation of outcomes relative to plans and goals.

While the value of information, communication, and technology is widely recognized, crisis situations underscore how each intersects in fundamental ways with organizational analysis, strategy formulation, and implementation related to each of the EHE categories. Key issues relate to planning, staying connected with members of the workforce and with students and external audiences, supporting teaching, research, and outreach functions, responding to changing needs within administrative and service units, measuring and tracking progress and outcomes in each of these, and supporting leadership decision-making. Each of these requires relevant information that is organized, accessible, and easily understood, and processes and mechanisms for communication.

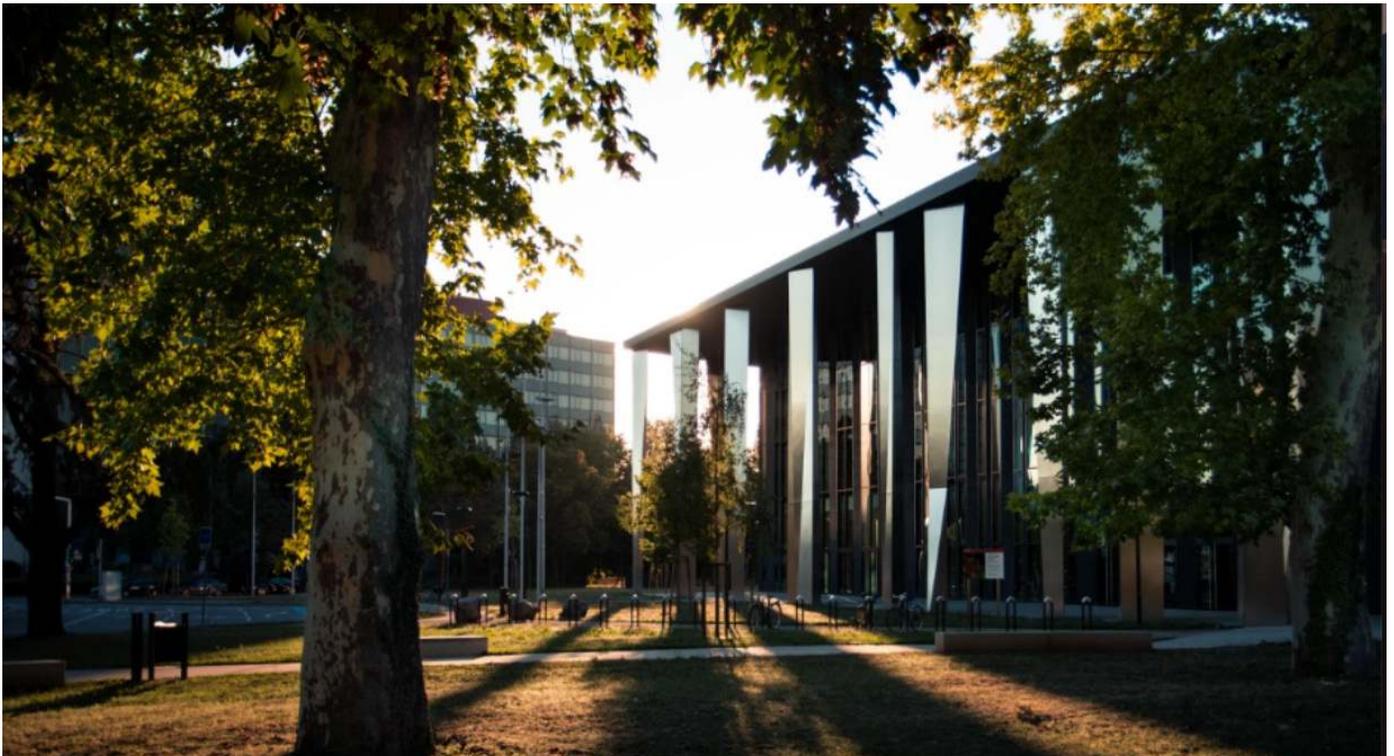
To do this forward-looking work, leaders need to find a high ground from which to survey the landscape of their institutions, to look toward the horizon and contemplate possible destinations, and to consider routes they might travel to those envisioned destinations. Simply stated, leaders need a guidance system to help their institutions navigate through what is largely uncharted terrain. The navigation system should be one that encourages leaders to consider fundamental questions, aggregates information needed to provide relevant answers, helps leaders identify possible destinations and distances, allows for entry of selected goals and waypoints, suggests alternative routes, and assists leaders throughout the institution with strategy development and planning. The navigation system should help track and report progress on travels, warn of roadblocks and necessary re-routings from the preset course, identify alternative paths when impediments arise, and provide periodic reminders of the values that define where true north lies. Finally, they need a system that comes with options for both personal and institutional guidance.

Strategic navigation during challenging times requires accessible and actionable information, effective technological support systems, and a laser-focus on communication. Among the questions that can be particularly useful are these:

- What information and support systems will be needed to identify and accurately assess the present circumstance, critical vulnerabilities, the various options and pathways available, the most urgent decisions that must be made, and the interconnection between these decisions?
- What information is needed by individual units and institutions to provide context and direction in contemplating questions related to mission, aspirations, programs, services, and stakeholder relationships—and how these may need to be revised going forward?
- What information is currently and readily available, and how do technological support systems make it easy for leaders to locate, access, customize, understand, and utilize multiple sources of input in context for planning and problem-solving?
- Do available information systems provide useful data for evaluating the status and critical needs in core priority areas, including such areas as safety, revenue generation/expense management, diversity, access, and recruitment—at the institutional and unit level?
- Do systems facilitate coordinated assessments and aligned decision-making within individual units and across the institution?

- Are communication and information support mechanisms available to keep faculty, staff, and students informed, and facilitate their engagement in relevant phases of planning, strategy development, adjustments to changing situations, and community-building?
- Do information, interaction, and decision-support technologies permit leaders to access, digest, and use information from across the institution and from peers, and to take account of the state, regional, and national patterns and trends in formulating and implementing plans?
- Do available information sources and systems enable consideration of “what if” scenarios, evaluate probable consequences of particular decision paths, and facilitate progress tracking and outcomes assessment, and how will that information be gathered, organized, and disseminated?
- Do information systems facilitate broad dissemination and ease of access, and mechanisms to assure the evaluation and continuous improvement of these mechanisms?

These and other questions to be noted in the discussion of EHE-R Category 6 in the pages ahead are vital in all planning and strategy formulation contexts. They play a particularly critical cross-cutting role for organizational review and renewal in times marked by turbulence and disruption.



Excellence in Higher Education (EHE):

A Foundational Framework for Organizational Review, Planning, and Improvement in Colleges and Universities

The Malcolm Baldrige Tradition

The Malcolm Baldrige framework, and the Excellence in Higher Education model that adapts the Baldrige model for colleges and universities, can provide the foundation for the organizational navigation system that is needed at this time.

