This column concludes a recent three-part series focusing on institutional effectiveness High Impact Practices (IE/HIP) mapped to the corresponding three principles on the PECC’s Targeted Issues Checklist (TIC). By means of their implementation at the academic/nonacademic program- and department-level, I propose that these IE/HIPs will enhance potential SACSCOC compliance.

In the first IE HIPs article, I posited that institutional – and for that matter, institution-aligned departmental – mission statements drive outcome formulation as well as actualizing their concomitant downstream assessment processes. Then, in the second article, I predicated IE/HIPs, which posited a reciprocally conceptual nexus between departmental missions and their derivative outcomes. With this final installment, I focus on the TIC's last sine qua non element, i. e.: the Culture of Continuous Improvement (CoCI).

In a 2018 Harvard Business Review article, organizational culture researchers predicate an a posteriori nexus between context-specific culture and resultant outcomes. Their analysis of 230 organizational cultures support the supposition that “geographic region, industry, strategy, leadership, and company structure—matters, as does the strength of the culture” (2018, Groysberg, et al., p. 49). In his 2002 book, Who Says Elephants Can’t Dance? discussing IBM’s iconic organizational culture, its former chairman, Louis Gerstner stated “Until I came to IBM, I probably would have told you that culture was just one among several important elements in any organization’s makeup and success... I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game, it is the game. In the end, an organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value” (Gerstner, 2002, p. 204).

The CoCI comprises what-I-refer-to-as macroPECConomic criteria, that is: larger, more global, and often multi-factor macroassessment criteria, which change from one annual assessment cycle to another, such as department analyses of outcomes. In contrast, I use the term microPECConomic to connote particularized or more single-factor microassessment criteria, which do not change from one annual assessment cycle to another, such as a department's mission. Winston Churchill said: “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”

The following Targeted Issues Checklist image illustrates the CoCI instructions for completing the requisite five-column table that follows.

**Figure 1: PECC's TARGETED ISSUES CHECKLIST (TIC) CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT instructions**
Meredith Gorran Farkas postulates that what constitutes a CoCI “is very much in the eye of the beholder,” she ultimately defines it - as “where assessment is a regular part of institutional practice” (Gorran Farkas, 2015, p. 150). That particular workaday organizational practice is contextualized by what Banta, Jones and Black denominate a “shared conceptual framework” (2009, p. 34, passim), viz.: Sullivan University’s PECC. With that framework in place, Hamm asserts “organizations…lay a foundation, then outline expected behaviors that drive the values into the fiber of the organizations’ operation and people” (Hamm, 2017, p. 26) SU’s PECCOnomics strategy “provides direction for the assessment process; is mission-driven and informed by research; and, like the assessment process itself, should be continually evaluated and modified when necessary” (ibidem, p. 123).

**Figure 2: Baxter’s Operational Excellence Framework Grounded on CoCI**

This Culture of Continuous Improvement is assessed by means of a five-column table, which is purposefully mapped to the SACSCOC IE algorithm contained in CS 3.3.1,
namely: The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas. By kick starting ancillary processes, which eventuate in departmental assessment, that five-column table constitutes the quintessential element of the TIC. For that matter, that CoIC table, AKA “Charlie’s Table,” encapsulates the algorithmic essence of SACSCOC assessment.

**Figure 3: PECC's TARGETED ISSUES CHECKLIST (TIC) CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT 5-STEP TABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity or Outcome (or Prior Improvement)</th>
<th>How Assessed</th>
<th>Assessment Results</th>
<th>Plan for Improvement (or Steps Taken to Produce Improvement)</th>
<th>Assessment of Steps Taken to Produce Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In turn, this table is aligned to the PECC mission whose assessment steps are represented in the university's seven-step continuous improvement circle (CIC):

**Figure 4: SULLIVAN UNIVERSITY'S 7-STEP CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CIRCLE (CIC)**

KAIZEN, THE JAPANESE CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

Adopted by Six Sigma, “kaizen is a Japanese philosophy that focuses on continual improvement throughout all aspects of life.”
As with the SU CIC, kaizen exhibits 7 steps, viz.:

1. Identify an opportunity
2. Analyze the process
3. Develop an optimal solution
4. Implement the solution
5. Study the results
6. Standardize the solution
7. Plan for the future

(ibidem)

The aforementioned web page also provides the following essential impactful practices that undergird kaizen:

- Replace conventional fixed ideas with fresh ones.
- Start by questioning current practices and standards.
- Seek the advice of many associates before starting a Kaizen activity.
- Think of how to do something, not why it cannot be done.
- Don’t make excuses. Make execution happen.
- Do not seek perfection. Implement a solution right away, even if it covers only 50 percent of the target.
- Correct something right away if a mistake is made.

