Focus on Integrating Results and Recommendations into Planning and Budgeting Systems

Sue Darby

Objectives

1. To identify and review existing and potential practice--what works, what doesn't, and what it takes to make it work.

2. To clarify required linkages among assessment results, planning, and resource allocation

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Common Components of Effective Processes

- υ Leadership
- υ Communication
- υ Alignment
- υ Data and Information
- υ Data-driven decision making
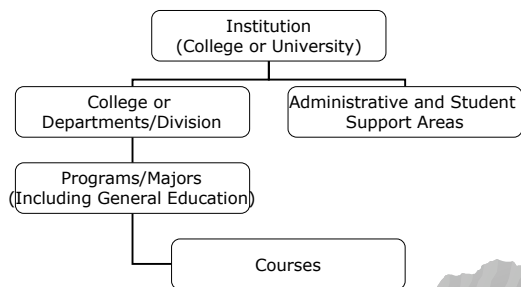
It Takes Leadership…

υ To communicate the message across the institution
υ To coordinate and align existing efforts
υ To consistently reinforce the value of assessment
υ To hold entities and individuals accountable for producing evidence in support of plans and budget requests
υ To make decisions on the basis of solid evidence
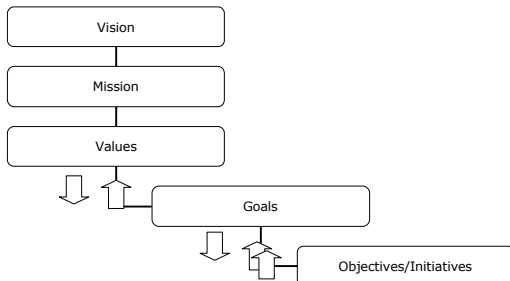
Communication must be . . .

υ Frequent and public
υ Clear and consistent
υ Directed to students, faculty, administration, and external stakeholders
υ Explicit in public documents (mission, vision, strategic plans)

Alignment

Institution
(College or University)

College or
Departments/Division

Administrative and Student
Support Areas

Programs/Majors
(Including General Education)

Courses

Another perspective on alignment

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┌─────────────────────┐
│       Vision        │
└─────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────┐
│       Mission       │
└─────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────┐
│       Values        │
└─────────────────────┘
          ⇩ ⇧  ┌─────────────────────┐
               │       Goals         │
               └─────────────────────┘
                      ⇩ ⇧  ┌───────────────────────┐
                           │ Objectives/Initiatives │
                           └───────────────────────┘
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Discussion Questions

1. How do the planning and budgeting processes work at your institution?
2. Are assessment results incorporated into these processes? How might this be accomplished?
3. What are the barriers to achieving this? How might those barriers be addressed?

Other forms of alignment

υ Position Descriptions
υ Policies/Procedures
υ Expectations
υ Reward structures
υ Committee structures and functions
  – e.g. Assessment committee and curriculum committees should coordinate efforts
υ Program review and planning
υ Consistency across divisions

Data and Information

- υ Reinforce the value of using assessment data by…
  - Requiring data for all resource allocations
  - Requiring assessment processes before approving new programs
  - Requiring assessment results for all existing programs
  - Following through on expectations of assessment
  - Requesting the plan for gathering, analyzing, and using the evidence
- υ Provide adequate support for institutional research and/or data collection and analysis

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An Abbreviated *(simplistic even)* Sample Plan

Proposal	Evidence	Resource required	Targeted outcomes	Assessment strategy
Hire math tutors	a. Tutored students achieved 85% of math outcomes, while others with similar demographics achieved only 70%.	$20,000	1. Increase percentage of first year students who achieve all math outcomes in courses A, B, and C from current 45% to 65% in first year.	Compare performance of baseline year to new year for all enrolled in courses A, B, and C.

Conversations . . .

How do we reward success while supporting continuing improvements?

Widening the Net: Co-Curricular Learning and Assessment

Learning Reconsidered (2004):

- Learning, development, and identity formation shape each other
- Co-curricular programming can allow students to learn through action, contemplation, reflection, and emotional engagement as well as information acquisition (p.12)

Making Co-Curricular Learning Transformative:

- Intentional design: activity, outcomes, planned assessment, follow-up
- Awareness that focus is on learning, development, and identity development
- Engagement of student in assessment process

Assessment Strategies

- "Use" data
- Surveys:
  - Satisfaction
  - Evaluation
  - Reflective
- Reflective Statements
- Portfolios

Assessment Strategies

- Interviews
- Standardized Instruments
- Longitudinal attitude surveys
- Responsive assessments
- Formative/summative assessments

The Rubric: A Chief Assessment Tool

- Holistic
- Item-based
- Competency-based
- Descriptive

Writing a Descriptive Rubric

v Determine primary outcome(s)
v Determine measures that indicate achievement of outcome
v Determine/describe degrees of success of achievement of measures

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A Sample Descriptive Rubric

OUTCOME: Students will write essays that show awareness of audience and purpose, as well as the connection between the two.

