Executive Summary

This briefing explores one of the most common leadership roles in academe—that of a department chair. It draws distinctions between the skills and knowledge necessary for successful management of an individual career and those required for farsighted departmental leadership, which calls for a holistic, organizational-level view of a program or a department as part of the larger institution. The briefing describes an in-depth approach to planning, assessment, and improvement in academic departments, using as a model the Malcolm Baldrige Program of the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

This model was adapted to the needs of higher-education institutions, with their particular emphases on scholarship, research, service, outreach, and teaching and instruction. The resulting Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) model, first developed at Rutgers University in 1994 and now in its seventh version (Ruben, 2007a), provides an integrated approach to assessment, planning, and improvement, drawing on the Baldrige model, as well as on standards and language of the institutional accrediting associations.

The following seven categories of the EHE are seen as interrelated parts of a unified system: (1) leadership, (2) strategic planning, (3) beneficiaries and constituencies, (4) programs and services, (5) faculty/staff and workplace, (6) assessment and information use, and (7) outcomes and achievements. The briefing elaborates on the application of the EHE framework by focusing on its categories as well as the EHE process and several ways that it can be used. The impact of the model is shown through results of two studies conducted to assess the practical value of EHE to participants. The briefing then discusses the framework outcomes in terms of specific improvement initiatives adopted by departments that have used EHE as well as lessons learned from more than 50 EHE assessments nationwide. Finally, the briefing highlights the contributions of EHE to fostering successful leadership practices and ultimately advancing the mission of a department, a program, and the larger institution.

Introduction

Presidents and other senior academic administrators often remark that serving as chair of an academic department was the most difficult position they ever held. Chairs must find a way to fill a variety of roles, such as leader, facilitator, steward, spokesperson, mediator, and colleague, simultaneously. Chairs provide leadership for the units in which the most fundamental work
of the academy is carried out. It is at the departmental level that approximately 80 percent of all university decisions are made (Roach, 1976). Additionally,

As administrators responsible for evaluating and rewarding staff, [chairs] promote or inhibit the advancement of individual careers. As advocates for faculty, they serve as important communication links between academic units and the administrative hierarchy of colleges and universities. As colleagues of faculty and staff in the department, they understand the daily frustrations and concerns of individuals employed in higher education institutions. (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993, p. 1)

Department chairs are the critical link among administrators, faculty, staff, programs, and students (Seagren et al., 1993; Waltzer, 1975) and, as such, must recognize and reconcile the distinctive needs and cross pressures from each of these essential constituency groups.

The context in which today’s academic leaders must execute their responsibilities exacerbates the complexity and importance of the role. A chair must be able to create a shared sense of purpose and direction that unites diverse faculty interests, react to external critiques from a growing number of vocal stakeholders, and respond to mounting accountability and performance measurement demands from within and outside the academy. Add to these challenges the need to understand and address institution-specific priorities; intensifying administrator expectations; and the ever-present demands of bright, opinionated, independent colleagues with varying levels of institutional commitment and the chair’s complex role becomes clear. Moreover, these and various other challenges confronting chairs must generally be addressed with modest resources and a very limited array of incentives with which to encourage or recognize colleagues’ participation in these departmental activities (Ruben, 2004).

To address the many challenges associated with academic administration, a rather significant shift is required of the average faculty member—a shift from focusing on his or her work as an individual to emphasizing the functioning of the department. Few of us come to these positions well prepared with the understanding or operational tools necessary for this shift in perspective. This briefing discusses these challenges and their implications and provides a framework designed to help academic leaders conceptualize and enhance the effectiveness of their work and that of the academic units that they lead.

MANAGING A CAREER VERSUS MANAGING A PROGRAM OR DEPARTMENT

Each year, approximately 80,000 faculty members in the United States serve as department chairs; approximately one-fourth of these positions turn over annually (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). Many of these 20,000 new chairs assume their roles having had little or no formalized preparation. The same can be said of program directors and sometimes deans. Gmelch (2000) notes that deans usually come to their positions without leadership training, without prior executive experience, and without a full understanding of the complexities or responsibilities that the role

*Excludes copies made for courses for which students pay enrollment fees.
The culture shock associated with the transition from faculty member to program director, chair, or dean can be enormous. In explaining the often turbulent transition from faculty member to academic leader, Gmelch and colleagues (Gmelch, 2000; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999) identify various contributing factors. They note, for example, that whereas faculty work tends to be solitary and focused, departmental leadership activities are generally public and fragmented. Faculty members have substantial autonomy in their work and in many tasks have considerable latitude relative to deadlines. By contrast, most academic leadership tasks are highly structured and have rigid, externally imposed deadlines. Faculty members prepare manuscripts dealing with issues about which they have a genuine interest, and often some level of passion; administrators prepare memos, budgets, personnel requests, and accountability reports on issues about which it is difficult for most academics to generate much enthusiasm. Faculty members request and campaign for their resource needs, whereas administrators are resource custodians and arbiters, with responsibility for allocation and equity. Excluding teaching, much of the day-to-day work of faculty members can be done anywhere and at any time; a majority of the academic administrator’s work requires a physical presence in one’s office during regular working hours. Finally, although academic leaders are quite fully occupied with their administrative responsibilities, many also continue to fulfill teaching, research, and service/outreach responsibilities associated with their roles as faculty members.