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

A Culture of Continuous Improvement occurs when an idea, action, function, or initiative has been organizationally routinized to become an engrained part of an institution’s *modus operandi*. CoCI is the process of purposefully and metacognitively internalizing an assessment ethos. Defined as “thinking about thinking,” metacognition is a term whose post-modernist connotation was popularized by John H. Flavell in a 1976 article entitled the “Nature of Intelligence.” Simultaneously, then, the internalized CoCI ethos is integral to what *Assessment Essential*’s author, Trudy Banta calls “a culture of assessment” (Flavell, 1976, p. 276). To create a culture of assessment, Barham, Tscheppikow, and Seagraves assert that an organization’s “values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors reflect a shared appreciation of assessment practice and its value to instructional advancement” (2013, p. 73). The opening sentences to Banta’s *Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice* categorically posits that, “Effective assessment doesn’t just happen. It emerges over time as an outcome of thoughtful planning, and I the spirit of continuous improvement, it evolves as reflection on the processes of implementing and sustaining assessment suggests modifications” (p. 3). As Banta suggests, these iterative practices are inarguably acculturated over time as noted in the aforementioned SACSCOC CR 2.5, which asserts that assessment should be “ongoing.” MacAyeal also plumps for “ongoing-ness” as one of a culture of assessment’s five mindsets, i.e.: “1. Assessment needs to live in the ongoing, daily work of everyone….Libraries, departments, and individuals need to include assessment as part of their expected work and build assessment activity into
their goals. Initiatives should grow organically out of continuing work and should be completed by those engaged in that work” (p. 1-2).

On May 21, 2005, the late author David Foster Wallace delivered the Kenyon University Commencement Address in which he told this story: "There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning, boys. How's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes 'What the hell is water?' https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/DFWKenyonAddress2005.pdf. If they have successfully annealed assessment to their workaday practices – as Sullivan has with its PECConomics – a culture of assessment becomes higher education's water.

Figure 5: PECC's TARGETED ISSUES CHECKLIST (TIC) Mission-Predicated Continuous Improvement Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targeted Issues Checklist for Academic Programs and Support Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NAME OF PROGRAM OR UNIT:</strong> Insert name of program or unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REVIEW DATE:</strong> Insert date of PECC review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission:</strong> To ensure quality assurance, the Sullivan University Planning and Evaluation Coordinating Council (PECC) systematically evaluates and assesses institutional effectiveness processes and their data, and values-driven results as presented by members of the Sullivan University community. Presenting members are primarily responsible for academic programs, academic support functions, student support functions, and administrative support functions. Institutional effectiveness processes focus on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A) alignment with the Sullivan University mission, goals and outcomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) consistency with Sullivan University’s seven-step continuous improvement circle (CIC), comprising the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify and integrate, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation process, identify outcomes and goals that coincide with the mission;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify appropriate measurement instrument(s);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Through research-based evaluation processes, gather data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analyze, evaluate and interpret data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Make plans for improvement based on analyses of data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Implement plans for improvement; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Evaluate and measure implemented plans to “close the circle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) achievement or progress toward desired results in accomplishing its mission; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) satisfaction of various constituents with our processes and graduates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Functions:** Composed of sector-level university and academic administrators, the PECC evaluates academic and administrative areas with this checklist, which describes all of the activities to be evaluated and helps determine if expected progress or improvement has been demonstrated. The evaluation checklist provides a single document to describe the findings based on PECC reviews of the academic programs, academic support functions, student support functions, and administrative support functions of Sullivan University. Additionally, this checklist is designed to ensure that all planning and evaluation functions are carried out in a timely and effective manner and that academic, academic support, student support, and administrative support areas meet these various requirements ("targeted issues"). This checklist is not a substitute for addressing these issues on a departmental basis but serves as guidance that the academic program or support unit and the PECC have addressed specific issues.