RUBRIC	LEVELS OF COMPETENCY			
Students understand the connection between audience and purpose.	Thesis clearly identifies purpose, while context and support indicate audience.	General sense of purpose and audience.	Audience and purpose occasionally clear.	No sense of audience or purpose.
Students target a particular audience.	Audience is clear from first paragraph.	Audience unclear.	Little sense of audience.	No targeted audience.
Students use language and structures appropriate to a audience.	Style, syntax, and structure are appropriate to a specific audience.	Occasional inappropriateness in style, syntax, or structure	Major gaffes in style, syntax, or structure, but otherwise appropriate	Style, syntax, and structure are random.

Some Co-Curricular Outcomes

v Cognitive complexity

v Knowledge acquisition, integration, and application

v Classroom work, problem-based learning; campus media, diversity programs

v Majors, group projects; living-learning communities, information literacy

Some Co-Curricular Outcomes

- Civic engagement

- Interpersonal/ intrapersonal competence

- Service learning; student government, community service, judicial boards

- Classroom projects and discussions, lab teams; student employment, advising and counseling, tutoring

Building a Descriptive Rubric:

- Define one outcome operationally:
  - Cognitive complexity
  - Knowledge integration or application
  - Civic engagement
  - Interpersonal/intrapersonal competence
- What "performance" or behaviors indicate its achievement?
- What are the levels of its achievement?

Gathering, Analyzing and Using Data on Student Learning

Janice Denton & Elaine Klein

Effective Assessment of Student Learning

λ **Is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning.**

λ **Is conducted to make a difference.**

λ **Is a matter of commitment, not a matter of compliance.**

The Assessment Process

Student Learning Outcomes

⇩

Evidence

⇩

Interpretation

⇩

Confirmation & Improvement

AAHE-9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

4

AAHE-9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

5

AAHE-9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a large set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

6

Two Categories of Evidence

λ **Direct Measure of Student Learning**

λ **Indirect Measure of Student Learning**

7

Typical Assessment Instruments
Direct Measures

"Artifacts" of educational process:
λ Dissertations
λ Capstone Experiences
λ Grades (with caveats!)
λ "Local" examinations
λ Papers, Portfolios, Performances

External measures:
λ GRE,
λ Licensure & Certification Examinations, etc
λ Commercial Tests

Indirect Measures

λ Surveys, attitudinal questionnaires (standardized or locally developed)
λ Focus groups, structured interviews
λ Success rates (placement, employer reports)

8

Grades Made Useful for Assessment of Student Learning

λ **Why it is important…**
  – Authentic, classroom-based assessment
  – Leverage work students may already be doing
  – Directly measure student learning
  – Credibility with faculty

λ **What is necessary…**
  – Excellent –criteria and standards represent the best discipline knowledge
  – Explicit – well written criteria and standards
  – Public –share the information
  – Useful –use the information to understand and improve learning

9

What do you want to know?

λ **Must have a good question.**
  - Have the changes to the General Education program produced any improvement in students oral communication skills?

10

Important Questions About Gathering Data

λ **What seems to relate to what we want to measure?**
λ **What's already being measured?**
λ **Will indirect measures help us understand more about learning in that area?**
λ **If we don't have data in this area, what can we reasonably gather?**

11

Important Questions About Analyzing Data

λ **Who will analyze the data?**
λ **Will the analysis have credibility?**
λ **How will the analysis be sent to those that can make changes?**

12

Important Questions About Using Data

λ **What are the data used for?**
- Validating student learning
- Improving student learning
- Planning
- Examining the assessment process
- Documenting institutional effectiveness

λ **If they are not being used, why not?**

13

Discussion Questions

λ What data do you have (or do you need)?
λ If you have data, what processes and structures exist (or are still needed) to support analysis?
λ Does the analysis suggest a need for change? Who needs to be involved to...
  - Make decisions?
  - Approve decisions?
  - Implement changes?
λ To what audiences (and when) do you share information about student learning?