Developed by the Department of Standards and Technology in 1987, and named after Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, the Baldrige Performance Excellence framework was created to respond to international challenges to organizational performance within U.S. business and industry (DeCarlo & Sterett, 1989; Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2020; Baldrige Foundation, 2020; Ruben, 1995).

The Baldrige framework blends scholarly concepts of organizational theory and behavior, principles from the professional literature, and insights derived from successful organizational and leadership practice. The program was created to achieve several broad goals: (a) identifying the essential components of organizational excellence; (b) recognizing organizations that demonstrate these characteristics; (c) promoting information-sharing by exemplary organizations; and (d) encouraging the adoption of effective organizational principles and practices (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2020).

Of the various approaches that can be beneficial to organizational review, planning, and improvement, arguably, none has been more influential than the Baldrige model (Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program, 2020). In 2009, web hits/downloads to its site totaled 2.2 million annually (NIST, 2019). During the year 2013, when the program celebrated its 25th anniversary, the number of state and local Baldrige-based award applications reached 15,000 (NIST, 2019). As of 2017, 25,000 individuals had attended Annual Baldrige Quest Conferences. (NIST, 2019), and the year 2019 marked the selection of the 121st organization to be recognized as an exemplary organization by the Baldrige program (NIST, 2020a).

Many case studies, professional endorsements, and testimonials speak in specific ways to the benefits of the Baldrige model in advancing effectiveness (Foundation of the American College of Healthcare Executives, 2015; Goonan, 2015; Leist, Gilman, Cullen, & Sklar, 2004; NACUBO, 2011; Sorensen, Furst-Bowe, & Moen, 2005; Weeks, Hamby, Stein, & Batalden, 2000). Organizations rated highly when assessed against Baldrige categories have been shown to outperform other organizations financially and also report improved work

processes and operational performance, improved quality in mission-critical areas, increased employee engagement, reduced turnover, heightened job satisfaction, reduced costs, greater reliability, improved customer and patient satisfaction, fewer complaints, increased customer retention rates, greater market share, a greater understanding of linkages among components of organizations, and improvements in other sector-specific indicators (Abdulla et al., 2006; Badri et al., 2006; Evans & Jack, 2018; Flynn & Saladin, 2001; NIST, 2016; Peng & Prybutok, 2015; Ruben, Russ, Smulowitz, & Connaughton, 2007; Schulingkamp & Lathan, 2015; Shook & Chenoweth, 2012; Sternick, 2011).

The Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) Framework

The Baldrige framework inspired the EHE model (Ruben, 2016a), which was developed in 1994 to provide a higher education adaptation of Baldrige tailored to the context, culture, and vocabulary that is familiar within colleges and universities.¹

The Baldrige program was initially developed for use in business and industry and was adapted to health care and education in 1999 (NIST, 2019). The education framework, which focused on teaching-and-learning processes, support, and outcomes, was especially well-suited to K-12 schools (Ruben, 2020; Schmoker & Wilson, 1993). For multi-mission higher education institutions, where research, community service, and outreach functions as well as teaching-and-learning, are essential, the scope of the “education Baldrige” was somewhat limited (Neel & Snyder 1991; Papanthymou & Darra 2017; Ruben 1995, 2007, 2018; Walpole & Noeth 2002; Ruben, 2004, 2018, 2021). Within many institutions, there was a need for a model that would guide assessment, planning, and improvement across multiple functions and multiple divisions, including academic, administrative, service, student affairs, finance, IT, HR, or athletics, as well as the institution as a whole. EHE was created to support this full array of applications, and to do so in a way that used terminology that was customary within higher education and would align with accreditation standards and approaches (Ruben, 2004, 2007, 2016a).

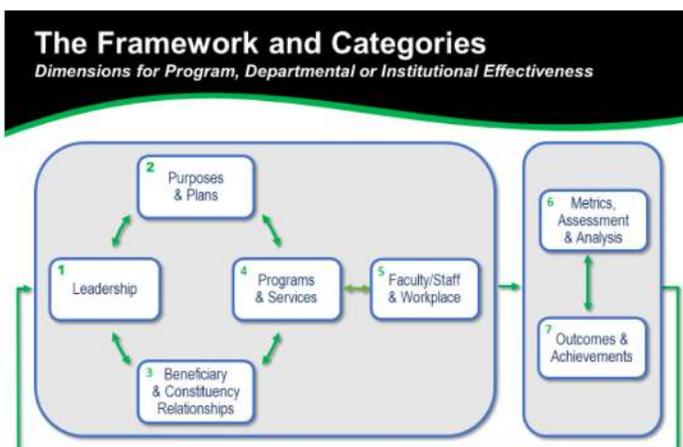
EHE is built on a foundation that recognizes the desirability of the Baldrige-based organizational concepts and principles within higher education institutions:

- **Effective leadership** that provides guidance and ensures a clear and shared sense of the institutional—or school, unit or program—mission and future vision, a commitment to continuous review and improvement of leadership practice, and social and environmental consciousness.
- An inclusive **planning process** and coherent plans that translate the institution's mission, vision, and values into clear, aggressive, measurable, and

¹ The first version of this model was called Tradition of Excellence and was published in 1994 (Ruben, 1994). Revised and updated versions were published under the current name, Excellence in Higher Education, in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2009/2010.

shared goals that are understood and effectively implemented.

- **Knowledge of the needs, expectations, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels of the groups served by the institution, school, unit, or program;** operating practices that are responsive to these needs and expectations; assessment processes in place to remain current with and anticipate the changing needs of these groups; and communication processes and mechanisms that promote interactions and community building.
- **Focus on mission-critical and support programs and services** and associated work processes to ensure effectiveness, efficiency, appropriate standardization, documentation, and regular evaluation and improvement with the needs and expectations of beneficiaries and stakeholders in mind.
- **A workplace culture** that encourages, recognizes, and rewards excellence, faculty and staff satisfaction, engagement, professional development, commitment, and pride; and provides strategies for synchronizing individual, program, unit, and institutional goals.
- Development and use of **indicators of organizational performance** that capture the organization's mission, vision, values, and goals and provide data-based comparisons with peer and leading colleges and universities, and relevant units within those institutions; widely sharing and assuring the use of this and other information within the organization to enhance analysis, interaction, and decision-making, and to focus and motivate improvement and innovation.
- **Documented, sustained positive outcomes** relative to the mission, vision, values, and goals, the perspectives of groups served, and faculty and staff, all considered in light of comparisons with the accomplishments of peers, competitors, and leaders (Ruben, 2016a, Ruben 2021).



Like the Baldrige model, EHE includes seven categories considered to be necessary components of excellence in any college or university at various levels—a program, department, center, school, college, or university (Ruben, 2016a, 2016b). See Figure 1.