The graduate education of the professoriate generally does little to equip us with the attitudes, knowledge, or skill sets that would attract us to academic administration, ease our transition into leadership roles, or prepare us for the important work associated with these positions.

In the quest to become great physicists, sociologists, classicists, or artists, most of us were appropriately preoccupied with developing ourselves as scholars, learning to conduct our own research and to disseminate and promote it and ourselves within our disciplines. Instrumental to these ends were the acquisition of competencies in analysis and criticism of extant knowledge, assertiveness in advancing and defending our own perspective, and persistence and steadfast dedication in the pursuit of our own line of scholarship, often in the face of critique and questioning from colleagues. Most of us had very little time to focus systematic attention on the practices of leadership or the complexities of higher-education organizations. The result: accomplished scholars largely unprepared for higher-education leadership roles.

With an absence of experience and formal preparation, it is not surprising that most new program directors and chairs instinctively bring a faculty mindset and selected skills to their administrative roles. From that perspective, some assumptions about department leadership seem fairly straightforward:

- Recruit excellent scholar-teachers and an outstanding program or department will result.
- Understand and support the individual needs of your faculty colleagues and they—and the unit—will thrive.
- Be a good colleague, listen, and respond in a facilitative way to your colleagues’ problems as they arise and you will be respected and valued as a leader.
- Department planning is usually wasteful.
- Business concepts and language belong in businesses.

After some time in their roles as academic administrators, most leaders come reluctantly to the realization that these principles generally do not yield the hoped for outcomes. Their inadequacy lies in the fact that they reflect a conceptualization of academic departments as collections of individuals, rather than as organizations. Shifting one’s level of analysis from that of the individual to that of the group, and seeing the group as part of an institution that operates in a complex environment with diverse and often competing interests and expectations, is the most fundamental conceptual change required for successful academic leadership. Making this shift means rethinking a number of basic assumptions.

1. **Excellent faculty members create excellent departments.** If we can attract and retain outstanding faculty members, could we not expect departmental excellence and effectiveness to follow naturally? Experience suggests that simply assembling a group of excellent scholar-teachers provides little assurance that the department and programs that they create together will result in and sustain an equally distinguished level of excellence or effectiveness. In fact, it is not uncommon to find situations in which a group of individually distinguished faculty members creates programs that seem to be less than the sum of the parts. Individual scholarly distinction is not necessarily associated with distinctive competencies in the areas of collaboration or teamwork,
characteristics that may well be as important as scholarship in creating and sustaining departmental excellence.

Moreover, it is generally the case that the more successful a unit is in recruiting and hiring outstanding faculty members, the greater the resulting challenges for the department leadership. Distinguished faculty members seldom share the same perspectives, needs, and styles, and these differences typically intensify, rather than diminish, the challenges that leaders face in resource allocation and in efforts to create an effective and collaborative climate.

2. Departmental needs are essentially the sum of the needs of individual faculty members. If we inventory and aggregate the needs and priorities of individual faculty members, would we not also be identifying the most pressing needs and priorities of the department? In practice, each faculty member is likely to have any number of needs and concerns that he or she can articulate relative to desired level of support. Unfortunately, the collected priorities of the faculty do not necessarily combine to create an appropriate agenda for advancing the interests of a department as a whole. To offer a simple example, obvious oversights can occur if the core curriculum of an undergraduate program is defined solely on the teaching interests and preferences of a given year’s faculty cohort. Leaving aside larger questions of intellectual coherence and alignment with student and institutional needs, a department that operates on this assumption will need to revise the core curriculum with each new faculty hire or departure.

3. Colleagues’ problems are best viewed as unique circumstances and dealt with in a personalized manner. Won’t the direct and candid advice that I have always given to my colleagues be just as appropriate now that I am department chair? Over the course of the average week, month, or semester, faculty problems arise and are brought to the chair for resolution. One new faculty member would like intensified responsibilities during her first semester in order to better acclimate to the department, university, and community; another colleague requests additional travel money; and still another would like a two-day teaching schedule to accommodate research or special child-care needs. Taken individually, each case has its merits, and it is tempting to assist each colleague in solving his or her particular problem in the manner that will be most pleasing to that person. However, experiences in academic administration teach that every way of solving a problem has consequences beyond the immediate circumstance. Each decision creates its own history and contributes to the evolving culture of the department. As individualized decisions become public—as they inevitably do over time—they represent a precedent with which the current, or future, leader must contend. Most academic leaders realize that day-to-day decision making cannot be guided solely by the needs and desires of one’s colleagues. As with a departmental needs assessment, a personalized approach to problem solving is fraught with risks and adverse long-term consequences for the leader, his or her colleagues, and the department.

4. Individual faculty planning eliminates the necessity for departmental planning. If individual faculty members have sound plans for their own academic work, is not spending time on departmental planning wasteful and duplicative? As critical and important as faculty plans are for managing the directions of individual trajectories, collectively, they do not constitute an appropriate plan for a department. For example, if one were to inventory faculty teaching or sabbatical scheduling preferences and endeavor to use them as the primary guide for scheduling courses, the result from the perspective of students and the department would be disastrous. In such an instance, what is needed is a systematic approach to scheduling, one that clarifies relevant criteria and provides an equitable, consistent, transparent, and communicable approach to coordinating faculty requests.