14

Discussion Questions

λ To what audiences (and when) do you share information about student learning?
λ What makes gathering, analyzing and using data on student learning challenging at your institution?
λ What examples of success can you share?

15

Engaging and Creating Commitment

What Makes it Possible?

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCA

Academy
for Assessment
of Student Learning
The Higher Learning Commission
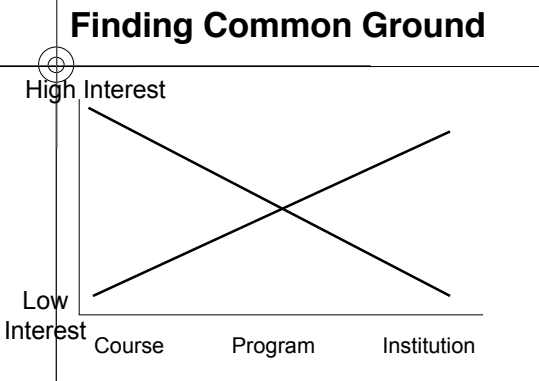
Reflection & Conversation

What's been your experience?

1. When are faculty most engaged in assessment? When is it meaningful, useful, real? (8-10 minutes)

2. When…for administrators? (8-10 minutes)

3. Identify 1-3 things that make engagement & commitment the norm. (Report Out - 10 minutes)

Finding Common Ground

High Interest

Low Interest

Course   Program   Institution

Breaking Down the Barriers

**Focus on
Learning & Teaching
Not
Assessment**

What We've Learned

ν **When there's acknowledgement of all the assessing and improving of learning that's already happening**

ν **When it is focused on learning versus assessment--and begins where the interest is and the interested are**

What We've Learned

ν **When documentation is simple, data/information is abundant, and conversations are plentiful and intentional**

ν **When it it makes sense and and is well-supported**

What We've Learned

ν **When it is pervasively and persistently sustained--by those engaged (there will always be the unengaged…go with those that are)**

ν **When leadership is consistent and supports perseverance, risk, experimentation, failure & learning**

What We've Learned

ν **When it is organized around conversation versus documentation**

ν **When reward structures and resources follow--TIMELY**

What We've Learned

ν **When results and recommendations make a difference--there's real follow-through and action supported by resources**

ν **When it begins simply and is allowed to grow organically--building on curiosity, creativity, inquiry, interest, and expertise**

What We've Learned

ν **When people feel comfortable and knowledgeable in what they are doing**

ν **When it is built into the work versus added on--and when time is assumed and provided for as needed**

What We've Learned

ν **Sustained, Committed Leadership at Multiple Levels and Across Institution**

ν **Shared decision-making (faculty, admin.)--authority for decisions on resources to support requests based on learning evidence**

What We've Learned

ν **Assessment results, learning, recommendations are tied integrated into larger systems and structures**

ν **Meaningful, useful, reasonable, and workable approaches--jointly defined, collectively agreed to, broadly supported (when it is non-trivial)**

CHANGING A CULTURE

Compliance ———————— **Culture**

- Sustains conversations about mission and values--COMMUNICATION
- Focuses on **LEARNING**, not assessing
- Sees teaching as stimulating learning
- Tears down the silos
- Has administrative leadership and support

CHANGING A CULTURE

Compliance ———————— **Culture**

- Involves all stakeholders
- Sees accreditation reporting as validation, not compliance
- Transforms structure and processes to facilitate learning
- Shifts from proving instruction to uncovering/creating LEARNING

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

- Common goals and values
- Sources of resistance
- Reasons for resistance
- Address the reasons

Top Barriers
to Engaging Faculty

"You can't assess the real learning."

"I'm *already* doing assessment."

"I have no time or resources."

"Nothing will change, so why bother?"

"The results will be used against us."

"There's no leadership, commitment, or reward system to sustain or back the effort."

Breaking Down the Barriers

"You can't assess the real learning."

What are ways you know that learning is happening? How do you know when things are going right?

Courses are part of a coherent program. Discuss the scope and sequence of outcomes - framed as *uncovering* ideas.

Breaking Down the Barriers

"I'm *already* assessing student learning."

They probably are--Stay positive - "Great! Tell me what you're doing."

Make an inventory of assessments that are already happening. Move discussion to program or department or discipline level.

Identify strengths & gaps.

Breaking Down the Barriers

"I have no time." "We don't have the staff or resources."

Focus on saving time & effort
- **maximize use of existing information**
- **try giving something up**
- **action research is not a dissertation**
- **samples & quick meaningful measures**
- **reports - short & simple**

Breaking Down the Barriers

"Nothing will change, so why bother?"

