

AUTHORS

Emilie Clucas
Leaderman, Ed.D.
Santa Clara University

Gina B.
Polychronopoulos, Ph.D.
Christopher
Newport University

Abstract

This paper introduces a conceptual framework for overcoming common assessment challenges and supporting a positive assessment culture in higher education through fostering collaborative relationships with faculty and staff. By using a lens that integrates concepts from person-centered and solution-focused counseling, positive psychology, and motivational interviewing, assessment practitioners can better understand what guides the cultivation of inclusive and participatory relationships in assessment. The RARE model provides a common set of strategies for implementing principles of effective assessment practice, developed by two assessment professionals from universities located in different accrediting regions: WASC (Western Senior College and University Commission) and SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges). In calling attention to the influence of their practitioner training and background, this model also highlights the benefit of exploring the disciplinary diversity that exists within the assessment field. Through exploration of this reflexive, strengths-based approach to assessment practice, the authors contribute to the discourse about professional identity in higher education assessment.

Humanizing the Assessment Process: How the RARE Model Informs Best Practices

Higher education assessment is a complex professional identity, as some practitioners are recruited as a faculty or staff member to their role while others transition from outside of academia. Our understanding of disciplinary identity in higher education assessment is emerging, with assessment professionals entering their positions from a broad range of academic fields (Suskie, 2009). Data from Nicholas and Slotnik (2018) confirm significant disciplinary diversity, with the majority holding their highest degrees in social sciences (30%) and education (44%). Social science respondents in this survey ranged from psychology, sociology, history, and organizational leadership disciplines; while those in education included higher education, administration, leadership, educational psychology, assessment and measurement, and curriculum and design. A closer look at the years of experience among this same group of professionals reveals that 75% have moved into the profession within the last seven to 10 years (Nicholas & Slotnik, 2018), which suggests that the assessment field is evolving. While the disciplinary paths of assessment practitioners are identifiable, their industry and career experiences, as well as implications for assessment practice, remain to be seen.

To complicate identity matters, our profession has a reputation of not being well liked among its counterparts in academia. Following recent media editorials from faculty criticizing the aims of higher education assessment (Worthen, 2018) and articles calling for our community of practitioners to better define standards of practice for themselves (Eubanks, 2017), we recognize the need to articulate how we develop interpersonal relationships with faculty and staff. One recent survey points to assessment professionals' desire for learning strategies for successfully overcoming unique or common challenges at their institution (Combs & Rose, 2016), and faculty resistance has been considered one of the main barriers to successful measurement of student learning outcomes (Katz, 2010). Although collaboration and relationship-building have been identified as best practices toward meaningful engagement in the assessment process (Kinzie, Jankowski, & Provezis, 2014), it has also been suggested that inclusive practices are necessary to establish

CORRESPONDENCE

Email

eclucasleaderman@scu.edu
gina.polychronopoulos
@cnu.edu

assessment as a sustainable process (Hutchings, Ewell, & Banta, 2012). In undertaking inclusive practices, assessment professionals can consider how they engage and involve staff and faculty.

As the public and those inside of the academy continue to scrutinize motivation within our field, we also view self-reflection as essential for navigating its future. The field of educational development, also known as academic or faculty development, has engaged in a similar dialogue at both the international (Green & Little, 2016) and national levels (Green & Little, 2013; Little, 2014; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006) to gain a better understanding of its complex professional identity as a community and the implications for research and practice. As the assessment profession continues to define itself, some common interpersonal roles and their respective tasks have already been identified through research. Several terms used to describe the relational nature of our work include (a) facilitator/guide: mentoring individuals, assisting people in the assessment process, and collaborating across disciplines; (b) political navigator: emphasizing people skills, sensitivity to culture, collaboration, and framing sensitive results (Jankowski & Slotnik, 2015); and (c) change agent: “responding to weaknesses; designing change; reflection; redesign; using results; making a difference; and closing the loop” (Ariovich, Bral, Gregg, Gulliford, & Morrow, 2018). Although both of the previous studies suggest that these necessary interpersonal roles intertwine, it is unclear how assessment professionals as a collective group prepare themselves for this change-oriented work.

In seeking to better understand how our own background and training in counseling inform our interpersonal work in higher education assessment, we reflected on the philosophical underpinnings that inspire our individual approaches to working with faculty and staff in the assessment process. We formalized our thinking into a model of reflexive, strengths-based assessment practice. The following questions guided the creation of our model:

1. How do our own professional identities influence our work with staff and faculty in assessment? Which theories have shaped our current practices in assessment?
2. How do we as assessment professionals cultivate participatory relationships with faculty and staff? What strategies have we used to develop healthy assessment cultures that allow for inclusive best practices to occur?