Figure 1

EHE: The Framework and Categories

Since its release, EHE has been adopted and applied in numerous ways in many colleges and universities of varying types and sizes. The value of this work has been recognized nationally by the Baldrige Foundation (Baldrige Foundation, 2018) and the Network for Change and Continuous Improvement (National Consortium for Change and Innovation in Higher Education, 2012).¹ The EHE framework has been updated and revised regularly since it was first developed. The most recent edition—the eighth—was published in 2016 (Ruben, 2016a, 2016b, 2020).

EHE-Renewal (EHE-R): Extending EHE as a Guide for Turbulent Times

Like the Baldrige, EHE was developed initially to guide assessment, planning, and continuous improvement in “normal” times. The EHE-Renewal framework (EHE-R), developed and published in 2020, and updated here, extends the basic EHE framework for use with a review, planning, and strategy formulation in crises where the needs may range from incremental and continuous improvement to extensive and transformative restructuring and reinvention (Ruben, 2020)². The version presented here updates the original framework (Ruben, 2020). While all seven categories and concepts associated with Baldrige-oriented and EHE thinking have relevance at any point in time, additional questions and topics become particularly important for renewal and reimagining efforts. A focus on issues related to repair and resilience are natural and important immediate steps. However, in these circumstances, it is also vital to review fundamental assumptions about the nature of an organization, its mission, aspirations, and the programs and services customarily provided for internal and external stakeholders. For any unit within a college or university, a review may lead to a validation and reaffirmation of traditional directions, or it may lead to the conclusion that fundamental changes are appropriate and perhaps necessary.

¹ Brent Ruben received the Baldrige Foundation, Inaugural National Leadership Excellence Award—Education Sector in 2018, and EHE received the Network for Change and Continuous Innovation in Higher Education (NCCI)—formerly, National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education—Leveraging Excellence Award in 2012.

² The author gratefully acknowledges Joe Barone, Richard De Lisi, Phil Furmanski, Ralph Gigliotti, Rob Heffernan, Maury Cotter, Susan Lawrence, Laura Lawson, Barbara Lee, Gwen Mahon, Karen Novick, Bishr Omary, Jonathan Potter, Brian Strom, and Al Tallia for their helpful comments and suggestions regarding the EHE-R framework, and Karen Verde and Jann Ruben for their much-appreciated editorial assistance.

Decisions regarding the desired extent of change—ranging from incremental to transformative—can be contemplated on all levels of a college or university, and within any or all functional units within the institution.

This process may help to identify opportunities for innovation, areas where support should be enhanced and amplified, and others where perhaps downsizing, restructuring, or discontinuation are appropriate. The EHE-R framework is designed to provide a helpful guide for this kind of review, systematic analysis, strategy formulation, and decision support.

What follows is an overview of the EHE/EHE-R categories and their relevance for community conversations, planning, and decision-making about the way forward.

Category 1—Leadership

Category 1 focuses on issues related to the effectiveness of leadership approaches and governance systems in advancing the mission of an institution, department, or program; how leaders establish and communicate aspirations; how leaders set goals, promote innovation; how leadership allocates resources to accomplish the new common goals; how leaders model core values in their behavior; and how leadership and leadership practices and performance are reviewed and evaluated (Ruben, 2016a).

Even in the best of times, leadership issues are numerous and complex. As an institution moves beyond the immediate response and repair stage and into a period of review, reimagination, and renewal, leadership, and governance dynamics continue to be of great importance (Ruben, 2020). Particularly critical are the relationships between leadership practices, information and communication processes and systems that must function effectively to connect and engage administrators, faculty, and staff at all levels. Breakdowns in these processes may well have been somewhat inevitable during the fast-paced decision-making in the immediate response phase. Especially because of this, leadership processes become very important as the organization moves into a period of forward planning. Through systematic communication and information processes, leaders can formulate effective strategies and reset a shared sense of direction, confidence, and optimism about the future. Failure to effectively address these issues in a timely way can have extremely negative and lasting consequences.

Category 2—Plans and Purposes

This category focuses on the steps and necessary factors to ensure that those steps result in the desired processes and outcomes. Clarifying and building consensus on mission(s), aspirations, goals, and developing and implementing plans are the central themes of Category 2. The category also focuses on the importance of environmental scanning, establishing processes for benchmark comparisons, and the alignment and coordination of plans and action steps throughout the institution, school, and/or unit. Also important in this category is how faculty and staff and other community stakeholders are engaged in defining aspirations and goals, and in creating and implementing plans (Ruben, 2016a).

Adapting these general themes to review and renewal in the wake of a crisis is difficult, but important. The biggest issue here is timing. Each unit/school/institution needs to determine the right time to engage in the various phases of the planning process for the period ahead, how to prioritize and sequence steps

in the planning process, and how to balance needs for expeditious decision-making with appropriate faculty, staff, and cross-institutional leadership engagement (Ruben, 2020). Because of the context, fundamental issues of direction, priority, and resources must be central in the process. Any number of changes may be necessary and/or desirable, and the approach to planning must assure possibilities for candid, systematic, and information-based analysis. While every dimension of the work of an institution may well come under scrutiny, the considerations of strategy development and decision-making relative to safety/health and student-centered issues will be central. These decisions will be more numerous and problematic in the current moment than for planning activities in more normal times. Complexities related to mission, stakeholder priorities, resource requirements, and the needs for broad engagement and time-sensitive and information-based decision-making also arise relative to research, administrative services, facilities, athletics, and other areas.

The process of implementing plans and decision-making in the face of an ongoing crisis requires technologies that bring together action plans, contextual information to support the plans, scenario-based execution, and feedback loops to navigate the crisis effectively.

Leaders, faculty, and staff should be able to see how the plan is progressing at any point and inform problem-solving through available internal and external information sources.

The issue of engagement is particularly critical as it relates to faculty, where the expectation of shared governance remains a core and treasured value at most institutions, even in situations such as a pandemic. Regardless of how one prioritizes the need for quick and decisive action during a crisis, failure to effectively communicate with (not simply to) and to meaningfully engage faculty and others in decision-making risks a lack of support, resistance, and, potentially, efforts to undermine leadership in the moment and over time.

Category 3—Beneficiary and Constituency Relationships

The focus of Category 3 is on connecting with, understanding, and engaging effectively with stakeholders that benefit from, influence, or are influenced by, the institution, and particular schools or units within the institution (Ruben, 2016a). Among these stakeholder groups that are considered—depending on the institution or unit being considered—are faculty (full-time and contingent), students, staff, patients, parents, alumni, members of relevant disciplinary or professional communities, governmental agencies, and the many public and societal beneficiaries, along with internal institutional service units, and national

and international collaborators or suppliers.