…could they be right? acknowledge it.

Try to agree and ensure that their efforts are meaningful and make a commitment to use the results.

Assessment is not a fad, it will not be going a way

Breaking Down the Barriers

"There's no leadership, commitment, or reward system to sustain or back the effort."

…could they be right?

How are administrators and other leaders engaged in ways that ensure engaged faculty?

Breaking Down the Barriers

"The results will be used against us."

Discuss safeguards on how to ensure that assessment results are not used to penalize faculty

Focus on their efforts and reward good teaching

* Clear expectations   * Resources
* Incentives   * Support

Creating Conversations of Consequence:
An Introduction
Monica M. Manning, Ph.D.
NovaLearning

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." (Margaret Wheatley)

The cabinet members sat around the table as the college's president described the upcoming fall convocation: "We're going to get together and talk about the importance of being a learning-centered institution." One cabinet member couldn't help the *sotto voce*: "If it's like past convocations, we'll get together, and he'll do all the talking!"

It happens a lot – good intentions of engaging in a conversation devolve into a 'talking head' monopolizing the time. At national conferences, session leaders promise an interactive session, but too frequently discover that the end of the period is fast approaching, leaving only a couple of minutes to ask "Any questions or comments?" Faculty hope to involve students in conversations about the course topic, but give up when their questions are met by silence.

Why do our good intentions of creating conversations so frequently go unfulfilled? What does it take to create the space for a compelling conversation – one that goes beyond just talking to having meaningful consequences? Are there ways to begin conversations that increase the likelihood that people will engage meaningfully with the topic and with each other?

Good conversations on campus have become rare. That does not need to be the case, but it does take intentionality to change this situation. It requires thinking through questions about the topic, valuing the kinds of knowledge and perspectives participants bring, and, most of all, it means developing an approach to a gathering that *depends on* conversation rather than one that *permits* conversation. In this paper I outline some of the reasons and ways to foster conversations on campus, suggest who might be involved, describe what's needed to support good conversation, and overview a variety of informal and formal processes available to foster productive dialogue and meaningful conversation.

Thinking Together

Margaret Wheatley offers the best reason for conversation: "Conversation is the natural way we humans think together."[i] Thinking together – that's more than just talking, that's going to the next step of sharing the process of how to resolve problems or address new

opportunities. It's recognizing that no one has the whole answer, that it's in the collective wisdom of people who care that we're most likely to find the best ways to work together.

Conversation – people connecting about ideas that are important to them – is often the first step in creating community. The emergent community becomes the foundation for sustaining vital conversations.

Again from Wheatley:
> When we're brave enough to risk a conversation, we have the chance to rediscover what it means to be human. In conversation, we practice good human behaviors. . .We gain insights and new understandings. And as we stay in conversation, we may discover that we want to be activists in our world. We get interested in what we can do to change things. Conversation wakes us up. We no longer accept being treated poorly. We become people who work to change our situation.[ii]

Too many of us spend too much time in meetings that don't go anywhere. They don't even motivate *us* to go anywhere, except back to our offices and desks. For all the meetings that are held on campuses, there is a prevailing sense of disconnectedness among many faculty and staff members. Meetings with their prescribed agendas and fixed authority roles rarely give us the chance to get to know each other. Instead of giving us the time to discover what we hold in common or welcome diverse thinking, meetings are usually managed in ways to reach conclusion as quickly as possible. Few people say they want more meetings. Many people say they miss good conversation.

When a Conversation is Important

People often ask me, "When should we have a conversation instead of a meeting?" My response is always, "When you feel the need for one." How often have we felt the need for a conversation about something important to us? We don't just crave a solution, but we feel a deep need to talk our ideas out, and hopefully, to hear how others are thinking. And how often do we wait for someone else to start that conversation? Starting a conversation can take courage. It can be the difference between shaping our environment and being the victim of our environment. When the choice is courage or victimhood – how can we not choose what is life-giving?

Too often in our work lives, we're asked to talk about things that have already been decided for us. Listen to the president in the introduction to this essay – he wants people to talk about the importance of an institution being learning-centered. But do the faculty and staff *believe* that being learning-centered is important? We won't know unless we ask them what is important to them. Conversations need to begin with what's important to us – they are not just a response to what others think is important.