5. Management is an appropriate concept for business, but it has no place in academics. Had we wanted to manage—or be managed—we would have chosen a different career. The language of business and management is off-putting for most academics. The term management, and others such as strategic planning, marketing, productivity, and organizational effectiveness—and the concepts associated with them—are anathema within the academic community. Colleges and universities often go to great lengths to avoid these terms in describing the positions associated with academic leadership. But the unvarnished truth is that these concepts, by whatever name, are essential functions within any effective organization—whether that organization provides products or services, whether it is in the private or public sector, and whether its work centers on business, government, health, or education. The more aca...
AODING AN ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL VIEW

Faculty members are not strangers to assessment, planning, improvement, and management activities. These activities are essential to the decision making and management essential to guiding their own career trajectories. However, thinking in terms of organizational-level assessment, decision making, planning, management, and improvement is generally less familiar. Although a department can be seen simply as an entity composed of individuals with their own needs and plans, the pursuit of collective excellence and a culture that supports these ends requires a higher level of analysis—one that views individuals as an organization that is part of a larger institution. At a departmental level of analysis, these are the challenges facing leaders:

- Developing and operating based on a model and principles of departmental excellence
- Facilitating the creation of a shared set of organizational aspirations within the department
- Working with colleagues to identify departmental strengths and improvement needs
- Creating collective investment in a plan to address key improvement priorities
- Promoting a shared commitment to undertake and follow through on the actions necessary to move the plan from rhetoric to reality

THE BALDRIGE APPROACH

Of the various integrated frameworks available to leaders to guide organizational assessment, decision making, planning, and improvement—management actions to address the aforementioned challenges—none has been more influential than the Malcolm Baldrige model (Baldrige, 2006b). In 1987, the U.S. Congress established the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program. Named after Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, who served from 1981 until 1987, the program promotes U.S. business effectiveness for the advancement of the national economy by providing a systems approach for organizational assessment and improvement. The Baldrige program, which is administered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), has also been important in national and international efforts to identify and encourage the application of core principles of organizational excellence. Essentially, the goals of the program are as follows:

- Identify the essential components of organizational excellence.
- Recognize organizations that demonstrate these characteristics.
- Promote information sharing by exemplary organizations.
- Encourage the adoption of effective organizational principles and practices.

These goals are as applicable to higher-education institutions as they are to other types of organizations. Indeed, what has made the Baldrige framework influential is its generic applicability to organizations of all kinds. As in other organizations, many academic institutions face the challenges of encouraging individual accomplishment and creativity on the one hand, yet also fostering a meaningful level of coordination, collaboration, and knowledge sharing on the other. Like others, we wrestle with the challenges of limited resources and struggle with issues of prioritization. We also struggle to maintain our traditional core values and practices in the face of external changes that cannot be ignored. Additionally, academic units grapple with issues associated with assessing productivity and performance and with "telling our story" in an effective way to key stakeholders. Meaningfully addressing these and the variety of other organizational challenges that confront our departments requires

- A clear sense of purpose
- A vision of the organization that we aspire to become
- A realistic sense of where we stand currently
- Plans that are collectively created and owned to mobilize our progress
- Leadership principles and practices that engage members of the unit in creating the future

The Baldrige framework provides a set of criteria that department chairs can use for conceptualizing organizational excellence and effectiveness and for assessing where the department stands. It provides a concrete process to guide the organization in pursuit of these aspirations.

Baldrige Categories

The Baldrige model of organizational excellence includes seven dimensions, or categories, as they are referred to in the language of the program (Baldrige, 2006a). Although the language and definitions used to describe the overall framework, categories, criteria, and core values have changed over the years, and vary somewhat from sector to sector, the seven basic themes are constant.
In general terms, the framework suggests that outstanding organizations are characterized by the following:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 thinking of these groups.

4. The development and use of indicators of organizational performance that capture the organization’s mission, vision, values, and goals and that provide data-based comparisons with peer and leading organizations; widely sharing this and other information within the organization to focus and motivate improvement.

5. A workplace culture that encourages, recognizes, and rewards excellence, employee satisfaction, engagement, professional development, commitment, and pride and that synchronizes individual and organizational goals.

6. A focus on mission-critical and support programs and services and associated work processes, to ensure effectiveness, efficiency, appropriate standardization and documentation, and regular evaluation and improvement—with the needs and expectations of beneficiaries and stakeholders in mind.

7. Documented, sustained positive outcomes relative to organizational mission, vision, goals, the perspectives of groups served, and employees, considered in light of comparisons with the accomplishments of peers, competitors, and leaders (Ruben, 2004).

**A Brief History: Baldrige in Higher Education**

The Baldrige model has been a popular framework for organizational self-assessment within the United States. The NIST estimates that thousands of organizations have used the criteria. The framework has been adopted, adapted, and used for assessment in any number of settings in business, and its validity, value, and usefulness have been widely examined (e.g., Baldrige National Quality Award, 2000; Belohlav, Cook, & Heiser, 2004; Flynn & Saladin, 2001; Wilson & Collier, 2000).

Since 1988, 68 Baldrige Awards have been presented to 64 different organizations in recognition of their distinguished performance (Baldrige, 2006a). Many international, state, local, and corporate award programs have been developed over the years based on the Baldrige model. In 1999, 43 states had programs using Baldrige criteria (Vokurka, Stading, & Brazeal, 2000), and more than 25 countries had used the Baldrige criteria as the basis for their own national award (Przynský & Tai, 2002). Subsequently, this number has increased to more than 60 national awards in other countries (Vokurka et al., 2000).

