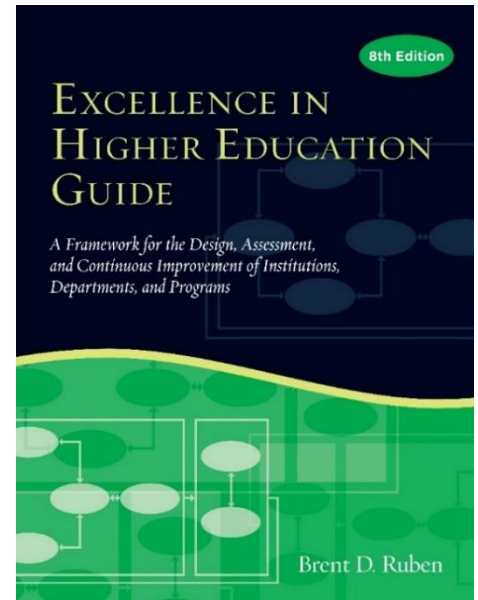


EHE-R | Renewal

Guidance for College and University Planning for a Post COVID-19 World

Adapting the Excellence in Higher Education Framework for Institutional, School, and Unit Renewal

Brent D. Ruben, PhD
Rutgers University



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2 months between mid-February and mid-April 2020 have ushered in a period of unprecedented disruption for higher education in the United States and internationally as COVID-19 continues to exert its far-reaching impact worldwide. Now each institution, and every academic, administrative, clinical, student life, and service unit within those institutions, face a number of critical decisions necessary to identify the path forward. In some cases, the challenges that must be confronted are existential in magnitude, as health, financial, enrollment, diversity, and affordability issues may require sweeping and transformative institutional change. Even those institutions that are structured to weather the storm will need to review and reflect on current conditions and make adjustments to assure a viable future trajectory.

Departments, schools, and institutions of all types and sizes will face a time of uncertainty through the months and years ahead, when fundamental questions related to mission, values, priorities, program and service offerings, and faculty and staff roles and responsibilities will need to be considered. Will the mission of an institution need to be reshaped? Will academic units that were struggling before the COVID-19 crisis need to be eliminated or restructured? What should be the new balance between tenure/tenure track and contingent faculty? What should be the new relationship among teaching, research, and service responsibilities in institutions of different categories? Will programs that serve residential, student life, transportation, and other on-campus functions be reinvented to accommodate new realities? Which support processes should be downsized and which must be ramped up? How will faculty and staff positions and responsibilities be affected, and how can these groups be engaged and supported in planning for changes that will be undertaken? How will budgets and resources and the mechanisms for their allocation be adjusted to accommodate the changed environment? And, perhaps most important, how will leaders guide the community through a process of systematic review, reflection, and reinvention while maintaining core values and a sense of community, and in what ways will the requisite decisions be made and communicated?

The Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) framework (Ruben, 2016a) is a robust framework and process for colleges and universities to identify the key issues they face and then formulate plans to address the new challenges ahead. Developed and widely used for assessment, planning, and improvement in academic, professional, administrative, student life, or service units, this version of the framework—EHE-R—focuses specifically on issues that institutions and their constituent units confront as they begin a thoughtful process of review, reinvention, and renewal in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

EHE-R collects and catalogues critical questions related to mission and vision, changing priorities, modifications in programs and services, and adjustments in faculty and staff responsibilities in the face of shifting needs among present and potential students and other constituencies and a dramatically transformed environment. And, most fundamentally, EHE-R

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges Joe Barone, Richard De Lisi, Phil Furmanski, Ralph Gigliotti, Rob Heffernan, 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.

works to determine how leaders at all levels will guide and support 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. The publication also describes alternative processes for using the framework at the institutional level, and within academic, professional, administrative, student life, support, and other units.

The EHE-R model is built on a foundation that recognizes the importance of each of these components:

- *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 relationships going forward.
- *Programs and services.* Engaging in a review of mission-critical and support programs and services in relation to defined criteria with the goal of identifying action plans for each.
- *Faculty/staff and workplace.* Recognizing and supporting faculty, staff, and community support needs while reviewing roles and responsibilities and determining needed actions.
- *Assessment and information use.* Assessing, communicating, and using progress and outcomes information relative to initiated changes for refining directions and future planning.
- *Outcomes and achievements.* Documenting, promoting, and sharing evidence of progress, achievements, and peer comparisons for use in day-to-day decision-making, planning, and future strategy formulation.

A Critical Moment in the History of U.S. Higher Education

Unlike most other crisis events that have confronted higher education, the challenge with COVID-19 is not simply a matter of addressing the problem at hand, and then undertaking crisis management and public relations strategies to restore an institution's reputation.² As with the personal, economic, and health-system impacts of COVID-19, the consequences of the pandemic have been pervasive, game-changing, and may well be permanently transformative for higher education. This crisis is defined by three conditions that are not likely to go away anytime soon.