On campuses, there are many times when conversation could invite deeper thinking and understanding before decisions are made. Here are some ways that conversations have been used on campuses:

What's happening to liberal education? What do we want to happen?
How do we address alcohol abuse among our students?
What can we do to sustain the vitality of our campus during a leadership transition?
How can we reconnect with each other – reclaim the meaning of academic community?
Is being learning-centered important? What would it mean for how we do our work?
How is technology changing the lives and the roles of our faculty and staff?
What is the responsibility of our college to the common good?
What do the new accreditation criteria mean in terms of how we assure and advance the quality of our work – and our work lives – together?
What kind of a college do we want to create, to be a part of?

The key is not selecting a topic from this list. It's determining what your campus needs to talk about. In fact, that might well be the first conversation: What do we most want to have a conversation about? What do we hunger for the opportunity to talk about?

How to start a conversation of consequence

How do we create the space for conversations that are compelling, conversations of consequence? First let me say a bit about conversations of consequence – it's the intention that there should be consequences or impact because of the conversation that makes these more than just talking. Intending conversations to have consequences is not the same as defining the outcomes of the conversation. I like to talk about "creating the space for a conversation." Creating the space is respectful of the possibility that the conversation might go in many directions. It's not about engineering a conversation, determining in advance what people will think and/or do at the end of the conversation. The poet, A. R. Ammons,[iii] describes the difference between creating a space for conversation and engineering that conversation:

> Don't establish the
> boundaries
> first,
> the squares, triangles,
> boxes of preconceived
> possibility,
> and then
> pour
> life into them, trimming
> off left-over edges,
> ending potential:

Delaying the establishment of boundaries until the conversation progresses helps to invite innovative or unconventional ideas.

Basics of Good Conversation Design

- Begin with an honest and open question
- Invite people who care about the question
- Start where you want to – follow where it goes
- Ensure that every voice is heard
- Be intentional about creating the future

Increasingly, authors are writing about the essential elements of good conversations. Many of the guidelines they offer are valuable. Still, I think if we are really to make the most of this practice in our every day work lives, keeping to just a few practical guidelines is useful.

- *Begin with an honest and open question*

Topics don't start conversations. Questions start conversations. One of the dangers we highly verbal educators have is making the questions too complicated. And we worry that a simple question will make it appear that *we* are simple or that we don't know very much. So we craft many-layered questions that try to express all we know but only hint at what we don't know.

Important conversations have followed from the simplest questions: What's up? What happened? What's important?

The questions that foster good conversations invite inquiry rather than call for already-known answers. Parker Palmer offers a guide for honest and open questions:

> An *honest* question is one I can ask without possibly being able to say to myself, 'I know the right answer to this question, and I sure hope you give it to me.'. . An *open* question is one that expands rather than restricts your arena of exploration, one that does not push or even nudge you toward a particular way of framing a situation.[iv]

In the formal processes described later in this paper, a more structured set of questions is often used. Still, to invite conversation, these must be honestly open questions.

- *Invite people who care about the question*

If you want a real conversation, then you invite the people who care about the question. Inviting people who have power but who don't care about the question is counter-productive. Their "not caring" becomes an energy drain in the room. A time may come that you frame the question in a way that compels them to pay attention. But if it's not important to them, then they have little to contribute.

- *Start where you want to – follow where it goes*

After you have crafted your opening question, others will arise. But a conversation needs the freedom that Ammons describes. Conversations are sometimes messy. Sometimes it's not exactly clear where they are going. Rather than controlling them – it's more helpful at a messy point to ask, "Where are we going? Where do we want to go?" and renew the energy of the conversation by what is important at that moment to those who are participating.

• *Ensure that every voice is heard*
Conversations are not meetings, but if care is not taken the same kind of dominant voice from meetings can take over a good conversation and turn it into a monologue. There are ways to avoid this. The first is to begin with a question that addresses people's feelings or experiences. Rather than abstract and intellectual questions, a simple one like, "Why is this important to you?" gives everyone a place to begin.

• *Be intentional about creating the future*
In our overly-engineered, bureaucratic world, it's easy to forget that the future is still created by what we do today. The choices we make in our daily lives determine the world we are creating. This is why the simple questions become important – they invite us to think about What's important to us? Where do we want to go?

The Value of Silence

Most writing about conversation is about talking, but silence is important, too. We're not accustomed to silence when we're in groups. It can make us uncomfortable. This often undermines good intentions. Silence can play an important role in conversations of consequence. For example, it is helpful when asking an opening question to invite people to take a few minutes and jot down their reflections. The quality of conversation increases dramatically when people have time to think – when an answer doesn't have to spring forth immediately. The jotting of ideas ensures that people will remember what was important to them while they listen to each other. It gives introverts the time to think about their response before extroverts unintentionally hi-jack the conversation in their desire to think out loud. This can make all the difference in the quality of conversations.