In 1999, the National Baldrige program advanced versions of the framework for health care and education, and in 2006, it also instituted a nonprofit program (Baldrige, 2006a). The education criteria (Baldrige, 2006a) were intended to be broadly applicable to school and educational settings—public, private, or corporate—at all levels. Since its introduction, a total of 99 applications have been submitted from higher-education departments or institutions to the national program (Baldrige, 2006a). Three applicants have been selected as winners of the award: the University of Wisconsin-Stout in 2001; the University of Northern Colorado, School of Business in 2004; and Richland College, Dallas, Texas, in 2005. There have been a number of college and university applications to state programs that parallel the Baldrige program, and several winners, including the University of Missouri-Rolla in 1995 and Iowa State University in 2004.

Beyond higher-education institutions’ direct participation in the national and state awards programs, the influence of the framework in higher education has been most apparent in the evolution of accreditation standards of professional and technical education and, more recently, in regional accreditation. In business, engineering, health care, and education, the standards for accreditation of college and university programs have come to mirror the Baldrige framework in many respects. The regional accrediting associations, perhaps most notably the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, emphasize issues central to the Baldrige framework.¹

¹ The Baldrige and accreditation frameworks also share the position that clarity of purpose and aspirations, ongoing review, planning, and continuous improvement are fundamental to institutional effectiveness and should be thoroughly integrated into the fab-
ric of every institution aspiring to excellence (Baldrige, 2006b; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002; North Central Association of Colleges and Universities, 2004).

THE EHE FRAMEWORK
To contextualize further the Baldrige framework for higher-education programs, departments, and institutions, the EHE model was developed at Rutgers University. The 2007 version (Ruben, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) is the seventh revision of the framework. EHE was designed specifically for higher-education institutions, where the mission typically includes an emphasis on scholarship/research and public service/outreach, as well as teaching/instruction. Additionally, the EHE model was designed to be applicable for use in assessment and planning activities by an entire college or university or by individual units of all kinds—business, student affairs and service, and academic.

The EHE framework focuses on elements that are useful guides for leaders in conceptualizing, establishing, managing, and sustaining an outstanding program, department, or institution. The framework is built around the following series of core concepts and values:

1. A clear sense of mission and vision broadly shared, understood, and valued.

   For academic departments, this implies that members of the faculty and staff share a sense of the department’s purpose and its aspirations for the future, and that this knowledge motivates and guides individual efforts toward these ends.

2. Strategic planning, plans, priorities, and goals to translate purposes and aspirations into specific programs, services, and activities and to ensure that operations and resources are effectively and efficiently used in support of these directions. Beyond establishing a clear and shared sense of purpose and future direction, there is the need to establish and follow through on more specific goals and plans to ensure that day-to-day decisions of faculty and staff and the allocation of resources encourage progress in the desired directions.

3. Effective leadership and governance processes at all levels, including mechanisms for feedback and review. The chair’s role is both complex and essential to the life of the department, for all the reasons discussed. It is unlikely that any one individual could excel naturally in all dimensions required for the position; the input and guidance of colleagues can be helpful. Colleagues can provide the chair with a useful source of ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of leadership and leadership practices in the department.

4. High-quality programs and services consistent with the established mission and aspirations, carefully designed, regularly evaluated, and continuously improved. The academy’s traditions and expertise in research and critical evaluation can be put to good use in systematic review of the department’s programs and services to ensure that the articulated high standards operate in practice.

5. Information about the needs, expectations, and experiences of key stakeholder groups gathered and used as input to program and service development, review, and improvement and to guide day-to-day decision making. An important element in the pursuit of departmental excellence is knowledge of the perspectives of students, the discipline, the institution, and various other stakeholders. The hope is that departments have systematic methods for gathering data so that information and analysis—rather than anecdote and impression—can ensure that a department’s instructional, scholarly, and outreach efforts are well received and serve to enhance the reputation of the unit.

6. Qualified and dedicated faculty and staff and a satisfying work environment, with ongoing review and improvement as priorities. It is, of course, quite obvious that recruiting and retaining outstanding colleagues is a key to departmental excellence. Also important is creating and maintaining a collegial and collaborative culture and a climate that validates individuals and their work. Although a positive departmental culture and climate alone will not ensure excellence in the work of the unit, their absence is a sure cause of dissatisfaction and discontent—sometimes so significant that it undermines the quality of the department’s work and provides the impetus for faculty to begin exploring other employment options.

7. Comparisons with peers, competitors, and leaders for review and improvement. Peer review is well accepted as it relates to research; such comparisons can be equally useful for evaluating the quality of a variety of departmental practices. Whether the goal is modifying curricula, assessing departmental productivity, marketing graduate programs, recruiting international students, or orienting new faculty, comparisons can be extremely useful. Depending on the issues at hand, useful comparisons can be made with other departments within an institution, with like disciplinary departments at other institutions, or with organizations outside of higher education.

While the EHE framework was created to be especially useful for academic
units, it is built on the assumption that
whether the focus is an academic, a stu-
dent life, an administrative, or a service
department, or an entire institution, the
generic concepts of organizational ef-
ficacy are equally appropriate as
criteria for day-to-day leadership and
review, and equally useful as guides for
leaders when it comes to guiding plan-
novation and improvement efforts.

The latest version of EHE (Ruben,
2007a, 2007b, 2007c) provides an in-
tegrated approach to assessment, plan-
novation, and improvement, drawing on
the framework of the Malcolm
Baldridge Program of the NIST, as well
as on standards and language of the in-
stitutional accrediting associations
identified earlier.