1. Social distancing in an industry where social interaction and physical presence are central to the work we do, whether it occurs in the classroom, the dorms and fraternities, or in the labs, libraries, and field sites where students and faculty conduct their research.
2. Fiscal emergencies in a sector that has confronted financial challenges for some time, especially but not exclusively at schools that receive state funding, and at small privates that were struggling financially before the pandemic. Unpredictability of demand/tuition revenue as well as impact on revenue from auxiliary services, such as sports, summer rentals of facilities, campus stores, and restaurants, etc., coupled with increased financial need among students, also contribute to the prospects of personnel reassigns and layoffs.
3. Increasing demand for health care services delivered in hazardous conditions for those schools with medical schools/hospitals, while simultaneously losing revenue from suspended elective surgeries (S. Lawrence, personal communication, May 2, 2020).

By all accounts, the immediate responses of students, faculty, and staff members to the pandemic were quite remarkable, demonstrating an impressive level of adaptability, resilience, and even short-term innovation in the face of many uncertainties, disrupted routines, and numerous disappointments due to cancellations of long-anticipated events and ceremonies. On the whole, colleges and universities can take pride in preserving core values and fulfilling the most essential aspects of the mission under truly extraordinary and difficult circumstances.

A key element in the adaptation and innovation process was provided by technology. The availability of several video conference modalities provided a virtual alternative to classroom instruction and to attendance at meetings and conferences. Students, faculty, and staff can be congratulated for an impressive pivot to make effective use of these alternatives to face-to-face instruction. Behind the scenes, the adjustments necessary to the continuation of classroom functions and meetings and university business more generally required herculean, largely invisible efforts by college and university personnel across institutions—in health care and public safety, budgeting, finance, information technology (IT), human resources (HR), scheduling, residence life, student affairs, campus services, and many, many others. While these responses, like those related to instruction, were remarkable in their speed of implementation and effectiveness in the leading edge of disruption, many of these adaptations and round-the-clock efforts of key personnel will neither be sustainable nor necessarily adequate solutions for the longer term.

² A helpful summary of crisis leadership concepts and models is provided by Gigliotti (2019), who makes the point that traditional crisis management models list reputational mitigation and restoration as key components.

The realities of this time have underscored the need for tools to help leaders throughout higher education think systematically and respond with intention in this time of disruption—and to do so in a way that envisions and charts a course to the “new normal”—which we hear talked about so much, but often at a level of abstraction and with an ambiguity that puts a rather abrupt end to conversations.

From Response to Renewal

With the passage of time and the lessening of immediate pressures, forward-looking planning becomes possible—and, indeed, essential. That shift can be reassuring and empowering for individuals, and supportive and sustaining for an organization, but it is not an easy one to accomplish. Encouraging voices point out that: “As difficult as any crisis is, it is always also an opportunity for learning and change”; and “We can be stronger once we get past the emergency.”

We are reminded that a crisis, emergency, or disaster is on the one hand a disturbing, distressing, and destabilizing event, one that necessarily becomes an all-consuming preoccupation for everyone touched by it. Yet, on the other hand, a crisis can become an opportunity to consider new directions, to reinvent and reprioritize, and to identify innovative alternative ways to carry out traditional practices. The Chinese word for crisis, *wei chi*—roughly translated as “dangerous opportunity”—succinctly captures this ironic duality (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 22)

The adaptation to an emergency pushes all of us out of our comfort zones and provides an opportunity for the emergence of out-of-the-box solutions to both preexisting and emerging problems. But the realization of new and enriching opportunities is not the only possible outcome of a crisis. Simply because changes *can* be made is not a compelling argument that they should be made—nor that all changes will be improvements. For instance, an important question is how new instructional methods utilizing distance learning will be integrated over the long term into higher education programs, and how virtual experience may change the fundamental nature and value of undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. This is but one of the many important questions that are raised by the current COVID-19 crisis and our responses to it. What is sorely needed in such a period, perhaps even more so than during “normal” times, is a framework and set of principles to guide organization review, reflection, reimagination, and renewal, along with a consideration of fundamental questions about purpose and value.

The Excellence in Higher Education Renewal (EHE-R) Framework: A Tool for Guiding Reimagination and Renewal

Of the various approaches that can be beneficial in organizational review, planning, and improvement, none has been more influential than the Baldrige model (Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program, 2020).³ The Baldrige framework provided the inspiration for the EHE

³ An introduction to the Baldrige model, its history, evolution, and the core concepts that provide the foundation for excellence are available in many publications (NIST, 2020; NACUBO, 2011; and Ruben, 2016a, 2016b). A detailed discussion of the applicability of the Baldrige framework for colleagues and universities is provided in *Higher Education Guide: A Framework for the Design, Assessment and Continuous Improvement of Institutions, Departments, and Programs* (Ruben, 2016a) and briefly summarized in the Appendix of this publication.

model, which provides a higher education adaptation of Baldrige tailored to the context, culture, and nomenclature that is familiar within colleges and universities. EHE has been updated and revised regularly since the mid-1990s. The most recent edition was published in 2016 (Ruben, 2016a, 2016b).⁴

The following sections provide an adaptation of core concepts of the EHE model (Ruben, 2016a) to define a review, planning, and strategy formulation framework for colleges and universities as they undertake efforts to evaluate and reinvent their future. This Excellence in Higher Education Renewal model (EHE-R) offers a scalable framework and a series of guiding questions to aid leaders and their colleagues in a systematic process of self-assessment, planning, and strategy formulation for their units, schools, and institutions to address the challenging times ahead.