Too often when silence occurs mid-conversation, someone pipes up: "Guess we've beaten that horse dead a couple of times." That mid-conversation point can prove to be another important time for reflection – for people to think about what's been said and what still needs to be said. I've learned to become comfortable with silence, even in groups as large as 800 – 1000. Perhaps it's most important in groups that large. There are so many distractions that silence can be an opportunity for the kind of essential thinking the group needs to move forward.

I also invite a brief silence as a way to support a conversation coming to a productive conclusion. This concluding moment of silence gives everyone a chance to reflect about what they have heard and decide what they want to do. Again, it avoids the situation where the extrovert begins talking before others know what they want to say. After the brief silence, the extrovert still has the opportunity to think out loud, but the introvert has also had the time that he or she prefers to reflect before speaking out.

Good Conversation Practices

Just as there is a growing amount of advice about how to prepare for good conversations, many writers offer advice about how to participate in conversations. Again, I believe less

is more. The fewer guidelines or ground rules you set, the more likely that you will have free, open, generative conversations. If simply listening, suspending certainty, speaking from the "I," and arriving willing to learn were always practiced, conversations of consequence would prevail on our campuses. Encouraging these practices is helpful, but if a "conversation cop" decides to keep everyone in line by citing violations, the spirit of conversation will wither.

These conversation practices seem simple, but they can prove challenging. As educators, we're trained as critics. We encourage our students in critical thinking. It's useful in conversation, however, to become discerning about when criticism is needed and when suspending certainty can be more productive. In "The Smart-Talk Trap[v] in *Harvard Business Review,* Pfeffer and Sutton cite the study, "Brilliant but Cruel." Teresa Amabile, the author of the study, found that writers of negative book reviews were perceived as smarter and more competent than those who wrote positive book reviews. Summarizing her findings, Amabile concluded: "Only pessimism sounds profound. Optimism sounds superficial."

I don't know if anyone has conducted a similar study in the academic arena, but I suspect the findings would be similar. The conclusion Pfeffer and Sutton draw about overly-critical environments gives pause: "If those with the courage to propose something concrete have been devastated in the process, they'll either leave or learn to be smart-talkers themselves. . .A company will end up being filled with put-down artists. It will also end up paralyzed by the fear and silence those people spawn."

Your Role

In starting a conversation, are you a facilitator? a host? or a convener? These three terms can be applied to a variety of situations. I distinguish the three roles in terms of the intensity of preparation and my participation.

I see myself as a facilitator when it is a more public role of providing guidance to a formally-constituted group (small or large) for an extended period of time (several hours to several days). In this role, I work with others to focus the issue, frame the question(s), prepare logistically, and provide written materials as needed. I'm also likely to determine in advance how the conversation might be documented for future use. Perhaps the most important distinguishing characteristic of the facilitating role is that I am not a direct participant in the conversation. My sole purpose is to create the space to support meaningful conversation.

I see myself as a host when there is a modest amount of preparation and my primary responsibilities are to extend the invitation, provide a welcoming environment, and encourage participation. When hosting, I expect to be directly engaged in the conversation.

I think of myself as a convener when the group forms in a more ad hoc fashion and there is a need for someone to assume responsibility for maintaining a purposeful and inclusive conversation. Here too I am directly engaged in the conversation.

Informal and Formal Conversation Processes

Earlier I said that beginning a conversation can be as simple as asking "What's up?" However, there is a continually expanding collection of conversational processes that are useful. Knowing which will best support your purpose can be valuable. Ranging from informal to formal, here are some that I have found most useful.

Informal Conversation Processes

Informal approaches are ones that you may decide spontaneously to incorporate or you may plan for in advance. They take little in terms of logistical or material support. They are simple, yet powerful in helping a group focus on what is important.

FutureScape™ – Developed by T. Irene Sanders, the FutureScape™ is sometimes called a mind map because it presents information visually, often illustrating inter-relationships.[vi] It provides a way to map the larger environment is which decision-making happens. It is a valuable way to quickly collect, organize, and comprehend the breadth of perspectives, insight, and knowledge that a group of people bring to collaborative decision-making. Making it visual assures people that their ideas have been included and provides everyone the opportunity to begin to make connections across often disparate data. Sanders includes a list of provocative questions for using FutureScaping in productive conversations.