The diverse array of critical stakeholder relationships, all of which have likely been disrupted in multiple ways by a pervasive crisis, makes this a complex and multifaceted area. The issues involved relate to information-sharing, needs assessment, providing support of various kinds, offering reassurance and guidance, and assuring the continuity of critical programs and services, among others. Connections and interaction normally created and maintained through traditional forms of face-to-face communication are likely to be compromised in crisis situations—creating both challenges but also opportunities for the use of virtual communication and other innovative forms of technological support. The ability to demonstrate meaningful and measurable progress against crisis plans will no doubt shore up the confidence of stakeholders. Note that in the Baldrige and EHE frameworks, individuals employed by the institution—as distinct from other stakeholders—are the sole focus of Category 5, and receive particular attention in that category rather than this one.

Category 4—Programs and Services

Establishing and maintaining mission-critical academic and administrative programs and services are the primary themes of Category 4 (Ruben 2016a). The nature of mission(s), programs, and services vary substantially depending on whether the work of the unit involves academics, administration and support services, student services, research, human resources, facilities, health and safety, athletics, or other functions. Generally speaking, this EHE category focuses on how each organization identifies, documents, evaluates, and regularly improves its mission-critical programs and services, as well as how particular programs and services become candidates for refinement, restructuring, or discontinuation. Also considered are administrative and support services and processes which may not always be visible but are nonetheless vital to the work of the unit or institution. Such areas as faculty, staff, and student recruitment, graduation certification, procurement, assessment, website maintenance, and administrative support are examples.

Higher education is much more accustomed to adding new programs and services or expanding existing activities than it is to downsizing, reimagining, reshaping, or restructuring. In the wake of periods of crisis, each of these options should be seriously considered. The kind of analysis that is most helpful in contemplating various options is one that identifies relevant criteria for decisions relative to changes—for example, mission centrality, effectiveness, efficiency, required resources, and revenue generation and other factors determined as priorities within a unit or by an institution overall—and the evaluation of programs

or services being reviewed against these criteria (Ruben, 2020). Information that may be useful for considering options may well be stored in a distributed array of systems, which can complicate access and delay decision-making. Strategies to overcome problems of compartmentalization take on added significance during periods when program and service review and renewal are urgent priorities.

Category 5—Faculty/Staff and Workplace

Faculty and staff, and the nature of the organizational culture, climate, and workplace, are the topics of Category 5 (Ruben, 2016a). The category considers how the program, department, or institution recruits, supports, engages, and retains faculty and staff; creates and maintains a positive workplace culture and climate; promotes professional development and career progression; and recognizes and rewards accomplishments and superior performance.

Maintaining strong connections among faculty and staff becomes a particularly critical need—and also a particularly significant challenge—during and following a crisis. In the COVID-19 context, the usual focus on recruitment, orientation, recognition, and professional development of faculty and staff is likely to require attention to technical, emotional, and financial support, as well as to issues related to possible reassignment, expanded or shifting roles and responsibilities due to changing conditions and illness, training and cross-training, and perhaps even temporary or more permanent furloughs or layoffs. For faculty, issues related to time-to-tenure and promotion can be topics of concern if faculty are drawn away from areas typically most essential to promotion. None of the stresses associated with these topics are comfortable to decision-makers, but addressing them in a forthright and timely manner is in the best interests of everyone. What can be helpful in confronting this situation, in addition to effective faculty and staff communication and support mechanisms, is a systematic approach to thinking through questions of value and purpose, along with institutional, school, or unit priorities, and then implementing personnel changes with sensitivity, transparency, compassion, appropriate transitional support, and effective communication (Ruben, 2020). Also important is to encourage faculty and staff contributions to decision-making when possible.

Category 6—Metrics, Assessment, and Analysis

Category 6 focuses on the criteria, methods, and metrics by which an institution, school, unit, or program gathers information to assess its effectiveness in fulfilling its aspirations and core mission(s), how assessments of effectiveness are undertaken, and, more generally how information and communication

systems support organizational analysis, planning, strategy formulation, and outcomes assessment across all EHE categories. More specifically, the category considers how performance-based and other information is gathered, managed, shared, accessed, and used within the institution. The category is also concerned with evaluating and continually improving assessment, information gathering, information use, and technological support for interaction and information-based decision-making (Ruben, 2016a).

As implied by the earlier discussion, the navigation system metaphor offers a useful way to determine what is needed from an information and information support perspective in times of disruption and renewal planning. In this respect, the issues highlighted in this category, as with those in leadership, cross-cut others. Effective and coordinated decision-making is inevitably compromised without sufficient, accessible, and timely information to inform planning, stakeholder relations, and faculty and staff functions.

Ideally, interaction and decision-support systems should allow for easy access to relevant data related to organizational performance, including comparisons with other units and with peers, and also facilitate easy access to the pertinent sector, state, regional, and national information sources and data.

If these processes work well, they provide accurate and timely information and eliminate the need for tracking down information from multiple sources.

Periods of crisis—particularly crises that affect all aspects of the institution—often underscore insufficiencies in information availability and compatibility, and information and communication support system issues that may have existed for years. Making information and interaction functions as simple and straightforward as possible, and leveraging existing technology is an especially sound approach in times of turbulence.

Category 7—Outcomes and Achievements

The final category focuses on accomplishments and evidence to document or demonstrate the performance of the institution or unit and to highlight and communicate progress in each priority area. Emphasis is placed on collecting, assembling, and providing evidence to chart progress and results, and to close gaps, using the metrics and information-gathering methods and systems identified in Category 6 (Ruben, 2016a). The category also considers outcomes over time, and in comparison, to peers, competitors, and leaders.

Tracking and documenting outcomes is particularly necessary when time and resources are in short supply, both of which point to the importance of thoughtful, data-informed, and continually updated analysis, documentation, and the necessity of in-process adjustments and redirection.

Guiding Questions for Review, Reimagination, and Renewal

The framework and questions presented in the following section are designed to provide a useful guide—a navigational template—for conceptualizing, planning, strategy formulation, and implementing revised visions, programs, services, and/or structures. Ideally, the result will be an empowering and energizing vision and path forward to a new or transformed “normal” for a college or university, or its constituent units, departments, or schools—regardless of whether the envisioned changes are incremental or transformative. The guide questions presented here apply to any unit within a college or university or the institution.

Questions are posed in each of the seven EHE-R¹ categories, organized into two groups—those that are likely essential and others that may be of secondary importance (Ruben, 2016b). This categorization may not be equally applicable in all contexts, and the leadership of each unit, school, or institution planning to use the framework could begin the review process by prioritizing and sequencing these questions in a manner that seems most appropriate for their circumstance.

1. LEADERSHIP

Critical Questions

- What is the future that leaders envision for the unit, school, and/or institution in this new environment, and what are the guiding principles and values necessary to achieve this vision?
- What preexisting leadership roles or structures need to be reimaged and refined? How will emergent leadership roles and decision-making protocols be coordinated with existing organizational structures, and how will communication and technological infrastructures support both?
- What are the most critical leadership goals now and going forward?
- How will the values of diversity and inclusion be preserved and nurtured?
- How can leaders build community within the unit, school, or institution? What messages are essential at this moment in time, and how should they be disseminated?
- What settings can be created to allow ideas and policies to be candidly discussed and evaluated by leaders at various administrative levels?