EHE has been adopted and applied in numerous ways in many colleges and universities of varying types and sizes, and the value of this work has been recognized nationally by the Baldrige Foundation (Baldrige Foundation, 2018) and the Network for Change and Continuous Improvement (NCCI, 2012).⁵

Like the Baldrige framework on which it is based, the EHE model, illustrated in Figure 1, includes seven categories that are considered to be necessary components of excellence in any educational enterprise at any level—a program, department, center, school, college, or university (Ruben, 2016a). In the context of the model, an educational enterprise is viewed in systems terms. The overall performance and sustainability of that system are seen as consequences of the quality of the seven components, and of the interactions and alignment among them (Ruben, 1995; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019; Ruben et al., 2017).

Paralleling Baldrige, EHE was developed initially to guide assessment, planning, and continuous improvement in “normal” times. The framework presented here adapts that basic EHE framework for use with review, planning, and strategy formulation in situations where the needs may range from incremental and continuous improvement to extensive and transformative restructuring and reinvention. The name EHE-R—Excellence in Higher Education-Renewal—will be used to refer to this application of the framework.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

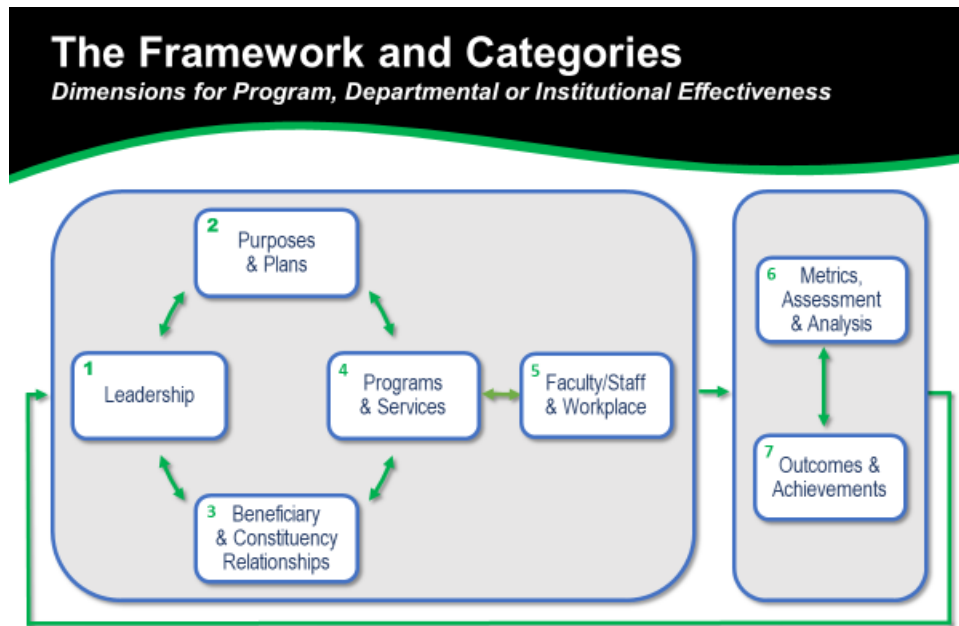


Figure 1
EHE: The Framework and Categories

Category 1—Leadership

Leadership practices are the focus of Category 1. The category examines 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; and how leadership and leadership practices and performance are reviewed and evaluated. Even in the best of times, these are challenging issues. In the midst of a crisis, the leadership questions and those included in the following pages are especially challenging. As an institution moves into the early part of a renewal mode, these questions become more approachable and begin to take on their own urgency. Particularly critical during this stage is the dynamic relationship between leadership, structures, and communication. Breakdowns in these areas can have very negative and lasting consequences.

Category 2—Plans and Purposes

Clarifying and building consensus on an organization's mission, aspirations, goals, and developing and implementing plans are the central themes of Category 2. The category also focuses on the importance of environmental scanning, benchmarking comparisons with other organizations, and the alignment and coordination of plans and action steps throughout the organization. Also important in this category is how faculty and staff and other relevant

stakeholders are engaged in defining aspirations and goals, and in creating and implementing plans within the organization. Adapting these general themes to a post-crisis environment is difficult, but also very important. The biggest substantive issues here are time and timing. Each unit/school/institution will need to determine the right time to undertake the planning process for the period ahead, how to prioritize the issues involved, and how to balance needs for expeditious forward movement with meaningful engagement. The guiding questions provided later in the publication should be helpful in this regard.

Category 3—Beneficiary and Constituency Relationships

The focus of Category 3 is stakeholders that benefit from, influence, or are influenced by, the organization. Among the stakeholder groups that are considered—depending on the work/school/institution being considered—are faculty (full-time and contingent), students, patients, future employers, alumni, members of relevant disciplinary or professional communities, governmental agencies, and the many public and societal beneficiaries, along with internal institutional service units, and collaborators or suppliers in other academic or administrative units. The diverse array of relationships, all of which have likely been disrupted in multiple ways, makes this a complex and multifaceted topic.