Together, the Baldridge criteria and
those developed by the regional ac-
creditation organizations offer one of
the best available standards of ex-
cellence for higher education. Each
approach stresses the importance of
institutional leadership, efficacy assess-
ment, continuous improvement, strategic planning, performance, and outcomes measurement. The combination of these frameworks
results in an approach that can be
useful in administrative, service, and
student life organizations, as well as in
academic departments and pro-
grams, or entire institutions. Al-
though our focus here is on academic
units, the flexibility and cross-cutting
nature of EHE is an important capa-
bility because academic, administra-
tive, and student service functions are
interdependent components of a col-
lege or university system. These
components interact in a variety of
subtle and not so subtle ways, and
collectively they provide the basis for
the perceptions—and reality—of a
college or university. Although dis-
tinctions among the various func-
tional units within higher-education
institutions are important to those of
us who work within these institu-
tions, they are much less significant
to external groups. For our con-
stituencies, what matters most is the
quality that they and others perceive
in the institution, and their overall
learning and living experience. Hav-
ing a common framework for assess-
ment, planning, and improvement can
be of great value in advancing the ex-
cellence of individual units, as well as
in fostering more integrated and effec-
tive communication and collabora-
tion across units.

The EHE Categories
The EHE framework consists of seven
categories or themes that are viewed as
relevant to the efficacy of any edu-
cational enterprise—program, depart-
ment, school, college, or university.
The categories are seen as components
of an interrelated system, as depicted in
figure 1, and described next:

• Category 1—Leadership considers
leadership approaches and govern-
nance systems used to guide the
program, department, or institu-
tion; how leaders and leadership
practices encourage excellence, ef-
ficacy, and progress toward
achieving the program’s or depart-
ment’s aspirations; how leaders fo-
cus attention on the needs of
individuals, groups, and/or organi-
zations that benefit from the pro-
grams and services of the unit; and
how leadership practices are re-
viewed and improved.

• Category 2—Strategic Planning
considers how the mission, vi-
sion, and values of the program,
department, or institution are de-
veloped, periodically refined, and
communicated; how they are
translated into goals and plans;
and how faculty and staff engage
in those activities. Also consid-
ered are the ways in which goals

Figure 1. The Excellence in Higher Education Framework
and Improvement in Colleges and Universities (Washington, DC: National Association of College and
University Business Officers, 2007).
and plans are translated into action and coordinated.

- **Category 3—Beneficiaries and Constituencies** focuses on the groups that benefit from the programs and services offered by a program, a department, or an institution, as well as on those constituency groups that have influence over the organization. The category considers how the organization learns about the needs, perceptions, and priorities of those groups and how that information is used to enhance the organization’s reputation and working relationships with those groups.

- **Category 4—Programs and Services** focuses on the programs and services offered by a unit, and how high standards of quality are applied to new initiatives and in the regular review of ongoing programs and services to ensure that they are consistent with the mission and aspirations of the program, department, or institution and operating effectively. The most important operational and support services are also reviewed.

- **Category 5—Faculty/Staff and Workplace** considers how the program, department, or institution recruits and retains faculty and staff, encourages excellence and engagement, creates and maintains a positive workplace culture and climate, and promotes and facilitates personal and professional development.

- **Category 6—Assessment and Information Use** focuses on how the program, department, or institution assesses its efforts to fulfill its mission and aspirations and on the effectiveness and efficiency of its programs and services. Also considered is how assessment information is used to guide day-to-day decision making and planning, and in efforts to improve programs and services.

- **Category 7—Outcomes and Achievements** focuses on information and evidence to document or demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the program, department, or institution in each of the preceding six categories.

### Using the EHE Framework

**A Conceptual Framework**

Academic departments can utilize EHE in various ways. Perhaps most basically, an academic leader can use it as a guide for conceptualizing organizational excellence, and for identifying specific issues that are particularly important for departmental effectiveness. The guide (Ruben, 2007a) provides a very useful set of planning questions, questions that have been broadly applied in many organizations across sectors rather than based solely on the culture or practices at one institution.

Because EHE is based on empirically and theoretically grounded—and enduring—dimensions of organizational effectiveness, the framework has a transferability and portability that transcends particular administrations, organizations, and time frames. Moreover, to the extent that the model is widely understood and used within the department, future program and department leaders can carry the model forward conceptually and operationally, rather inventing their own approaches.

### A Guide to Organizational Assessment, Planning, and Improvement

Another common use of the Baldrige/EHE framework is as the basis for actively engaging the faculty of the department in assessment, planning, and improvement activities. The EHE guide (Ruben, 2007a), along with a companion workbook and scoring guide (Ruben, 2007c) and a facilitator’s guide (Ruben, 2007b), is designed to support these applications. In this context, EHE can be used as the basis for a workshop or retreat. EHE workshops consist of a step-by-step assessment process, moving through the seven categories one at a time. For each category, the process includes these activities (Ruben, 2007c):

- Discussing the basic themes and standards for the category
- Brainstorming a list of strengths and areas for improvement for the unit with respect to the category
- Reviewing effective approaches and practices in the category used by leading organizations
- Rating the unit in the category on a scale of 0 to 100 percent to capture perceptions of the extent to which the program, department, or institution is fulfilling the standards of the category

