Presidential Perspectives on Advancing the Institutional Effectiveness Model

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April 2016

The Association for Higher Education Effectiveness

This study was sponsored by the Association for Higher Education Effectiveness (AHEE, see www.ahee.org). AHEE was founded in 2013 with the mission of "support[ing] and develop[ing] leadership that educates, advocates, advises, facilitates, and improves higher education's capacity to use evidence in decisions, policy, planning, and change for the purpose of improving postsecondary education. AHEE's vision statement is as follows:

> Higher education institutions rely on integrated offices led by well-prepared, qualified Cabinet-level professionals who assure evidence-based planning, decision making and improvement as a means of achieving institutions' effectiveness. These professionals are knowledgeable of global problems and solutions regarding higher education effectiveness and are routinely called upon to participate in higher education policy.

The ever-changing landscape of higher education has increased the need for information to respond quickly and accurately to a shifting economy, changing student demographics, accreditation requirements, and increasing demands for accountability. As a result, presidents and their boards have made increasing demands on institutions to provide diverse types of information to guide their efforts to traverse this new terrain.   In summary, evidenced-based decision making has become critical and crucial to an institution's, as well as to a president's survival.

Given these changes, evidence-based leadership and management continue to be a growing trend in higher education. While campuses often profess interest in accountability, strategic planning, and "big data," recent sources suggest that a true "culture of evidence" has not yet been realized. Only 26% of a sample of chief academic officers says their institutions are very effective in using data to inform campus decision-making; only 26% say their campuses are very effective in identifying and assessing student learning outcomes; and only 16% say their colleges or universities are very effective in data analysis and organizational analytics (Jaschik & Lederman, 2016). A 2014 study by the National Association of System Heads described a pattern of disconnected offices across campuses with varying responsibilities for decision support that suffer from ever -increasing workloads comprised of descriptive reporting that do not permit broader and deeper analysis of crucial topics such as student success and resource allocation.

One response to these needs is the development of administrative structures that intentionally combine the institutional research, outcomes assessment, strategic planning, accreditation and academic and non-academic unit review functions (the integrated institutional effectiveness (IIE) model). While only 43 institutions listed offices of institutional effectiveness in the 1995 *Higher Education Directory*, this number had increased to 375 by 2010. It increased again to 501 in 2015. It is not clear why many institutions have developed this structure, but possible advantages include leveraging expertise and communication among staff members involved in the various institutional "quality" functions; providing a platform for challenging assumptions, deepening questioning and exploration; improving the effectiveness and efficiency of resource allocation; and reflecting on a given campus' role within the wider higher education landscape.

The Association for Higher Education Effectiveness (AHEE) was founded in 2013 to support the development and success of IIE organizations, and particularly the professional development of their leaders. One of AHEE's goals is to carry out research concerning the IIE model and its success. A group of researchers affiliated with AHEE carried out the current study to investigate institutional presidents' perspectives on the IIE model.

Method

The researchers investigated the pervasiveness of the IIE model, its perceived advantages and disadvantages, the staffing and capabilities needed to ensure the success of the IIE model, and possible future directions. A set of interview questions (see the Appendix) was developed for the

study. Initially, a convenience sample of president's known to one or more of the researchers resulted in six (6) interviews. Next, a random sample, drawn from institutions that had undergone a comprehensive regional accreditation review within the previous three years (2012-2014), and, that demonstrated some evidence of an integrated institutional effectiveness presence based on a website review, was invited to participate in the study. This resulted in an additional six (6) interviews. In total, 12 leaders were interviewed (three presidents, one chancellor, one interim president, five presidents emeritus, one provost) representing a variety of institutional types (three community colleges, a for-profit medical college, a historically Black institution, a liberal arts college, a private institute of technology, a private research university, two regional state universities, and a theological seminary).

Results

As shown below in Table 1, 7 of the 12 participants agreed their institution espouses the IIE model and 4 of these 7 stated their institutions have fully adopted it. Five of the 12 could identify additional institutions that have or may be close to having adopted the IIE model.

Participants identified advantages of the IE model as improved effectiveness and efficiency of decision making; improved institutional accountability and ability to establish priorities; the ability to carry out benchmarking and identify best practices; greater timeliness, accuracy and richness of evidence; durability of decision support processes; better connection of people and systems; heightened ability to focus on student success; and the potential to influence policy. The only disadvantage cited was the difficulty in identifying candidates for the chief institutional effectiveness officer position who possess the necessary skill set. Ten of the dozen participants felt the IE model will become more common as accountability pressures continue to escalate, particularly accreditation requirements.