Category 4—Programs and Services

Establishing and maintaining mission-critical academic and administrative programs and services is the primary theme of Category 4. The nature of the mission, programs, and services will vary substantially depending on whether the work of the unit involves academics, administration and support services, student services, facilities, athletics, or other functions. The category focuses on how an organization identifies, documents, evaluates, and regularly improves each mission-critical program and service, as well as how particular programs and services become priorities for refinement, restructuring, or discontinuation. Higher education is much more accustomed to adding new programs and services than it is to downsizing, reimagining, reshaping, or restructuring, all of which may well be options that merit consideration in post-crisis planning. In reviewing and prioritizing programs and services—and in decisions relative to changes—effectiveness, efficiency, expenses, and revenue generation become critical criteria.

Category 5—Faculty/Staff and Workplace

The quality of the faculty and staff, and the nature of the organizational culture, climate, and workplace, are the topics of Category 5. The category considers how the program, department, or institution being reviewed recruits, supports, and retains faculty and staff; creates and maintains a positive workplace culture and climate; and recognizes and rewards accomplishments and superior performance. The usual focus on recruitment, orientation, recognition, and professional development of faculty and staff is likely to be accompanied, and perhaps replaced by, needs for technical, emotional, and financial support and issues related to possible reassignment, expanded

or shifting roles and responsibilities, retraining and cross-training, and perhaps even temporary or more permanent layoffs. None of these options are topics that bring pleasure to anyone in the unit/school/institution. 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, compassion, and appropriate transitional support.

Category 6—Metrics, Assessment, and Analysis

Category 6 focuses on the criteria, methods, and metrics by which the organization assesses its effectiveness in fulfilling its aspirations and core mission, or missions, how assessments of effectiveness are undertaken, and how evaluations are used to monitor relationships with current and prospective students, and other constituencies and collaborators. Performance-oriented information is always an asset to organizational effectiveness, and this resource becomes particularly critical in a period such as this where expeditious and quality decision-making is required. Data collection and access should be made as simple and automatic as possible, and to the extent feasible, should be embedded in the workflow so that these activities do not require a major expenditure of time. If these processes work well, they provide accurate and timely sources of information and eliminate the need for the creation and use of shadow systems to complete scenario planning, to assess progress on selected plans and goals, and to evaluate the decisions to postpone, expand, downsize, redesign, restructure, or discontinue specific programs or services.

Category 7—Outcomes and Achievements

The final category focuses on outcomes, with an emphasis on collecting, assembling, and providing evidence based on the metrics and methods identified in Category 6. In general, this category asks for information on accomplishments and evidence to document or demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the organization, and in this context, to highlight and communicate progress in each priority area, to identify areas where changes of some kind are not leading to envisioned outcomes, and to determine what may be lost in the new configuration.

EHE-R: Applying EHE to Crisis Response, Reimagination, and Renewal

The EHE concepts and categories have been shown to be useful for assessment, planning, and improvement (NACUBO, 2011; Ruben et al., 2007). While EHE and the Baldrige framework were developed to guide assessment, planning, and continuous and incremental improvement in normal times, the categories and concepts can be equally useful as a guide to organizational renewal in times of crisis. In such situations, many organizations or institutions may require refinements, adjustments, minor pivots, and continuous improvement; or, in circumstances where challenges are existential, requiring dramatic, transformational change in purpose, vision, and goals may be necessary for survival.

The EHE-R framework presented in the following pages is designed to provide a useful guide for conceptualizing, planning, transitioning, and implementing revised visions, programs, services, and/or structures that will be elements of the path forward to the “new normal” for a college or university, or its constituent units, departments, or schools.

The following sections provide a reframing of the EHE/Baldrige model (Ruben, 2016a) as a tool for helping college or university leaders, faculty, and staff identify critical questions to guide institutional response and rebuilding within a unit, school, or institution.⁶ The framework to be presented is applicable to any academic, professional, administrative, student life, service, athletic, or other unit within a college or university, or to the institution as a whole.

Many important questions are posed in each of the seven categories of EHE-R. To make these lists somewhat more approachable, within each category questions are divided into those that are likely essential and others that may be of secondary importance. This categorization may not be appropriate in all cases. Rather, each unit, school, or the leadership of the institution should prioritize and sequence these questions in a manner that makes sense for the challenges and timing at hand.

1. LEADERSHIP

Critical Questions

- What is the future that leaders envision for the unit/school/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 reimagined and refined? How will emergent leadership roles and decision-making protocols be coordinated with existing organizational structures, and how will communication infrastructures support both?
- What are the most critical leadership goals now and going forward?
- How can leaders build community within the unit/school/institution? What messages are most 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?

⁶ “Unit/school/institution” is used throughout the document to refer to any academic, professional, administrative, student life, service, athletic, or other unit within a college or university, or to the institution as a whole.

Also consider:

- How can leaders ensure that 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?
- How will the values of diversity and inclusion be nurtured and preserved?
- How will communication within the leadership team and throughout the unit/school/institution be effectively coordinated?
- What leadership development needs and priorities exist, and how can these be addressed?

Why these questions?