¹ The framework and questions provided in the following sections provided an updating of the first published version of EHE-R (Ruben, 2020).

- How can leaders make the best use of available information and interaction- and decision-support systems to strengthen planning and implementation throughout the institution and its constituent units?

Also, consider:

- How will communication within the leadership team and throughout the unit, school, and/or institution be supported and effectively coordinated?
- How can leaders ensure that emergency decision-making protocols and processes instituted to achieve increased control and predictability in such areas as health, finance, and personnel will not inadvertently undermine effective organizational functioning and employee morale and performance?
- What leadership development needs and priorities exist, and how can these be addressed?

Why these questions?

The role of leadership and the important functions leaders play are easily taken for granted during normal times. During difficult circumstances, however, nearly all leadership functions—especially those related to providing vision, communication, prioritization, reassurance, compassion, and guidance—become more critical and more visible. Leadership actions may also become subject to more praise or criticism, as personal and professional stresses intensify, and faculty, staff, and students look to leaders for guidance, and help, in coping with emerging complexities and challenges.

Leadership responsibilities related to reaffirming the core mission and the importance of operational areas are predictable during normal times. Still, the changes triggered by crises and efforts to recover, recalibrate, reimagine, and reset will likely require a reexamination and temporary or longer-term adjustments to the leadership structure, roles, and responsibilities within the unit/school/institution in the wake of a crisis.

In rethinking leadership structures, roles, and responsibilities in light of current and anticipated circumstances, consideration should be given to whether and how leaders and leadership team roles and responsibilities should change. In some instances, decision-making may need to become either more or less centralized, expanded, or narrowed. New teams, committees, or task forces with crisis-recovery oversight or coordination responsibilities may also need to be established. How newly created structures interface with legacy structures to decision-making can become a source of concern and frustration. Efforts to prevent or mitigate the situations are vital.

The importance of leadership communication during challenging times cannot be overstated. Attention should be given to how the many facets of communication will be implemented and coordinated within the unit, school, or institution, with other leaders at other levels, with individual faculty and staff members, and with other critical individuals and groups. In each case, a multiplicity of important two-way communication goals exists, including updating, support, reassurance, and community-building.

Having well-trained and experienced leaders at all levels can be extremely advantageous as institutions, schools, and units reconsider and recalibrate their future. Quite likely, these qualities are unevenly distributed, and therefore attention to leadership development may be appropriate (Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2017). For example, would additional programming on topics such as crisis management, health and safety, organizational assessment, strategic planning, organizational change, legal and regulatory issues, budgeting, effective organizational communication, and emotional intelligence, or leadership styles and strategies be beneficial at this point and going forward, and if so, what resources and strategies might help address these needs?

An additional useful step in all aspects of assessment, planning, and strategy formulation in the area of leadership is a consultation with administrators of similar units, schools, and/or institutions to share information on approaches to dealing with these and other issues within their organizations.

2. PURPOSES AND PLANS

Critical Questions

- What will be the timing and the process through which a future vision, priorities, plans, and goals for the unit, school, and/or institution are formulated?
- What core principles and values will remain central for the institution as various transformative changes are considered?
- How will contingencies related to resources, timing, and other uncertainties be taken into account?
- How will organizational structures, personnel, technologies, and processes be involved in guiding the planning process?
- What current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are important planning considerations, and what information is available to provide clarity in each area?
- How will faculty, staff, students, and other groups' perspectives be represented in planning? How will meetings and collaborative decision-making processes be

structured to encourage creative problem solving and a sharing of the collective intelligence and multiple perspectives within the community?

- How will plans across the unit, school, and/or institution be communicated, coordinated, and aligned, and how will common and cross-cutting priorities be determined?

Also, consider:

- What procedures, structures, and processes may hinder the planning process and plans, and how can these impediments be addressed?
- What opportunities for improvement have now been opened by the massive disruption of the way things have always been done?
- What chronic problems have plagued the unit, school, and/or institution, and is there now an urgency and an opportunity to address and resolve these ongoing issues?
- What new, expanded, or partnered programs or services opportunities might be considered particularly appropriate at this point?
- How will difficult decisions about or eliminating particular programs and services be made? How, and by whom, will the news of these decisions be shared?
- How will the organization monitor the effectiveness of the planning process and progress relative to the goals identified in the plan, and how will feedback on both be used to improve the process and intended plan outcomes?
- Are there lessons that have been learned from the present situation that should be considered in plans for the future?

Why these questions?

During normal times, strategic planning is generally a periodic process undertaken at the institutional level, within academic and professional programs and departments, and in administrative, student life, service and support areas, athletics, and other units. In these planning processes, historical missions and aspirations of departments/institutions provide the foundation for the development of new or expanded goals, strategies, and activities. Fundamental assumptions about the mission, or missions, and future visions of units/schools/institutions, are typically not challenged or revised in planning activities during normal times. Times of turbulence, extreme change, or severe fiscal challenges, however, call these historical precedents into question, and afford the necessity

and/or opportunity to revise and reset forward-looking visions, priorities, and goals.

The planning process should provide a well-defined, constructive, and systematic way forward. The perspectives of faculty, staff, and students—and, as circumstances permit or require, other stakeholders—should be represented in these discussions. Planning in context of a crisis will certainly require attention to resources and will benefit from an environmental scan to inventory current and anticipated needs and opportunities. A reconsideration of the mission and reprioritization of mission-critical functions, and the development of a situation-sensitive vision and goals for the unit, school, and/or institution going forward are also useful components of the process. Time and resource constraints may force compromises that deviate from ideal processes and procedures. To the extent possible, however, core values and principles of planning and engagement should guide the process. The benefits of attention to these principles will likely become apparent and rewarding over time, if not immediately.

The uncertainties of the present situation and the potential for changing conditions also suggest the need to build in flexibility as well as scenario and contingency planning options.

For example, given current realities, how can planning consider and prioritize the most appropriate uses of technologies and physical facilities in light of safety and financial concerns? Taking account of challenges relative to movement and space, what options can be considered for preserving the values of face-to-face contact in the classroom and on campus?

Ideally, the planning process should lead to the development of a document that enumerates short-term priorities and longer-term needs. The plan should also advance an energizing, future-oriented vision and articulate goals, needed resources, timelines, and recommended action steps that can be widely communicated. Time constraints may impose limitations on these best practices. Still, there are many benefits from maintaining the highest possible process standards in planning, as well as in maintaining the ability to change direction as circumstances shift. Attention must be given to resource limitations in a time of fiscal crisis and to considering the possibility of reprioritizing resources to mission- and revenue-critical activities.