**NOTEs:** Subsequent to its first assessment cycle, all programs should ensure evaluation of prior assessment cycle improvements and add longitudinal data as needed to columns three and four. All locations and learning modalities should be included in assessment and parsed out in longitudinal documentation. Use program-specific assessment and/or the RuffaloSM Noel Levitz instrument and corresponding data. Then, to operationalize the CIC without being overly discursive, one might tabularize input, such as:

Figure 6: SULLIVAN UNIVERSITY’S 5-COLUMN
EVIDENTIARY TABLE operationalizing the CIC's 7 steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIC STEP 1</th>
<th>CIC STEP 2</th>
<th>CIC STEPs 3-4</th>
<th>CIC STEPs 5-6</th>
<th>CIC STEP 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify programmatic/departmental outcome(s):</td>
<td>Identify Measurement Instrument(s)</td>
<td>Data Gathered/Analyzed</td>
<td>Implement Data-driven Improvement Plan</td>
<td>Evaluate resultant Improvement(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTE: be specific.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NOTE: be specific.</td>
<td>NOTE: be specific.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. a.)

2. b.)

NOTE: add additional rows as needed

As I often note, SACSCOC is not prescriptive and does not particularly care how an institution provides compliance evidence. However, as an evaluator, I often see tables used consistently to summarize IE processes for all campuses and delivery modalities across programs. As an exemplar, the following model demonstrates a variation-upon-a-theme use of tables succinctly to record CIC (and, hence IE requisite) current and longitudinal processes:

**FIGURE 7A: EXAMPLES OF 5-STEP COCI TABLE**

**FIGURE 7B: MULTI-CAMPUS EXAMPLES OF 5-STEP COCI TABLE**
Wendy Weiner has postulates the following fifteen elements, which she feels, are needed to achieve a culture of assessment:

1. clear general education goals,
2. common use of assessment-related terms,
3. faculty ownership of assessment programs,
4. ongoing professional development,
5. administrative encouragement of assessment,
6. practical assessment plans,
7. systematic assessment,
8. the setting of student learning outcomes for all courses and programs,
9. comprehensive program review,
10. assessment of co-curricular activities,
11. assessment of overall institutional effectiveness,
12. informational forums about assessment,
13. inclusion of assessment in plans and budgets,
14. celebration of successes,
15. responsiveness to proposals for new endeavors related to assessment.


(Weiner, 2009, p. 28).

Zumuda offers these helpful six steps to achieve CoCI:

**FIGURE 8: ZUMUDA’S SIX STEPS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**
### Step 1: Identify and clarify the core beliefs that define the school’s culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Operating Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some faculties may hold achievement in the academic disciplines as primary; others may believe that the social and emotional development of students is primary. Both are core beliefs and drive teacher support for the status quo or the need to change the status quo.</td>
<td>Each school is a complex living system with purpose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 2: Create a shared vision by explicitly defining what these core beliefs will look like in practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the shared vision of what the school community will look like when its core beliefs truly inform practice. It is a narrative description of what is seen and heard in every part of the school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A shared vision articulates a coherent picture of what the school will look like when the core beliefs have been put into practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The legitimacy of a shared vision is based on how well it represents all perspectives in the school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 3: Collect accurate, detailed data and use analysis of the data to define where the school is now and to determine the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The collection and analysis of data lead to rich conversations among a staff about the meaning of the data and an honest assessment of teaching and learning practices. By identifying the gaps between where a school is now and the shared vision, staff members gain clarity on what they have to do to achieve that vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once staff members commit to the shared vision, they must gain clarity on their responsibility for achieving that vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When staff members perceive data to be valid and reliable in collection and analysis, data both confirm what is working well and reveal the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision in a way that inspires collective action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown below, course-mapping is also an essential tool in assessing CoCI.