The role of leaders 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, information, prioritization, reassurance, compassion, and guidance—become more critical and more visible. Leadership actions may also become more subject to 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, but 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 rethinking leadership structures, roles, and responsibilities in light of current and anticipated circumstances, consideration should be given to whether and how leader and leadership team roles and responsibilities should change—expand in some cases, and perhaps be distributed in others. Consideration could be given to individual positions and associated areas of responsibility and also to the establishment of new teams, committees, or task forces with crisis-recovery oversight or coordination responsibilities.

The importance of leadership communication during challenging times cannot be overstated. Consideration should be given to how the many facets of communication will be implemented and coordinated within the unit/school/institution, with other leaders at other levels, with individual faculty and staff members, and with other critical individuals and groups. In each case, there are a multiplicity of important communication goals and message priorities, including information-sharing, offering support and reassurance, and community-building that should be addressed.

Having a large pool of well-trained and experienced leaders at all levels to guide the unit/school/institution can be extremely advantageous as it reconsiders and recalibrates its future. Quite likely these qualities are unevenly distributed within the unit/school/institution and therefore attention to leadership development would be appropriate. For example, would additional programming on topics such as crisis management, 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 in time 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 consultation with leaders of similar units/schools/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 vision for the future, shared priorities, plans, and goals for the unit/school/institution are formulated?
- How will organizational structures, personnel, and processes be involved in guiding the planning process?
- What current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are important considerations in the planning processes, and what information is available to provide clarity in each area?
- How will consultation and creative problem-solving be enhanced to inform the new vision?
- How will faculty, staff, students, and other groups' perspectives be represented in planning? How will meetings be structured to benefit from the collective intelligence of the community?
- How will plans across the unit/school/institution be communicated, coordinated, and aligned, and how will common and cross-cutting priorities be determined?

Also consider:

- How will contingencies related to resources, timing, and other uncertainties be taken into account?

- What procedures, structures, and processes may hinder the planning process and plans, and how can these impediments be addressed?
- Are there lessons that have been learned from the present situation that should be considered in plans for the future?
- What chronic problems have plagued the unit/school/institution and is there now an urgency and an opportunity to address and resolve these ongoing issues?
- What opportunities for improvement have now been opened by the massive disruption of the way things have always been done? What new or expanded programs or services has the crisis made apparent?
- How will difficult decisions about downsizing or eliminating certain programs and activities be made? How will the news of these decisions be delivered?

Why these questions?

During normal times, strategic planning is generally a periodic process undertaken at the institutional level, and 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 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 in fact 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. The planning process benefits from an environmental scan to inventory current and anticipated needs, challenges, and opportunities; a reconsideration of the mission and reprioritization of mission-critical functions and revenue streams; and the development of a situation-sensitive vision and goals for the unit/school/institution going forward. Time and resource constraints may force compromises that deviate from ideal processes and procedures. To the extent possible, however, core principles of planning and engagement should guide the process. The benefits of attention to these values 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 distancing concerns? Taking account of what are, it is hoped, short-term limitations and restrictions on movement and space, what options can be considered for preserving values of face-to-face contact in the classroom and on campus?

Ideally, the process should lead to the development of a document of short-term priorities and longer-term needs. The plan should also advance an energizing, future-oriented vision and articulate goals, needed resources, time lines, and recommended action steps that can be widely communicated. Time constraints may impose limitations on these best practices, but there are many benefits from maintaining the highest possible process standards in the planning process. Attention must be given to resource limitations in a time of fiscal crisis, and consideration must be given to reallocating 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 of all key parties throughout the process. Attention to how similar units/schools/institutions are addressing planning challenges is also useful.

3. BENEFICIARY AND CONSTITUENCY RELATIONSHIPS

Critical Questions

- How will students be served post-crisis?

For example, consider how units/schools/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, psychological and career counseling, sense of community and ownership, and others.

- What other groups and organizations are traditionally served by the unit/school/institution, what specific benefits are being provided for each, in what ways are many of these relationships mutually beneficial, and how will these needs be taken into account going forward?⁷
- 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?

⁷ 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.

- What communication approaches will be needed to sustain relationships with each beneficiary and constituency group?

Also consider:

- 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?
- What important unit/school/institutional benefits are realized through engagements with various constituency groups (e.g., collaborative research and community engagement), and how can these mutual benefits be preserved?
- Are there new constituencies that should become a focus of attention due to the impact of the crisis?
- How can units/schools/the institution serve as a critical partner in society-wide recovery 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 typically disrupted in times of dramatic change. It will be important to capture beneficiary and constituency perspectives with regard to what programs, offices, and services are needed to provide emotional, financial, technical, housing, food, and social support, and how well these efforts are coordinated and how their availability is communicated.

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 two-way communication with constituencies and collaborators is also essential, particularly in situations where conditions are constantly changing. Moreover, the viability of existing communication channels may have been compromised, and new approaches may be needed. With students, for example, these efforts may require the use of existing “listening posts” as well as innovative technology-based communication. In all cases, the goal is to capture insights on constituent priorities, current sources of satisfaction/dissatisfaction and concern, and needs and expectations for their future relationship with the unit/school/institution.

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, 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 virtual and other technologies be used to support various mission-critical functions and important administrative and support functions going forward?
- What innovations are possible in mission-critical, administrative, and support processes? If these innovations are supporting a new vision for the unit/school/institution, how can the new vision support programs, services, and systems that are lean, free of waste, and avoid duplicating other efforts?