The planning process should also include strategies for implementation and should attend to the need for constant communication and engagement among all key parties. As discussed previously, time and energies devoted

to communicating with key stakeholder groups are particularly important in periods of disruption. The opportunity for engagement, especially for faculty, may well be as important as the decisions that are made as a result of that engagement (Ruben et al., 2017). Gathering benchmarking information regarding how other units, schools, and institutions are addressing planning can also be helpful. Possibilities for sharing services, forming alliances, and creating new partnerships should also be explored.

3. BENEFICIARY AND CONSTITUENCY RELATIONSHIPS

Critical Questions

- How will student needs and expectations be addressed?

For example, consider how units, schools, and the institution will address issues related to finances and health, campus residence, dining services, campus life, campus transportation, direct interaction with faculty, research engagement, advising, and psychological and career counseling.

- How will mutually satisfying connections and a sense of community be maintained with students at all levels—particularly newly admitted undergraduate students—and with their parents?
- What communication, information, and interaction-support technology and strategies will be needed to sustain connections and relationships with each beneficiary and constituency group?
- What other groups and organizations are traditionally served by the unit, school, and/or institution, what specific benefits are being provided for each, and how will these needs and expectations be prioritized and addressed going forward?¹
- What programs, offices, and services should be available to provide academic, emotional, financial, and social support for students and other constituency groups? How will these programs and services be coordinated, and how will their availability be communicated?
- What groups are critical collaborators, partners, and suppliers for the unit/school/institution, and how will their expectations and future-oriented needs be assessed and addressed?
- What are the essential approaches for gathering, organizing, and disseminating information regarding the needs, concerns, and forward-looking expectations of faculty, staff, and students and other constituencies to guide planning and day-to-day decision-making?

¹ Constituencies that might be considered in this category include students, parents, regulatory groups and advisory boards, unions, and the media, and secondarily, peer institutions, alumni, the general public, and others. “Groups and organizations” refers to external beneficiaries, constituencies, and stakeholders not employed by the department/institution, paralleling the Baldrige framework, as employees, faculty, staff, and other employee groups are the focus of Category 5.

Also, consider:

- What important unit, school, and institutional benefits are realized through collaborative relationships with particular external groups (e.g., collaborative research and community engagement), and how can these mutual benefits be sustained?
- What new constituencies and potential collaborations should become a focus of attention looking forward?
- How can units, schools, and the institution serve as a critical partner in local, regional, and national renewal efforts?

Why these questions?

Multiple constituencies benefit from the work of each department and the institution overall. Every entity has multiple mission areas that are important to particular constituencies and beneficiaries. Relationships with these groups are inevitably disrupted during periods of dramatic change, and it will be important to capture the perspectives of these stakeholder groups about what programs, offices, and services are needed to provide emotional, financial, technical, housing, food, and social support. Equally important are efforts to ensure that available support programs and services are well coordinated and effectively communicated. Looking to the future, the benefits provided for constituencies may need to be reconsidered and reprioritized, and current and anticipated realities may dictate a need to form new collaborations or partnerships. Decisions in these areas are consequential and require thoughtful assessment, planning, and strategy formulation.

Effective and recursive two-way communication is essential, particularly in situations where conditions are constantly changing.

Moreover, the effectiveness of existing communication mechanisms may have been compromised, and new strategies and communication support systems for building and maintaining strong connections with students and other stakeholder groups are likely to be needed. For example, with students, these efforts may suggest the need to take account of formal—and informal—messaging on social media, and the introduction of innovative technology-based communication to solicit input and promote interaction with the institution. In all cases, the goal is to capture insights on constituent priorities, current sources of satisfaction/

dissatisfaction and concern, and needs and expectations for the future. Additionally, constituencies that may have required less attention in pre-crisis times—such as parents of prospective and current undergraduate students—may require greatly enhanced communication during renewal planning.

4. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Critical Questions

- How will programs and services be systematically reviewed, inventoried, and prioritized, and what changes will be needed in these offerings going forward?
- What criteria—and weightings of these criteria—should be used in reviewing and considering program/service prioritization and possible changes?

For example, consider criteria such as mission centrality, alignment with aspirations, importance to stakeholders, distinctiveness, safety, resources required and revenue generated, the potential for redundancy, importance to faculty and staff, and reputational contribution.

- What programs, services, or centers are candidates for initiation, improvement, expansion, downsizing, restructuring, or discontinuation?
- How can interaction- and decision-support technologies be used to facilitate various mission-critical functions and administrative support functions going forward?
- What innovations are possible in mission-critical, administrative, and support processes? How do these innovations take account of the efficiency, judicious use of resources, and avoidance of duplication with existing efforts elsewhere in the institution?

For example, consider adding additional online teaching/learning tools, streamlining processes, expanding collaborations, eliminating redundancies, sharing services, utilizing space and structures more efficiently, minimizing travel, enhancing safety, and expanding engagement-, interaction-, and decision-support technology.

Also, consider:

- What programs, services, and functions overlap with others across the unit, school, and/or institution, and what opportunities exist for closer coordination or integration?

- What opportunities exist for optimizing the relationship between centralization and decentralization in administrative areas in light of current and anticipated circumstances?

For example, what would be the ideal balance between centralized and decentralized functions relative to finance, HR, IT, research support, facilities, interaction- and decision-support, internal and external communication, safety and health, instructional support, and professional development given current and anticipated circumstances?

- What opportunities for reform are possible given the disruption of large meetings and in-person contact? What benefits might be derived from permanently instituting new telecommuting options in everyday work processes, healthcare delivery, and miscellaneous administrative functions?

Why these questions?

Most programs, services, and work processes within units, schools, and/or institutions are disrupted to varying degrees in times of crisis. A variety of stop-gap repair measures are typically implemented during recovery, with the widespread pivot to technology to deliver instruction being a prime example. In most institutions, the mode of instruction was transformed by COVID-19 in a matter of several weeks, with the change from the elective and selective application of virtual technology to its nearly universal adoption and use. Research, health care, counseling, and community outreach and other functions were also disrupted, as were advising, student life, on-campus services, residence life, international programs, athletics, and administrative services such as human resources, information technology, finance, budgeting, and virtually every other area. Changes introduced to address the immediate challenges posed by the crisis may need to be carefully considered in forward planning. Are these stop-gap measures the solutions that should be implemented on a more permanent basis? Are refinements needed? What criteria should be used to make these decisions, and how can information- and decision-support systems facilitate the analysis of these measures as a component of crisis-response planning?

The accuracy of the assertion that a crisis is an opportunity depends on the way this issue is addressed. Not all potential possibilities for innovation and change are desirable or sustainable. Productively transforming crises into opportunities requires consideration of very basic questions about the aims and scope of

existing and potential programs and services, taking into account—and perhaps weighting the importance of—relevant evaluative criteria and utilizing available information to inform prioritization. Systematic analysis and decision-making about possible program and service changes involve these two steps: (1) Deciding on the critical criteria for assessing the importance and effectiveness of current program and service offerings; and (2) using those criteria and available information as the basis for classifying, prioritizing, and making recommendations for change. Some of the criteria that may be important to consider are alignment with organizational/institutional aspirations and priorities, importance to stakeholders, mission centrality, resources required and revenue generated, safety, value, benefits provided, distinctiveness, competitive positioning, reputational standing, and, perhaps, leveraging benefits of a particular geographic locale (Ruben, 2020). A review and analytic process might lead to decisions that some programs, services, and processes—for example, those associated with online course delivery, interaction, and testing—should be strengthened and expanded. The process might also identify the need to think through opportunities to revise, restructure, merge, or perhaps postpone, downsize, or discontinue some programs and services.