ORID – The Institute for Cultural Affairs created ORID as a collaborative learning process to support consensus decision-making. It is useful when a group has shared a common experience and needs to make a decision based on that experience. It follows what is often called the "inference ladder," i.e., the conceptual ladder that our reasoning "climbs" from the time of initial sense stimulation to action based on that stimulus. Its usefulness in a group situation is that it helps the group organize their disparate observations and reactions to develop a collective understanding of their experience. This provides a grounding for their eventual decision-making. Simply put, when I am with such group, I'll ask that we work through four questions in sequence:

- What did you *Observe*?
- What is your *Reaction*?
- What are the *Implications*?
- What do you want to *Do*?

Knowing these four questions in advance provides everyone the opportunity to bring their individual reflections productively to bear on the group's decision.

PQP – Perhaps my favorite of these informal approaches is PQP. This conversational process began its life about 1980 as a method for students to use to provide feedback to each others' writing. Developed by Dr. Bill Lyons and the Iowa Writing Project Team, PQP stands for Praise, Question, Polish. Students were asked to praise what worked in the essay, note questions it raised, and then suggest improvements. A NovaLearning colleague, Dr. Anne Sturdivant was a member of that Iowa team and introduced me to PQP as an editing device. But I have also found it valuable when a group wants to have a conversation about an article, a speech, or a formal report. In these cases, I ask these questions:

- What did you like (or find useful)?
- What questions does it raise?
- What thinking does this stimulate for you? What other ideas do you have?

This approach is helpful in circumstances where people might quickly fall into criticizing what's wrong with an article or a report and miss what is useful. The critics are not silenced because they can offer their criticism at the same time they suggest improvements or better ideas.

Formal, Large-Group (Whole-System) Conversation Processes
For the past fifteen years, we at NovaLearning have been facilitating campus-wide conversations to initiate strategic planning or to explore critical campus issues. We use a variety of large-group processes that can foster dialogue in different ways for different purposes. These formal processes may involve the whole campus or representatives from across the whole campus.

Our experience is that each campus needs to develop a conversational approach that fits its culture and circumstances. No one model fits all. Questions about what is to be accomplished, what time line must be met, who is to be brought together, when can large gatherings be organized, and what kinds of inquiry best fit the circumstances must be addressed for each institution.

On the next page are snap-shot descriptions of campus conversational processes that provide a glimpse of the range of possibilities. Web links to more information are included.

Formal Conversation Processes

Appreciative Inquiry*: Associated with David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on an organization's capacity for positive change through inquiry into its positive change core -- the body of stories, knowledge, and wisdom, often undisguised, that best describes the organization's life-giving forces and the organization when it has been and is at its best. Events can be accelerated processes over 2 - 3 days or be scheduled intermittently over several months. <connection.cwru.edu/ai>

Future Search Conferences: Associated with Marv Weisbord, Philadelphia, PA, In a search conference session, participants work together to build a preferred future for their system and to develop a plan to realize that preferred future. Events are 2-3 days and accommodate 40 - 80 people. <www.futuresearch.net>

Open Space Technology: Associated with Harrison Owen, Potomac, MD, Open Space Technology is a self-organized, self-managed large group process that allows groups from 10 to 1000 address complex and/or conflicted issues in a short period of time, with high levels of innovation and ownership. Events are typically 1 - 3 days, but abbreviated versions of 2 and 4 hour sessions can be used for smaller groups. <www.openspaceworld.org>

Strategic Conversations*: Associated with the Board of Trustees of Maricopa Community Colleges, Phoenix, AZ. The Strategic Conversation methodology was developed by Linda Rosenthal and Donna Schober as a set of techniques to open the lines of communication across the Colleges' stakeholders. Participants engage in brainstorming, problem-solving activities, and employ dialogue as an intentional process. Events are focused on a selected topic and may last from 2 hours to 2 days. <www.maricopa.edu/stratcon>

World Café Conversations*: Associated with Whole Systems Associates, World Café conversations use the café metaphor to offer a practical, yet creative way to grow our capacity for thinking, learning and acting together, even in large groups. In a Café conversation, people move rapidly from ordinary conversations –which keep us stuck in the past, are often divisive, and are generally superficial--toward *conversations that matter* in which collaborative learning and collective change are more likely to occur. <www.theworldcafe.com>

Real Time Strategic Change: Associated with Robert Jacobs and Danmiller-Tyson and Associates, Ann Arbor, MI. Jacobs defines 'real time' as the simultaneous planning and implementation of individual, group, and organization-wide changes and 'strategic change' as an informed, participative process resulting in new ways of doing business that position an entire organization for success, now and for the future. Typically events are scheduled over 3 days with hundreds, even thousands of people participating. http://www.rwjacobs.com

Some of these processes foster convergence and others encourage divergent thinking. Appreciative Inquiry and Future Search both begin by establishing a common ground. Appreciative Inquiry invites participants to find the core factors that give their institution vitality. Future Search builds a shared understanding of the institution's past and of the trends having impact on it. In both processes, after common ground is established,

questions are asked that invite participants to generate a wide variety of possibilities for the future.