Although examples of successful interpersonal strategies have been well documented, the theoretical mindset and processes that guide practitioners in inclusive assessment work have yet to be explored. Kinzie and colleagues note that integrating this type of generative assessment as effective practice continues to be a challenge for institutions (Kinzie et al., 2014). Moreover, the Watermark study suggests that the roles and competencies of assessment practitioners should be further explored and defined (Ariovich et al., 2018). Considering all of these recommendations, it is beneficial to examine collaborative practice—including building strong relationships with faculty and staff—as a key aspect of successful engagement in assessment and enhancing institutional assessment culture.

Purpose Statement

The multitude of disciplinary backgrounds within the assessment profession lends itself to ambiguity in defining clear links to developing effective assessment practice. However, we see this diversity of disciplines as a strength within our field. This paper aims to describe a model for a strengths-based approach to assessment practice (which was informed by our shared background in professional counseling) as well as how the underlying theories link to best practices in assessment. Our purpose in developing the RARE model is to demonstrate how we use our disciplinary lens to create participatory and inclusive relationships with faculty and staff in the assessment process.

We propose our approach as a set of strategies for developing inclusive partnerships with faculty and staff in good assessment work. Derived from our experiences as counseling

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professionals and from several counseling theories, the following model demonstrates strategies from person-centered (Rogers, 1950) and solution-focused therapies (de Shazer, 1985), motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 1991, 2002), and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) to conceptualize how these particular theories inform our practice by describing them in action. Please note that although these strategies are inspired by counseling skills we do not intend for them to be employed as such by assessment professionals; doing so would be unethical and outside the scope of assessment practice. However, it is our hope that our initial discussion of the influence of our disciplinary backgrounds, as well as engaging in reflexive, strengths-based assessment practice, will spark future discourse within the field and contribute to the development of our collective professional identity.

RARE Model

The RARE model approach is informed by both humanistic and postmodern counseling theories.

The RARE model approach is informed by both humanistic and postmodern counseling theories (R for Relate, A for Acknowledge, R for Reflect, and E for Empower), representing four groups of strategies inherent in these theories. Humanistic theory emphasizes the importance of an egalitarian relationship between the client and counselor (Hansen, 2006). That is, the counselor is not considered the “expert” in the relationship; rather, he or she partners with the client in an effort to understand his or her experience. There is often a distinct power differential between assessment professionals and faculty/staff members in higher education, which may contribute to a sense of cautiousness about engaging in the assessment process. Although the assessment practitioner may indeed have expertise, the person-centered approach of the RARE model seeks to minimize the power differential in an effort to strengthen relationships and promote a collaborative and inclusive culture of assessment. Relatedly, the RARE model also has postmodern theoretical influences in that collaboration and co-construction of meaning are the primary tenets; the counselor and client create the knowledge together through multiple perspectives on the problem (Sanders, 2011). In this manner, the assessment practitioner does not impose his or her knowledge upon the faculty/staff member; instead, they work together to construct the assessment process and interpret meaning.

The RARE model emphasizes four components of effective assessment practice, as well as strategies within each component. The following is a brief description of each strategy, including their specific theoretical underpinnings.

- 1) **R–Relate:** Effective assessment practice includes building relationships with others. The foundation of this model stems from the person-centered approach to counseling developed by Carl Rogers (1950), using three core conditions necessary for establishing a trusting relationship and working effectively toward goals: genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. Some of the humanistic strategies employed in this non-directive approach include active listening, reflection, and clarification.
- 2) **A–Acknowledge:** To foster collaborative relationships, it is helpful to recognize and highlight the strengths of others. This postmodern component builds upon humanistic counseling theory by recognizing and acknowledging the strengths and resources that faculty/staff bring to the assessment process. Solution-focused in theory, the intent is to guide faculty in setting their own goals. Some strategies employed in this category include: supporting a collaborative relationship, building upon strengths, and changing the “doing and viewing” of the problem (Murphy, 2008).
- 3) **R–Reflect:** When working toward change, noticing and embracing resistance will help to redefine it and promote growth. Motivational interviewing (MI) focuses on the power of the individual in creating change by meeting faculty members at their current level of assessment practice. MI strategies employed in promoting assessment growth include: collaboration (vs. confrontation), rolling with resistance, and developing discrepancy (Miller & Rollnick, 1991, 2002).

- 4) **E–Empower:** Linking all of the components together, we strive to empower faculty and staff to engage in meaningful and autonomous assessment practice. Core elements of positive psychology are used to better understand faculty needs and facilitate their readiness to act using guidance and support. In practice this translates into: identifying the great assessment work faculty are already doing, often referred to as self-efficacy; and supporting faculty as they take the next new step. Positive psychology strategies employed include: focusing on what is right/going well, building upon what is enabling success to help them flourish, and PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011)).

