Closing the Loop

Closing the loop is the key step in the institutional effectiveness (IE) cycle. It involves modifying strategies as needed to better achieve outcomes. Once we have analyzed our data, we need to utilize our findings to strategize and implement changes for improvement.

Why close the loop?

Assessment/evaluation is pointless if you do not take the opportunity to use it as a tool for improvement. Here are some of the potential benefits:

- Improvement of learning
- Stronger program/department
- Inform planning and budgeting
- More successful students, employees, and customers
- Better retention and graduation rates
- Successful accreditation review

When working on closing the loop, ask yourself the following questions:
What are we doing effectively?
Where can we do better?
Did we meet our targets? Why were targets not met?
Were targets too high/low?
Did we collect sufficient data?
And most importantly: What can we do differently?

SHARE. Disseminate assessment findings to colleagues/faculty and other stakeholders.

DISCUSS. Provide structured opportunities for discussion of the assessment results. For example, you might make assessment a regular agenda item at meetings or have special IE sessions

PLAN/STRATEGIZE. Develop ideas and proposals for revising processes, activities, learning goals and objectives, the program curriculum, teaching methods, assessment methods, etc.

ACT. Implement new strategies for improvement.

Examples of Changes/Strategies for Improvement

Educational Programs (BSN, MS, MD Programs)	Administrative Units
Curricular Changes adding/changing pre-requisites changing degree program requirements changing course sequence **Pedagogical Changes** incorporating guest lectures adding organized small group activities adding web-based delivery of content **Student Support** implementing peer-tutoring system organizing group study providing online resources/referrals **Faculty Support** faculty retreat professional development technology assistance online resources	**Process Changes** changing intake/communication procedures developing/revising forms going electronic creating work flow/charts expanding a service eliminating redundancy **Customer Service Changes** developing communication protocols automated response/follow-up adding web-based services developing/revising handbooks/manuals **Employee Support** office retreat professional development trainings/workshops technology assistance

A commonly reported use of results is to *refine the assessment process itself:*

- New or refined instruments
- Improved methods of data collection (instructions, incentives, timing, setting, etc.)
- Changes in participant samples

What do we do in the following situations?

Results are difficult to interpret.	Review the assessment method selected. It may be necessary to change the assessment instrument/tool (change the measure).
Results can be interpreted but do not provide sufficient details to inform a meaningful decision.	Additional measures may need to be added. It may be necessary to revise the measure to provide more meaningful information (i.e., change survey items).
Target was not achieved.	Consider adding action steps (e.g., professional development, revision of course content) that increase the likelihood of attaining the desired outcome target. Adjust the target level if needed.
Target was achieved.	Celebrate your achievement and determine if the target should be adjusted to a higher standard or if sustainability efforts should be put into place to maintain the level of performance noted.
Target is achieved consistently (over more than one cycle).	Consider removing the expected outcome from your IE plan and replacing with another outcome and corresponding new target.

Documentation is everything!

If our activities/data/decisions/strategies and resulting changes for improvement are not document, then they don't exist to outsiders or reviewers.

Things to Remember as you Document
➢ Results are reported in aggregate form. We do not report results for individuals.
➢ We do not report results for individual courses.
➢ We focus on the unit (e.g., educational program, office).
➢ Anonymity of all participants has to be maintained — never identify anyone.
➢ Clearly state how findings were reviewed.
➢ Clearly state the changes implemented as a result of the findings.

Additional Tips

- Schedule time to record data directly after completing the assessment/evaluation.
- Prepare a simple table or chart to record results.
- Think about the meaning of these data and write down your conclusions.
- Take the opportunity to share your findings with colleagues in your area, as well in those in other areas.
- Share the findings with stakeholders, if appropriate.
- Report on the data and what you have learned at discipline-specific and institutional meetings.