A systematic evaluation facilitated by tools developed for or adapted to this purpose may also be useful in identifying new program or service priorities, innovative instructional approaches, or alternatives for new sequencing or modularizing strategies for courses, degrees, and competency certifications.

Within student affairs, new strategies may be identified to better align programs and services with student needs in an increasingly virtual and hybrid experience. Within administrative areas, innovative opportunities may be possible for reinventing processes for optimizing available technology, better utilizing space and structures, managing travel and other expenditures, enhancing safety, streamlining work processes, sharing services, coordinating or combining functions, or enhancing collaboration with other units. At the institutional level, innovations might include, for example, the creation of a website that presents a simplified view of the college or university organized around programs, instructional offerings, and areas of research expertise and themes rather than reporting relationships, legacy organizational structures, or physical location. The hope would be that innovation such as this could make the offerings and resources of the institution more apparent and virtually accessible to external audiences. Any benefits that result from a crisis will be proportional to the degree to which changes either address or transform fundamental purposes of the unit,

school, and/or institution, leverage current and potential strengths, and address present or future needs of stakeholders.

5. FACULTY, STAFF, AND WORKPLACE

Critical Questions

- What values and principles should guide communication and engagement efforts with faculty and staff in the present situation and going forward?
- How will information be shared, input solicited, and the sense of community preserved in the absence of regular face-to-face contact?
- How will faculty and staff uncertainties and morale issues related to health, safety, employment, security, transportation, and possible personnel changes be acknowledged and addressed?
- What is the distribution of faculty and staff work roles and responsibilities, and what opportunities/necessities exist for recalibration, reallocation, temporary or longer-term reassignment, cross-training, and professional development to address needed changes in workload and workplace priorities? How will right-sizing or downsizing be handled? How will institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion be accounted for in decisions relative to temporary or permanent workforce reductions?
- What services will be needed to support faculty and staff in times of transition, reinvention, and renewal?
- What innovations in faculty and staff work practices might be considered?

For example, consider technological innovations to facilitate virtual work, team communication and collaboration, flextime and cross-training options, shift work, administration-union collaboration, and new approaches to balancing personal, family, and professional responsibilities.

Also, consider:

- How can issues regarding faculty and staff morale related to the crisis in general and within the program, school, and institution be addressed most effectively?
- What communication and engagement approaches and technologies will be needed for effective interaction with, and among faculty and staff, and how will these efforts be planned and coordinated?

Why these questions?

In times of crisis within higher education, faculty and staff are the essential resources for effective response and recovery in the face of immediate challenges, and even more critical for reimagination and renewal. In a changing and transitional environment, support services will be of particular importance to provide information, reassurance, and community-building related to department/institution operations, available technical training, relevant regulations and policies, financial and emotional assistance, professional development and out-placement, recognition for innovation and outstanding individual and team accomplishments, and responses to faculty and staff questions and concerns.

Faculty and staff functions are numerous and varied, and the need to review the distribution of roles and responsibilities in relation to immediate and future needs is essential, as will be considerations relative to short- and long-term multitasking, temporary reassignments, cross-training, longer-term professional development, and layoffs.

The relatively decentralized leadership structures and decision-making processes within higher education afford flexibility in responding to crises. That said, the absence of a more predictably centralized and hierarchical decision-making culture may also mean that recursive efforts are required to inform, engage, support, coordinate, and inspire faculty and staff understanding and actions throughout a department and institution. A variety of mechanisms are in place to achieve these goals in normal circumstances, but these will likely need to be augmented in times of crisis.

6. METRICS, ASSESSMENT, AND ANALYSIS

Critical Questions

- What will be the critical measures and what information and decision-support systems will be needed to review and assess progress on the review and reaffirmation or refinement of visions, priorities, plans, and goals going forward, and how will these be determined?
- What methods will be used to assemble, collect, organize, and communicate assessment information for use in planning and operational decision-making?
- What relevant information is currently available, and what additional information and technological support are needed from internal and external sources to assist with assessment and outcomes tracking now and going forward?

- Are technology support and decision systems available, accessible, understood and used throughout the institution?
- What individuals, teams, or offices will coordinate assessment and the integration of available performance data for planning and decision-making?
- How are similar units, schools, and institutions dealing with the challenges of forward planning and strategy formulation in this time period, and what useful lessons can be learned from a better understanding of their problems, solutions, and experiences?
- How will assessment methods and data/information-sharing systems be evaluated and improved to respond to changing conditions?
- How can existing information sources and platforms, as well as relevant external sources, be leveraged to address current challenges in a way that fosters horizontal and vertical coordination and alignment?

Also, consider:

- How will trend and comparative outcomes information be gathered and used?
- How can reimagination and renewal processes and activities become a focus for academic research and collecting and sharing of best-practices information?

Why these questions?

A clear and shared sense of the appropriate indicators for the unit, school, and/or institutional effectiveness, as well as methods for tracking and using the information on progress and outcomes, are important in all circumstances. In the context of pervasive turbulence and disruption, establishing measures and capturing, documenting, and disseminating these measurement outcomes information is a vital process for clarifying goals and strategies, and for systematically tracking progress relative to desired outcomes. The process of establishing and agreeing upon relevant markers and methods also helps to clarify and focus on priority goals, strengthen teamwork, and heighten energy and ownership of organizational directions.

During times of crisis and change, the value of assessment may be overlooked in the face of what may seem to be more pressing responsibilities. However, measurement and outcomes tracking are particularly useful at these times.

Assessment is especially critical for monitoring revised or restructured mission-critical programs and services, new administrative and support processes, leadership effectiveness, progress on planning, success in addressing stakeholder expectations, support for faculty and staff, innovation, and communication within the community relative to each of these.

Effective information- and interaction-support systems also permit the aggregation of information from multiple institutional, peer, regional, state, and national sources for use in analysis and decision-making. Trend analysis and benchmark comparisons with other departments/institutions can also be a source of useful information to assess progress and accomplishment and to motivate and encourage all involved.

7. OUTCOMES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Critical Questions

- How will process and planning outcome information be used for internal and external reporting and accountability?
- How will information relative to planning progress, process improvement projects, and broader goals be communicated and used within the units, schools, and institution?

For example, consider whether and how progress, trend, and benchmark comparison information will be disseminated and used by leaders, faculty, and staff. Will dashboard displays be created for easy access to data? Will improvement opportunities identified through assessment be documented and shared? Will a unit, school, and/or institutional case studies narratives be developed?