**FIGURE 9: JANKOWSKI’S MAPPING LEARNING OUTCOMES: WHAT YOU MAP IS WHAT YOU SEE**
FIGURE 10: IE HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES (IE/HIPs) MAPPED TO THE CIC STEPS IN FIGURE 4 & AND TO THE ACTIONS IN FIGURE 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIC STEPS</th>
<th>CIC ACTION</th>
<th>CIC HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES (HIPs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identify programmatic/departmental outcome(s):</td>
<td>1. adhere to the SU Alignment of Mission (<a href="http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398800">http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398800</a>) and Outcomes (<a href="http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398801">http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398801</a>) IE/HIPs listed in the prior <em>Academic Illuminator</em> articles and on the accompanying LibGuide; 2. consult the internet for sample programmatic outcomes (but ensure they accord with the SU Outcomes IE/HIPs), such as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
these from Georgia State University: [http://oie.gsu.edu/files/2014/07/GSU-Program-SLOs.pdf](http://oie.gsu.edu/files/2014/07/GSU-Program-SLOs.pdf)

3. Bresciani postulates three common barriers to implementing outcomes-based assessment. Understanding of assessment follows time and resources as barriers. Consequently, as a requisite prerequisite to identifying outcomes, one must manage time and resources AND understand assessment beforehand (Bresciani, 2011, p. 5).

4. be specific.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Identify Measurement Instrument(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5. prefer use of direct measures* versus indirect measures;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. do not use grades; **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. rubrics may aid measurement;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. measurement instrument(s) should be outcome-directed in order to measure &quot;and there pour forth jejune words and useless empty phrases&quot; (Anthony Trollope). the requisite learning-outcome-specific results. If it does not, find one that will (consult: MENTAL MEASUREMENT YEARBOOK, or other such compilations);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. triangularize multiple measurement instruments for interrater reliability and cross-validation of data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. use multiple measures, thereby maximizing reliability and validity;¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. triangulate data from any multiple instruments to outcomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. be aware of the distinction between formative and summative assessment strategies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. be specific.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Data Gathered/ Analyzed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>14. provide longitudinal data (preferably for the most recent three-year evaluation cycle;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. in order to demonstrate continuity, provide data for all pedagogical modalities and for all campus locations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. provide evidence that the campus’s measures of student learning are direct, valid, and reliable and that representative sampling of students and courses will take place in the assessments;²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. student performance can be compared, including how the campus will define student performance that “exceeds,” “meets,” “approaches,” or “fails to meet” standards;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. map data to course instrument: “a course map is essentially a representation of how you intend to approach and assess each of the student learning outcomes you identified for your course;”³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. identify potentially misleading or flawed test questions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. small data samples may be inconclusive;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. advanced (logical, linear regression) analysis techniques may be useful for many programs;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. be specific.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | Implement Data-driven Improvement Plan | 23. develop concrete plans for implementation of changes;¹  
|   |   | 24. demonstrate evidence of data-driven directionality to modifications and areas needing improvement;  
|   |   | 25. Summarize assessment findings in ways that make them meaningful and understandable. In particular, make clear how student performance compares with the targets;⁵  
|   |   | 26. Share assessment findings with interested/relevant program faculty and other stakeholders. These might include an assessment committee or all program faculty;⁵  
|   |   | 27. Provide structured opportunities for discussion of the assessment results. For example, you might make assessment a regular agenda item at meetings of program faculty;⁵  
|   |   | 28. Develop ideas and proposals for revising learning goals and objectives, the program curriculum, teaching methods, assessment methods, etc. Clear assessment results can be used to support request for resources;⁵  
|   |   | 29. be specific  
|   | Evaluate resultant Improvement(s) | 30. during the subsequent assessment cycle, use the prior methodology to assess the efficacy of improvements  
|   |   | 31. be specific  

*Direct measures*, as Suskie notes are: “direct evidence of student learning is tangible, visible, self-explanatory evidence of exactly what students have and haven’t learned” (2004, p. 95). *Her examples include: student ratings by their field experience supervisors; scores and pass rates on appropriate licensure/certification exams; capstone experiences; other written work or performances; portfolios; scores on locally-designed tests; employer ratings of graduates; student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs.* ⁴

Nevertheless, *Indirect measures* can provide a useful supplement and check on the findings from direct measures. *They include: Surveys of students and alumni; exit interviews with graduating students; data on placement and other measures of post-graduation performance.* ⁵

**Grades may: 1.) leave unclear the expectations for student learning; 2.) collapse information about multiple learning outcomes; 3.) incorporate other aspects of student performance, such as attendance and participation ;and, 4.) be less likely to tell where exactly improvement is needed.* ⁵

References


*Institutional Effectiveness Continuous Improvement Circle (fig.).* (2015). Unpublished manuscript, Sullivan University Creative Communications Department, Sullivan University, Louisville, KY.