For example, consider adding more online teaching/learning technology and support systems, streamlining processes, expanding collaborations, eliminating duplication, sharing services, utilizing space and structures more efficiently, minimizing travel, and enhancing safety.

Also consider:

- What programs, services, and functions overlap in others, 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, consider finance, HR, IT, research support, facilities, transportation, sponsored research, external communication, safety measures, legal considerations, and changes that might become options in light of current and anticipated circumstances.

- What opportunities for research-based reforms of pedagogy are now made possible by the disruption of larger lectures and in-person proctored high-stakes exams? What benefits

might be derived from permanently instituting some telecommuting options? Should telemedicine become a routine option both for receiving and delivering health care?

Why these questions?

Most programs, services, and work processes within units/schools/institutions are disrupted in times of crisis to varying degrees. A variety of stop-gap measures are implemented during recovery, with the use of online technology to deliver instruction being a prime example. In most units/schools/institutions, the mode of instruction was transformed by COVID-19 in a matter of several weeks from the elective and selective application of virtual technology to wholesale 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 HR, IT, finance and budgeting, and virtually every other area. Changes introduced to address the immediate challenges posed by the crisis may need to be carefully reconsidered in forward planning. Are these stop-gap measures the solutions that should be implemented on a more permanent basis?

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 as to 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 and decision-making. 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 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, nonduplicativeness, competitive positioning, reputational standing, and, perhaps, leveraging benefits of a particular geographic locale.

The 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 point to the need to think through opportunities to revise, restructure, merge, or perhaps postpone, downsize, or discontinue some programs and services.

This evaluative process may also be useful in identifying strategies for optimizing technology, better utilizing space and structures, minimizing or even banning travel, enhancing safety, streamlining work processes, sharing services, coordinating or combining functions, enhancing collaboration with other units, or delaying, creating alternatives to, or discontinuing events or functions. Within academic and professional areas, innovative opportunities may be possible in reinvention instruction and the academic calendar, and in identifying alternatives for new sequencing or modularizing strategies for courses, degrees, and competency certifications. Within student life, innovations should be considered to better align programs and services with

student needs in an increasingly virtual student experience. At the institutional level, innovations might be, 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 on campus. The hope would be that an innovation such as this could make the offerings and resources of the institution more apparent and virtually accessible to outside audiences. In any case, whatever benefits may result from a crisis will be proportional to the degree to which changes either address or transform fundamental purposes of the unit/school/institution, leverage current and emergent strengths, and address present or future needs of stakeholders.

5. FACULTY, STAFF, AND WORKPLACE

Critical Questions

- How will faculty and staff uncertainties and morale issues related to health, safety, security of their employment, transportation, and possible personnel changes be addressed?
- What values and principles should be the focus of communication and engagement efforts with faculty and staff in the present situation and going forward?
- 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?
- 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, flex-time and cross-training options, shift work, administration-union collaboration, and new approaches to balance between 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/institution be best addressed?
- What communication approaches will be needed for two-way communication with faculty and staff, and how will these communication efforts be planned and coordinated?

Why these questions?

In times of crisis within higher education, faculty and staff are the essential resource 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, support, and community-building related to department/institution operations, available technical training, relevant regulations and policies, financial and emotional support 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 of short- and long-term multi-tasking, 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. The absence of a more predictably hierarchical decision-making culture also means that recursive efforts are required to inform, engage, align, support, reassure, inspire, and coordinate faculty and staff understanding and actions throughout a department and institution. A variety of centralized and distributed mechanisms are in place to achieve these purposes 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 for assessing progress on visions, priorities, plans, and goals going forward, and how will these be determined?
- What relevant information is currently available and what additional information is needed to assist with assessment and outcomes tracking now and going forward?
- What methods will be used to assemble, collect, organize, and disseminate assessment information for use in planning and operational decision-making?
- 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/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?

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?

Having a clear and shared sense of the appropriate indicators for unit/school/institutional effectiveness, as well as methods for tracking and using information on progress and outcomes, are important components of organizational excellence. The value of assessment may be overlooked in the face of what may seem to be more pressing responsibilities during times of crisis and change. However, measurement and outcomes tracking can be particularly useful during organizational change.

In the broader context, establishing measures and capturing, documenting, and disseminating these measurement outcomes is a vital process for clarifying goals and strategies, and for systematically tracking progress in achieving the desired outcomes. The process of establishing and agreeing upon relevant markers and methods also helps to clarify and focus on goals, strengthen teamwork, and heighten energy and ownership of new directions. Outcomes assessment is especially critical for assessing revised or restructured mission-critical programs and services, new administrative and support processes, leadership effectiveness, progress on planning, success in understanding and addressing stakeholder expectations, support and encouragement of faculty and staff, and innovation, among other activities.

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

- What metrics and outcomes methods will be utilized to assess progress, outcomes, accomplishments, and continuing improvement needs?
- How, and to whom, will outcomes information be communicated and used within the unit/school/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; and will a unit/school/institution case study narrative 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?