Rating is a traditional component of the Baldrige approach. Although not essential to the self-assessment process, this facet lends focus to the review and provides a mechanism for faculty members (and staff who may participate) to compare more precisely their perceptions with those of colleagues. Typically, the rating for each category is conducted anonymously, followed by display of the results and discussion of the distribution and its implications. The mean rating for the group for the category under review is then calculated and entered on a bar chart, which is also displayed and discussed. Figure 2 provides an example of how ratings might look for a hypothetical department reviewed in...
a workshop. As depicted, a rating of 35 percent in category 1, Leadership, would indicate that, on average, participants in the workshop consider that the department satisfies "some" of the criteria associated with effective leadership in the Baldrige/EHE framework. A list of strengths and areas for improvement generated through the discussion would provide the documentation and rationale for their rating. Thus, at the end of the process, the department not only has information on how its members perceive the effectiveness of the unit, but also a list of initiatives that could enhance its strengths and effectiveness.

Once these steps have been taken for all seven categories, the list of areas of strength and those in need of improvement is reviewed and discussed further. Next, attention shifts to the areas identified as needing improvement, and voting is employed to rank order the potential improvements in terms of importance, potential impact, and feasibility given the department’s mission, aspiration, and broad organizational goals. Generally, the four to six areas perceived to be the highest priorities for attention are identified. Finally, participants in break-out groups develop preliminary plans for addressing each of the priority areas. Each preliminary plan includes a summary describing exactly what needs to be done, an outline of key steps, a list of the individuals or roles that should be involved in the project, designation of a proposed team leader, a project timeline, an estimate of resources, and a list of desired outcomes (Ruben, 2007a, 2007c).

The formal workshop ends at this point, and the leadership of the unit becomes responsible for moving forward on the improvement initiatives, periodically reporting progress back to colleagues. As the selected priority projects are completed, the group can return to the list of other areas for improvement to select the next round of targeted improvements. It is recommended that the process, illustrated in Figure 3, be undertaken on an annual or biannual basis. Thus the EHE process becomes a core component in the life of the department.

At Rutgers and a number of other higher-education institutions, the EHE model has been used as an organizational self-assessment program within academic, student life, administrative, and service departments.

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF THE EHE PROGRAM

With any organizational assessment, planning, and improvement model, the question arises: Does the initiative have the desired value and impact? Particularly within a higher-education environment, presumptions about and enthusiasm for a program’s effectiveness are not persuasive arguments on their own. To address these concerns, the Center for Organizational Development and Leadership (www.odl.rutgers.edu/) at Rutgers University has undertaken a program of research to study the value of the Baldrige program and, more specifically, the impact of the EHE approach.

I briefly summarize two studies here (Ruben, Russ, Connaughton, & Smulowitz, 2007). The first study consisted of a Web-based survey of participants’ perceptions of selected outcomes of the EHE assessment process several months after completion of the workshops. The participating departments were broadly representative of the university. There were three business/service/administrative departments and three units whose missions are primarily

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Figure 2. Example of Ratings for a Department
academic. Separate self-assessment workshops were conducted for each department during the 2003–04 academic year (Ruben, 2005).

The goal of the study was to evaluate the extent of learning that resulted from participation in the Baldrige/EHE assessment process. The study focused specifically on participants’ perceptions of the value and knowledge derived from workshop participation. The 113 individuals who participated in the EHE programs were contacted by e-mail at the end of the academic year and invited to participate in the study. In all, 44 workshop participants (39 percent) responded to the survey.

The second study focused on organizational change. It consisted of in-person interviews with department leaders of each of the six departments that had participated in the EHE program, approximately one year after the workshops, to determine whether planned improvements from the program were carried to fruition.

Findings from the first study indicate that the EHE organizational self-assessment process does result in the acquisition of a knowledge and theory base and leads to the identification of organizational strengths and improvement needs. Participants reported that as a result of the workshop they had increased knowledge and awareness of the Baldrige/EHE criteria, as well as a better understanding of the importance of each of these dimensions/categories for organizational effectiveness. The findings also indicate that the EHE self-assessment workshop and process served the intended goal of assessment, in that it helped participants gain a sense of where their unit stood—its strengths and areas in need of improvement—in relation to Baldrige/EHE standards. Moreover, participants indicated that participation in the program encouraged the translation of theoretical knowledge into practical improvement strategies and actions.

The second study addressed the question: “Did departments make substantial progress on priorities they established during the Baldrige/EHE program?” Overall, the results suggest that the answer is yes. Of the priorities established during the Baldrige/EHE self-assessment process, 65 percent were executed by the departments, producing “some/considerable progress.” Progress ratings reported by leaders were substantiated by “improvement steps” that were found to be reflective of a priority’s perceived importance.

One of the most interesting and fundamental questions raised by these studies deals with the relationship between learning resulting from the Baldrige/EHE assessment and subsequent progress on organizational change priorities: “Is there a relationship between knowledge gained from the self-assessment process and subsequent progress made on departments’ EHE priorities?” Thus, the second research project involved a follow-up with the same departments studied previously. Findings from this study would seem, intuitively, to suggest that such a relationship does exist, but the design of the studies did not provide the basis for more than speculation on this point. That said, overall, responses from the individual departments reported relative to organizational change indicated that leaders perceive that such a relationship exists. Moreover, comparisons of findings regarding perceptions of knowledge acquisition in the first study and documented improvements implemented by the organization in areas identified as priorities in the second study are also interesting. Figure 4 compares the knowledge acquisition and organizational change outcomes for departments that have made progress.
Specifically, the columns indicate (1) the percentage of department members who evaluated the knowledge dimensions of EHE as being “valuable” or “very valuable” to their enhanced understanding, and (2) the percentage of priorities that the leaders of those departments rated as having “some” or “considerable progress.” As illustrated, the knowledge outcomes (70 percent) corresponded very closely to the progress on organizational change (67 percent).