Table 1. AHEE | Presidential Perspectives on Integrated Institutional Effectiveness (IIE) Study. Summary Results

Question	Summary - 12 Interviews (6 Pilot, 6 Regular)
1	Does your institution or another institution you may be familiar use an integrated institutional effectiveness (IIE) model as described in the definition we provided you?	7 feel own institution espouses IIE (4 Pilot, 3 Regular) 7/12 = 58%
2	If the integrated institutional effectiveness model has been adopted at your or other institutions, has it been fully adopted? If not, are there some obstacles to moving in this direction?	4 feel may have fully adopted IIE at own institution (3 Pilot, 1 Regular) 4/12 = 33% | 4/7 = 57%
3	If your institution has adopted the IIE model, what are your expectations of this unit and have those expectations been met? What else would you like to see from this unit? What preparation and skills are most important for staff members charged with leading IIE efforts? What staffing levels are necessary for carrying out this work successfully?	<u>Expectations</u>: No consensus. Some mentions of building an IIE culture across the institution, including effective listening and building of relationships. Also, improved and/or standardized data utilization. <u>Skills</u>: Communication/Interpersonal skills (5); Data/Assessment/Research skills (5); Leadership skills (4); Creativity (2); Project Management skills; taking and maintain a broad frame of reference. <u>Staffing Levels</u>: No consensus around appropriate staffing level (sometimes too small or about right; never too big); general sense is that it's institution-dependent.
4	Do you know of any institution that may be close to adopting the IIE model?	5 feel they know of at least one other IIE institution 5/12 = 42%
5	In your judgment, what are the advantages of adopting this model? What are the disadvantages?	<u>Advantages</u>: No consensus emerged, but many advantages were cited: Improved decision-making/One-stop decision support (3); institutional answers readily available/confidence (3); independence/objectivity (2); accountability; ability to set priorities; efficiency; ability to identify best practices; data timeliness; data accuracy; data thoroughness; enables comparisons; engages full community; potential to influence public policy; connects systems to people; creates powerful student success messaging; durability (process outlives personnel changes, at least designed to do so). <u>Disadvantages</u>: Other than the challenge in finding professionals with multiple skillsets and, potentially, the length of time it takes to do IIE well, the disadvantages mentioned referred to problems occurring when IIE is not implemented well, or, if existing conditions remaining unchanged; e.g., wrong person leading; strong personalities getting in the way of progress; "silo" or "turf" issues remaining in place and/or developing ; weak buy-in; overwhelming people with data; not respecting some "rightful ownership" where it exists such as faculty involvement in program review.
6	What do you see as the future of IIE?	10 feel IIE will grow, is necessary, or simply will not go away (accreditation was most frequently cited factor in this) 10/12 = 83%

Discussion

Based on prevalence indicators and interviews with current and former college presidents, Integrated Institutional Effectiveness (IIE) is assuming an ever-increasing profile and prominence in postsecondary institutions.

Interviewees in this study identified several advantages of the IIE model, including improved institutional decision-making and accountability. They acknowledged that professionals who can lead successful IIE efforts must have a varied and highly developed skill set; a skill set that requires not only technical/analytical expertise, but also leadership, coalition-building, and culture-forming abilities.

This trend toward integrating accreditation, assessment, institutional research, program review, and strategic planning activities appears to be taking root in response mainly to external forces, such as those exerted by accrediting bodies, and, to internal pressures, including "consumer-oriented" demands from prospective students and their parents. Indeed, nearly all interviewees explained that embracing IIE will be unavoidable, as institutional performance, accountability, and return on investment become ever more dominant themes in the higher education landscape.

References

Gagliardi, J.S., & Wellman, J. (2014). *Meeting demands for improvements in public system institutional research: Progress report on the NASH project in IR*. Washington, DC: National Association of System Heads.

Jaschik, S. & Lederman, D. (2016). The *2016 Inside Higher Ed survey of college and university chief academic officers*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/survey/2016-inside-higher-ed-survey-chief-academic-officers

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Does you institution or another institution you may be familiar use an integrated institutional effectiveness (IIE) model as described in the definition we provided you?
2. If the integrated institutional effectiveness model has been adopted at your or other institutions, has it been fully adopted? If not, are there some obstacles to moving in this direction?
3. If your institution has adopted the IIE model, what are your expectations of this unit and have those expectations been met? What else would you like to see from this unit? What preparation and skills are most important for staff members charged with leading IIE efforts? What staffing levels are necessary for carrying out this work successfully?
4. Do you know of any institution that may be close to adopting the IIE model?
5. In your judgment, what are the advantages of adopting this model? What are the disadvantages?
6. What do you see as the future of IIE?
7. Our study group is planning to identify institutions that have recently had a reaffirmation of their regional accreditation that show some evidence of having an integrated institutional effectiveness and contact a sample of presidents at those institutions to ask similar questions. With this in mind, do you have any suggestions for improving our interview process?