- What information should be shared, when, how often, and with what audiences?
- What opportunities can be identified for institutional and scholarly research and cross-institutional sharing of outcomes assessment information and best practices?

Why these questions?

Beyond enhancing the quality and alignment of institutional decision-making, gathering, displaying, and disseminating progress and outcomes, assessment results have other internal benefits. This information is also useful in broadening the understanding of external constituencies regarding the plans and priorities being pursued and outcomes achieved, reinforcing a sense of community,

energizing internal and external stakeholders, and enhancing pride in the unit/school/institution at an important moment in time for the institution.

Essential in the effective use of this information is easy access and the ability to customize that information to the context and needs at hand for easy use in the present circumstance and as conditions change.

Summary of EHE-R Categories and Core Themes

Key elements of the EHE-R framework can be summarized as follows:

- **Leadership.** Communicating core values, promoting a sense of community, and advancing a forward-looking vision that underscores the importance of reviewing, revisiting, reconfirming, or revising purposes, aspirations, and priorities.
- **Purposes and plans.** Creating a time-sensitive process for systematically considering directions, aspirations, plans, strategies, goals, action steps, and methods for follow-through.
- **Beneficiary and constituency relationships.** Listening to, understanding, and responding to the immediate and forward-looking needs of students, prospective students, and other key constituencies and collaborators to sustain and ideally strengthen connections and relationships going forward.
- **Programs and services.** Engaging in a review of mission-critical and support programs and services in relation to defined criteria to identify action plans for each.
- **Faculty/staff and workplace.** Recognizing and supporting faculty, staff, and community support needs with a goal of strengthening relationships while reviewing roles and responsibilities and determining needed actions.
- **Assessment and information use.** Assessing, communicating, and using progress, process, and outcomes information relative to initiated changes for refining directions and future planning.
- **Outcomes and achievements.** Documenting, promoting, and sharing information on progress, achievements, and peer comparisons for use in day-to-day decision-making, planning, and future strategy formulation and process improvement.

The Process for Using the Model

There are many ways in which the model and questions provided in the previous pages can be used. As EHE is typically implemented, the process engages leaders, faculty, and staff in a systematic process of reflection that provides a foundation for identifying and launching improvement plans. The EHE-R framework could be used in this way or solely by a leader or leadership team as a checklist and guide. Reviewing and addressing questions oneself or with a small group is quicker and more convenient than engaging a broader collection of faculty and staff. However, broader participation and input has numerous benefits. Particularly where the purpose of the review is to conceptualize and formulate forward-looking plans, involving broader engagement helps to create a shared understanding of needs and priorities. This process also contributes to an alignment in thinking and priorities across categories and to the commitment necessary to help mobilize and motivate the group to move forward constructively.

When implemented for review, planning, and strategy formulation, the process would begin with a sequential review of each of seven categories, the concepts noted for each, and the listed questions. Each unit, school, or institution will have different purposes, needs, and time constraints, and the list of questions to consider is lengthy. A logical place to begin, therefore, is to determine which of the listed questions are of greatest priority for consideration. That list—and any additional questions that a group would like to add—can be ordered based on need, timing, potential impact, or other criteria judged to be relevant. This could be done in a way that creates a “high,” “moderate,” and “lower” priority list for each category. A next step would be discussing each of the prioritized questions in turn and candidly discussing what specific issues are of critical concern, with a plan to follow the steps identified in Figure 2.

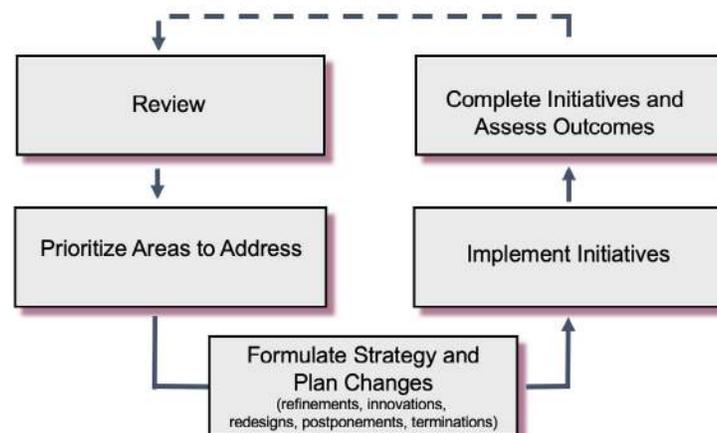


Figure 2

The EHE-R Process

An additional step is the identification of current strengths and areas for improvement in each category. Another activity that could be incorporated into the review process is a paring down of the identified areas of concern to a list of a “top three” in each category or a top eight to ten priorities across all categories.¹ Following review and prioritization, the effort would shift to planning and strategy development. For each priority item, consider determining what key action steps are required, who will be responsible for leading the effort, what deliverables are expected, what expenses may be involved, and what the implementation timeline should be (Ruben, 2016b).² The results of the review, prioritization, strategy formulation and implementation action plan can then be documented, shared, and periodically updated as a resource going forward. Additional items not on the original priority “shortlist” can be added later as a focus for future attention.

Concluding Comments

As leaders of higher education departments, schools, and institutions of all types and sizes confront uncertainty and disruption, there is a need for rigorous, systematic, and proactive approaches to guide review, assessment, and strategy formulation activities. It is hoped that the EHE-R framework—incorporating but also extending the Baldrige and EHE categories—can be useful for analysis and decision-making as higher education institutions and their constituent schools and departments plan for the future.

In this paper, particular emphasis is devoted to communication, information, and interaction- and decision-support technology as critical components of review, analysis, strategy formulation, and implementation. The metaphor provided by navigation system thinking is particularly appropriate to articulate these needs. Having access to the right information will help an institution navigate through the ambiguous and rapidly changing terrain. A navigation system would consider important questions, integrate information from multiple sources, guide analysis and decision-making, allow for entry of goals and waypoints, help identify destinations and distances, and suggest alternative routes. The navigation system should also help track and report on progress, provide alerts, recommend re-routings when roadblocks are encountered, identify alternative paths, and provide linkages to the information that serves as a reminder of where true north resides for each leader and institution.

The framework can also provide a very useful foundation for externally required program review and institutional accreditation (Ruben, 2007) that may occur during times of turbulence and disruption. While the focus here is on higher education review and renewal, it should be noted that the emphasis on crisis response and renewal questions presented could be equally useful for organizations in other sectors.

¹ Quantitative assessment component is also a component of the standard EHE assessment process (Ruben et al., 2017). This element is unlikely to be as necessary or useful for EHE-R, particularly given time pressures and multiple agendas. It could be implemented at a later time.

² A template that can be used for this action planning process is provided by Ruben in the EHE Workbook (Ruben, 2016b).

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