To the extent that awareness and knowledge are necessary precursors to action, planning, and change, these results are significant. They suggest that the Baldrige/EHE self-assessment process provides a solid foundation of knowledge and helps to define a standard of excellence that contributes an important dimension to learning and change.

**IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES**

The nature of the specific improvement priorities that are established through the EHE assessment process vary from department to department. What follows are examples of priorities that have emerged across the seven categories. In some cases, the projects grew out of improvement needs in a single category; in other cases, the initiatives addressed gaps that spanned more than one category.

- **Marketing and communication:** Formulating new approaches to communicating the departmental accomplishments within the university, state, region, and nationally. (Categories 3 and 7)
- **Feedback systems:** Implementing more systematic and comprehensive methods for gathering feedback from students, alumni, and employers. (Categories 3 and 6)
- **Leadership review:** Implementing procedures for soliciting colleague/stakeholder feedback on leadership effectiveness. (Category 1)
- **Quality of academic life:** Implementing an organizational climate and faculty/staff satisfaction survey. (Category 5)
- **Research support services:** Developing improved grants application submissions and research support processes. (Category 4)
- **Organizational structure:** Consolidation of programs, departments, and centers into fewer, more interdisciplinary programs; in another instance, sharpening of mission and focus of existing departments and the creation of new cross-cutting programs. (Categories 4 and 2)
- **Shared services:** Formulating approaches to sharing support staff across departments during peak work periods to improve faculty and student services. (Category 5)

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Based on the results from approximately 50 EHE assessments of academic and administrative departments, several themes that department chairs should consider emerged:

1. **Leadership.** Departments that rated highest had leaders who were active on campus, within the community,
and nationally within their fields. Colleagues perceived these leaders to be effective in creating a shared sense of purpose and possibility within their units. The leaders also encouraged feedback on their own performance, and members of the department evaluated leaders’ communication with colleagues as excellent. Conversely, in departments rating lower, communication with colleagues was judged to be poor; leaders were perceived as ineffective in helping to create focus, clarity, and a shared view of the department’s mission, vision, and goals; and feedback on leadership style and possible improvements was not encouraged and in some cases was actively discouraged.

2. Strategic Planning. Departments that rated highest in this category had a formalized planning process, and there was a shared understanding of—and commitment to—the plan, including the department’s mission, aspirations, plans, and goals. For departments rated as less effective in this area, improvements in the planning process were needed, including more useful and timely input from faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. In these departments, there was lack of attention to long-term planning and insufficient communication and consensus building relative to plans and goals.

3. Beneficiaries and Constituencies. Higher-rated departments used surveys, focus groups, and other systematic information-gathering methods to gain an understanding of the perspectives of students, alumni, and other beneficiary and constituency groups. The data were compared with those from peer and other departments to provide an interpretive context. Within these departments, information on needs, expectations, and satisfaction levels was used as input to planning. Lower-rated departments had sources of information available on these areas, but there was no systematic analysis or use of these sources.

4. Programs and Services. In highly rated departments, mission-critical programs and services were regularly reviewed to ensure that high standards were maintained. Critical operational and support processes—those in place to support teaching, research, and service efforts—were well documented, standardized, and regularly reviewed and refined to increase effectiveness and efficiency. Technology was utilized to support innovation and streamlining of departmental tasks. Less highly rated departments devoted little attention to identifying or systematically examining mission-critical programs and services or support processes. Work processes were defined by default, rather than by definition, and were often “personality driven,” rather than “principle driven.” In personality-driven environments, individuals created and owned work processes. Others reported that these processes work well if one knows and gets along well with these “process owners,” and if they are available when needed. In principle-driven environments, processes were well documented, standardized, and “owned” by the unit, rather than by any particular individual.

5. Faculty/Staff and Workplace. High-rated departments had programs in place to recognize outstanding faculty and staff contributions and supported professional development for faculty and staff. They also implemented systematic approaches, including surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews, to monitor the quality of the department’s climate and faculty and staff satisfaction. They used the results of assessments in planning and improvement. In lower-rated departments, there were few professional development opportunities to support individual, departmental, and institutional advancement for faculty, and especially for staff. In addition, there were few internal mechanisms to recognize and reward accomplishments and contributions and no formal approaches to monitoring satisfaction or departmental climate.

6. Assessment and Information Use. Among higher-rated departments, criteria for assessing departmental excellence had been established, and the data were regularly gathered and used to determine/document the effectiveness of the unit in fulfilling its mission, achieving its aspirations, and addressing its broad organizational goals. Peer departments were also identified, and information was gathered and used for purposes of assessment, planning, and improvement. In lower-rated departments, there was a general perception that the unit was excellent, but the criteria by which this could be documented were unarticulated, and few measures were defined. These departments had a substantial amount of data that could be used to assess the quality of the department, but that information was not organized, not well communicated, and not used for planning.