Gathering, displaying, and disseminating progress and outcomes assessment results has important internal value, and is also useful in broadening the understanding of external constituencies regarding the plans and priorities being pursued and outcomes achieved. Beyond the value served by the information itself, shared knowledge of progress and outcomes reinforces a sense of community and can enhance pride in the unit/school/institution and the progress and outcomes among stakeholders going forward.

Summary of EHE-R Categories and Core Themes

Key elements of the EHE-R framework 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 relationships going forward.
- *Programs and services.* Engaging in a review of mission-critical and support programs and services in relation to defined criteria with the goal of identifying action plans for each.
- *Faculty/staff and workplace.* Recognizing and supporting faculty, staff, and community support needs while reviewing roles and responsibilities and determining needed actions.
- *Assessment and information use.* Assessing, communicating, and using progress and outcomes information relative to initiated changes for refining directions and future planning.
- *Outcomes and achievements.* Documenting, promoting, and sharing evidence of progress, achievements, and peer comparisons for use in day-to-day decision-making, planning, and future strategy formulation.

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 it is typically implemented, the standard EHE process engages leaders, faculty, and staff in a self-assessment and self-reflective activity that provides a foundation for identifying and launching improvement plans. In some instances, the framework is used 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 EHE categories and the buy-in necessary to help mobilize and motivate the group to move forward constructively.

When used for review, planning, and strategy formulation, the process would begin with a category-by-category review of the seven categories, the concepts noted for each, and the listed questions. Because each unit/school/institution will have different purposes, needs, and time constraints—and because the list of questions to consider is lengthy—a logical place to begin 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 sequenced based on need, timing, potential impact, or other criteria judged to be relevant. This could be done in a way that created 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 for each question as shown in Figure 2.

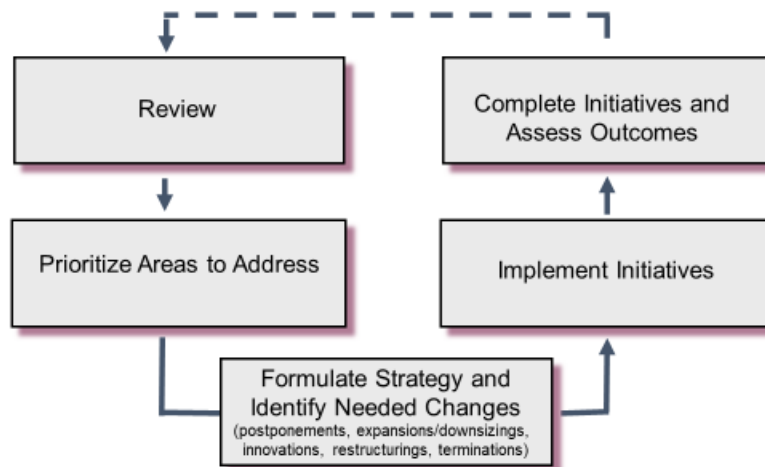


Figure 2
The EHE-R Process

In traditional applications of the EHE framework (Ruben, 2016b), an additional step is the identification of strengths and areas for improvement in each category, a step that could be incorporated for use with EHE-R if desired. Another activity often included in the usual application of the EHE organizational review process is a narrowing down of the identified areas of concern to a list of a “top three” in each category, or a top five to seven across all categories.⁸

Following review and prioritization, the effort shifts 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). The results of the review, prioritization, strategy formulation, and implementation action plan should be documented, shared, and revised as a resource going forward. Additional items not on the original priority “short list” can be revised as a focus for later attention.

Conclusion

For any organizational assessment, planning, or improvement program, the question that always arises is whether the initiative has the intended value and impact. Positive perceptions and enthusiasm among participants are not, in and of themselves, persuasive outcomes when weighed against the investment of time and talent that is required for the review, planning, and strategy formulation processes.

Experience and evidence suggest that the EHE framework is useful in assessment, planning, and improvement within an institution, school, or unit of any type or size, drawing on accepted principles of organizational excellence. The modified EHE-R framework presented in this publication adapts that basic EHE framework to provide a guide for review, planning, and renewal in the post-crisis environment in which higher education now finds itself. The goal is for the EHE-R model to help leaders, faculty, and staff work together to create a viable and empowering road map to address the challenges of a very uncertain future.

⁸ 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 point in time.

Appendix

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 challenges to leadership and organizational performance. The program was developed initially for the business community and was later modified for health care and education.

The original intent of the program was to promote U.S. corporate effectiveness, by providing a framework and national awards program built around a systems framework for organizational assessment and improvement. The framework blends scholarly concepts of organizational theory and behavior, principles from the professional literature, and successful organizational and leadership practices. The program accomplishes the following: (a) identifies the essential components of organizational excellence; (b) recognizes organizations that demonstrate these characteristics; (c) promotes information-sharing by exemplary organizations; and (d) encourages the adoption of effective organizational principles and practices.