Open Space, on the other hand, intentionally invites participants to identify and organize around the diverse ideas, issues, and questions that arise out of the focus topic. These early conversations can be followed by a set of questions that encourage the participants to find what they hold in common as most important or most critical.

Web-Based Resources

The growing interest in finding better ways to come together to shape our workplaces and our society in ways that are life-giving is evident in the number of web-sites about conversation that have emerged. Paraphrasing from their web-sites, here are five that demonstrate a diversity of approaches:

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation brings together people and groups to practice, promote and study inclusive, high quality conversations. Their focus on justice, respect, and democracy throughout society uses dialogue, deliberation and other forms of collaborative, transformational communication. Their purpose is to elevate the quality of thinking and communication in organizations and among citizens to solve humanity's most pressing problems. <thataway.org>

The Center for Formation in the Community College was founded to enable community colleges to create transformative communities of faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, community partners, and students. Through Circles of Trust, the Center fosters communities of the heart by working with colleges committed to supporting individual and institutional formation. <www.league.org/league/projects/formation>

The Heartland Institute creates Essential Conversations^{TM} among individuals and within organizations to help bring about the systemic change needed in these extraordinary times. They host "thoughtleader gatherings" in the belief that business and organizations are the means to a global renaissance. Their programs are anchored in the belief that essential conversations among leaders will transform our organizations and the world. <www.heartlandinstitute.com>
 (Note the .com; another Heartland Institute operates as a .org)

The Collective Wisdom Initiative explores the field of collective consciousness, its study and practice. Their approach is a partnership of both scientific processes and wisdom traditions - a quest for knowledge, understanding and comprehension. Their web-site includes a number of provocative seed papers, reports on research, and challenging questions that Initiative participants bring to this work. <www.collectivewisdominitiative.org>

PeerSpirit is an education and service company that has developed an original group process methodology, the PeerSpirit council. They see council, or circle, as the common root of all cultures. The intent of their council approach is to facilitate a level of conversation that allows groups of people to accomplish goals through an integrated experience of heart and mind. <www.peerspirit.com>

Connecting For A Change

Some great conversations do just happen, and we relish them when they do. But great conversations are not the norm on most campuses. The president I mentioned in my introduction was serious about wanting to encourage a conversation about learning-centered colleges. But without acting purposefully to create the space for a conversation of consequence he was likely to be disappointed.

Several years into my work at NovaLearning, a chancellor asked me how our company was progressing. I had worked with this chancellor and his colleagues, and I decided to test an idea that was emerging for me. "Sometimes I think that we're brought into a campus to create the space for faculty and staff to say what they already know." His "yes" surprised me. Although I had worked in and with higher education for two decades, I was just beginning to realize how rarely time is set aside for important conversations on campus, how seldom new ideas are welcomed, and how infrequent authentic communication is.

When I am on a campus I sometimes refer to the sense of disconnectedness and isolation that is apparent. People lean forward in their chairs as if to listen more closely. This sense of disconnectedness ought not be surprising. If we don't take time to stop and talk about what's important, we increasingly grow isolated from each other. It becomes easy to attribute devious motives and underhanded intentions. If we want to change what's happening on our campuses, we need to begin to talk about what we are experiencing and then to share our aspirations for what could be. These kinds of conversations take courage. But they are the best – perhaps only – way we are going to find the power to create the campuses that foster productive lives for those who work and learn there.

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Feedback on this article is welcome:

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[i] Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another and Other: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope To the Future* (Berrett-Koehler Publ., 2002) p. 42

[ii] Wheatley, p. 140.

[iii] A. R. Ammons, *Tape for the Turn of the Year,* (New York: W.W.Norton Co. 1965).

[iv] Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward the Undivided Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2005) p. 130

[v] Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton, "The Smart-Talk Trap" Harvard Business Review, May-June 1999, p. 138.

[vi] T. Irene Sanders *Strategic Thinking and the New Sciences* (Free Press, 1998) p. 113+

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