7. Outcomes and Achievements. High-rated departments had evidence of departmental excellence and effectiveness relative to their mission, aspirations, and goals, and in rela-
tion to their peers. This information was used to guide day-to-day decision making and management practices within the department, as well as planning and improvement activities. Attention was also devoted to ensuring that outcomes and achievement information was effectively communicated to key internal and external beneficiaries and constituencies. Conversely, lower-rated departments were largely unable to offer evidence of their effectiveness in achieving their mission, aspirations, and goals. They also had little or no peer comparison information. Typically, there was a perception within these units that the department was undervalued within the institution.

CONCLUSION

For academic administrators striving to bring effective leadership to their programs, departments, or institutions, a perspective on departmental excellence is extremely valuable, as is having a practical tool for engaging colleagues in establishing the future directions of the unit. The Baldrige/EHE model addresses these needs, offering many other contributions to enhance departmental excellence, as shown in table 1.

One of the attributes of the Baldrige/EHE framework is that it represents a nationally based standard of organizational excellence. Its validity, relevance, and utility are well established across varying organizational contexts. Used for self-assessment in a retreat or workshop mode, it provides a means for broadly engaging faculty and staff in the review process, in a manner that results in a collective understanding of strengths and priorities for improvement. The process encourages the sharing of relevant information about the department and fosters collaborative problem solving.

In a time when increasing emphasis is being placed on documenting the quality and effectiveness of all facets of the work of the academic department, the EHE program provides a framework that guides assessment of the effectiveness of the department as an organization, and also of its mission-critical academic programs and services. The approach highlights the importance of self-assessment of department and program accomplishments over time; of comparisons of one’s own accomplishments with those of peers and leaders; and of clarification of areas where such comparisons can be most useful. Further, the EHE rating process—and the assessment methods it encourages—helps a department establish a baseline against which to evaluate progress over time.

Although not always explicit goals, heightened teamwork, a sense of a shared agenda, and leadership development are also significant benefits to the department. Moreover, the EHE framework fits very well with professional and regional accrediting criteria, and participation in the process helps to prepare academic departments and their faculty members for the demands and opportunities that the accreditation process presents.

The combination of the accreditation and Baldrige frameworks provided by EHE results in an approach that can be useful as a guide to assessment, planning, and improvement in administrative, service, and student life organizations, as well as in academic departments. Most fundamentally, EHE fosters an organizational-level mindset and encourages leadership thought and practice aimed at systematically advancing the shared needs, purposes, and aspirations of the unit.

NOTES

1. See the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (www.msche.org), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (www.neasc.org/), the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org), the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (www.nwccu.org), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (www.sacscoc.org), and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (NCA) (www.wascweb.org). With a foundation of Baldrige concepts, the NCA has created an alternative to the accreditation model called the Academic Quality Improvement Program, in which about 200 institutions are presently participating (Academic Quality Improvement Program, 2006; Spangehl, 2004).

2. The first version of this model was called Tradition of Excellence and was published in 1994 (Ruben, 1994). Revised and updated versions

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Potential Contributions of the Baldrige/EHE Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Offers accepted standards of organizational effectiveness</td>
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<td>• Engages all department members in assessment, planning, and improvement</td>
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<td>• Creates clarity and a shared understanding of improvement needs and priorities</td>
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<td>• Promotes knowledge sharing and collaborative problem solving</td>
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<td>• Encourages units to clarify excellence measures, as well as to implement tracking and documentation of quality and effectiveness</td>
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<td>• Promotes peer and over-time comparisons</td>
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<td>• Creates baseline measures</td>
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<td>• Develops future leaders</td>
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<td>• Complements new and emerging accreditation models</td>
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were published under the current name, Excellence in Higher Education, in 2005, and 2007 (Ruben, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

3. Higher-education departments and institutions completing the Baldrige/ EHE program include 12 Rutgers University business/service/administrative departments; 21 Rutgers University academic units; University of California, Berkeley; University of Pennsylvania, Madison; Penn State University; University of San Diego; California State University, Fullerton; Miami University; University of Toledo, Raritan Valley Community College; Howard University; University at Buffalo; University of Illinois; Howard University, Excelsior College; Marygrove College; Azusa Pacific University; University at Binghamton; University of Vermont; University of Massachusetts; MIT; University of Cincinnati; University of Texas, Austin; Seton Hall University; and Texas A&M University.

REFERENCES

Hecht, I. W. D. (2006). Becoming a department chair: To be or not to be. Effective Practices for Academic Leaders, 13(3).

ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


This site provides a downloadable version of the Baldrige national education award criteria, designed for use by
educational institutions at all levels K–postgraduate, as well as additional background information on the awards program.


This official site of the national quality program offers access to background materials, award criteria for various sectors including education, links to state awards programs, and lists and sites of past winners.


This site provides information on an alternative accreditation program reflective of the Baldrige criteria developed and offered by the North Central regional accrediting association. Although the Baldrige criteria are increasingly reflected in the approaches of all of the regional accrediting associations, the North Central Association has institutionalized the continuous improvement model as an alternative to the traditional accreditation approach.


The EHE model, discussed extensively in this article, is an assessment model that combines the Baldrige criteria with the language and standards of accreditation in a way that is tailored specifically for higher-education institutions. The three publications provide a guidebook, a facilitator’s guide, and a workbook, respectively.


This classic and useful overview of the role of department chair captures the array of issues and challenges faced by individuals serving in this position.


This article provides a discussion of the value of integrating assessment, continuous improvement, and accreditation concepts and approaches.

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