Numerous case studies, professional endorsements, and leader testimonials speak to the benefits of the Baldrige model in advancing organizational insight, learning, and practice (Foundation of the American College of Healthcare Executives, 2015; Baldrige National Quality Program, 2016; Dawson, 2016; Goonan, 2015; Leist et al., 2004; NACUBO, 2011; Sorensen et al., 2005; Weeks et al., 2000). A number of quantitative studies also provide evidence of value of Baldrige criteria for improving organizational effectiveness. Organizations rated highly in terms of Baldrige criteria have been shown to outperform other organizations financially and also report improved work processes and 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, and improvements in other sector-specific indicators (Abdulla et al., 2006; NIST, 2016; Shook & Chenoweth, 2012; Sternick, 2011). Each of these performance metrics becomes an important marker in the aftermath of crisis.

Inspired by the Baldrige framework, the EHE model was developed in the mid-1990s to adapt the framework to fit the context, culture, and language that are familiar within colleges and universities. EHE has been updated and revised regularly since the mid-1990s. The most recent edition—the eighth edition—was published in 2016 (Ruben, 2016a, 2016b).⁹

EHE is built on a foundation that recognizes the desirability of incorporating these fundamental organizational principles within higher education, including:

- Effective *leadership* that provides guidance and ensures a clear and shared sense of organizational mission and future vision, a commitment to continuous review and improvement of leadership practice, and social and environmental consciousness.

⁹ 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.

- An inclusive *planning process* and coherent plans that translate the organization's mission, vision, and values into clear, aggressive, and measurable goals that are understood and effectively implemented throughout the organization.
- *Knowledge of the needs, expectations, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels of the groups served by the organization*; operating practices that are responsive to these needs and expectations; and assessment processes in place to stay current with and anticipate the changing needs of these groups.
- *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, employee satisfaction, engagement, professional development, commitment, and pride; and provides strategies for synchronizing individual and organizational 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 organizations; widely sharing this and other information within the organization to focus and motivate improvement and innovation.
- *Documented, sustained positive outcomes* relative to organizational mission, vision, values, and goals, the perspectives of groups served, and employees, all considered in light of comparisons with the accomplishments of peers, competitors, and leaders (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019).

Assessing the EHE Model and Process

At Rutgers, two studies were undertaken to assess the benefits of the EHE assessment process in “normal” times (Ruben et al., 2004; Ruben et al., 2007). Findings from these studies point to the impact of the EHE organizational self-assessment process in the acquisition of a knowledge and theory base, in the clarification of organizational strengths, and in the pursuit of critical improvement needs.

With support from the Lumina Foundation, the National Association of College and University Administrators carried out a national research initiative to study Baldrige/EHE in 2010–2011 (NACUBO, 2011). The study focused on initiatives at eight U.S. colleges and universities—American University, Rogue Community College, Marist College, University of North Texas Health Sciences Center, University of Georgia, Loras College, the California State University System, and California State University–San Bernardino—where EHE was introduced (NACUBO, 2011). At each institution, the framework was employed to address one of three specific goals: (1) improving and strengthening core functions (financial planning, accreditation, and IT); (2) creating and implementing new practices (space measurement and planning, safety, human resources, and performance management); and (3) promoting multicampus and system-

level change (organizational change and innovation, and operational process improvement). The NACUBO-Lumina study confirmed earlier findings relative to the value of the Baldrige/EHE framework to guide and motivate organizational improvement, the introduction of new and innovative practices, and the facilitation of multicampus alignment and change.

To date, more than 60 academic and administrative departments at Rutgers have participated in the program. Roughly 50 other colleges and universities in the United States and internationally have also found this program helpful in their assessment, planning, and improvement efforts. Additionally, the model has been applied in various research and training contexts in Botswana, Canada, China, Chile, Iran, Northern Ireland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand, and the EHE guide has also been translated and published by Wuhan University Press for use in China (Ruben, 2015).

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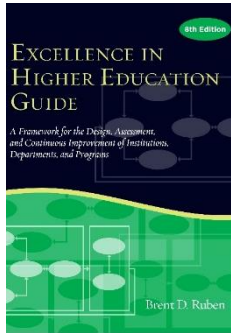
About the Author

Brent D. Ruben is distinguished professor of communication and senior university fellow and founder of the Center for Organizational Leadership at Rutgers University. His authored/coauthored books include *Leadership, Communication, and Social Influence: A Theory of Resonance, Activation, and Cultivation* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019); *A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education: Core Concepts, Competencies, and Tools* (Stylus Publishing, 2017); *Excellence in Higher Education Guide: A Framework for the Design, Assessment and Continuous Improvement of Institutions, Departments, and Programs* (Stylus Publishing, 2016); and *What Leaders Need to Know and Do: A Leadership Competencies Scorecard* (National Association of College and University Business Officers, 2006). He received The Malcolm Baldrige Foundation Inaugural Award for National Leadership Excellence in Education in 2018.

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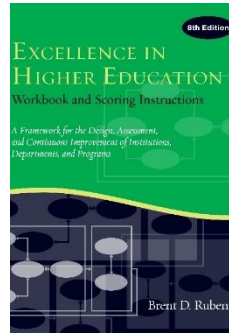
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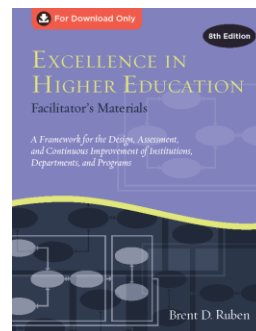
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