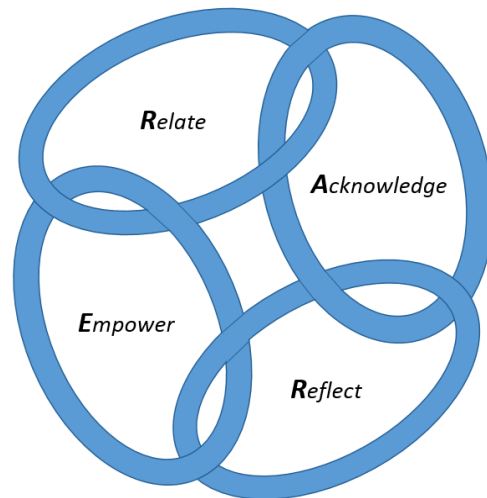


Figure 1. RARE Model

As demonstrated in Figure 1, each of the four components is represented by a link. The links are joined together to demonstrate an interconnected method of applying the strategies of the RARE model into assessment work. Each component linking together also symbolizes an equitable partnership in working with faculty and staff. Overlap is inherent in the strategies throughout the components of the RARE model as they derive from conjunctive theories (i.e., humanistic and postmodern counseling theories). Accordingly, the RARE model is an integrative application of counseling strategies that facilitate trust, motivation, and change within the practice of educational assessment. In the following section we will discuss each component of the model in greater depth and offer examples of how one might use the strategies of this approach. The examples highlight some of the challenges that we may face as assessment practitioners, such as resistance from colleagues, making changes for improvement, finding meaningful data, and promoting faculty autonomy and positive assessment culture. The RARE model applies to assessment work with not only academic faculty members but also administrative and student affairs staff; therefore, discussions throughout this manuscript will include references to these individuals interchangeably.

The RARE model is an integrative application of counseling strategies that facilitate trust, motivation, and change within the practice of educational assessment.

R–Relate

Building strong relationships with faculty and staff members relies on gaining their trust. Relate involves meeting with faculty and staff individually to establish oneself as a supportive colleague. In the counseling relationship a crucial aspect of building trust includes active listening, a term developed by Carl Rogers (1951) that describes a way of being that facilitates rapport and understanding. Translating this concept to assessment work, an intentional focus on learning about an individual's experiences and about his or her assessment challenges communicates the belief that the faculty or staff member is the expert in the relationship. Another strategy of this component includes conveying empathy by recognizing individuals' experiences as valid. Listening actively involves repeating back

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what you heard from an individual by paraphrasing what that person said to you in your own words. Clarify that you have heard their assessment concerns correctly by asking questions to check for understanding. Inquire about potential areas where you are less certain of their meaning. Communicate a genuine interest in interpreting individuals' experiences as accurately as possible. Finally, validate the feelings they express with unconditional positive regard.

Although this technique can feel awkward and robotic at first, it will feel more natural and genuine over time as it is repeatedly practiced. During initial meetings with faculty or staff set an agenda that focuses on learning from them. Build trust with individuals by asking about their curriculum, programs, services, research, and students. Invest time in developing a shared understanding of their perspectives of assessment (including current challenges and previous frustrations regarding what has not been effective or meaningful), and acknowledge small victories when possible. As they identify and describe problems with assessment, create tools and adapt resources that meet their specific needs. Convey a tone in reports, e-mails, and face-to-face meetings that communicates a willingness to see the problems as they do. The strategies within this component are essential in helping the faculty or staff member perceive the assessment professional as an ally and it will enhance their ability to overcome challenges collaboratively in the future.

A–Acknowledge

Once the assessment practitioner has developed positive relationships with faculty and staff members the next step is to recognize the individual strengths that they bring to the assessment process. Rooted in solution-focused theory (de Shazer, 1985), this postmodern approach builds upon humanistic counseling theory by acknowledging the independence of the individual with whom you are collaborating, helping to guide, versus lead, the individual in establishing meaningful goals. There are several solution-focused strategies that one may use in a solution-focused approach to educational assessment: supporting a collaborative relationship, building upon resources (i.e., strengths) and exceptions, and changing the “doing and viewing” of the problem (Murphy, 2008). For assessment professionals who are trying to strengthen their alliances with faculty and staff members on assessment practices, this component is essential, as it lets them know that you recognize the work they are already doing and will continue to work alongside them in a partnership capacity.

Supporting a collaborative relationship. Faculty and staff are the experts in their discipline or professional areas, and they are undoubtedly engaging in some form of assessment in their regular practices. For instance, they may be constructing exams and assignments to evaluate how well students have mastered specific learning outcomes, collecting data about what services students utilized most frequently on campus, or distributing student opinion surveys. In supporting collaborative relationships it is important to highlight the individual strengths and contributions that one brings to the assessment table, especially before offering any suggestions to a faculty or staff member. Murphy (2008) suggests the following strategies for establishing a collaborative and change-focused relationship: approach others with humility and a desire to learn from their perspectives, use language consistent with change, and solicit feedback on the collaborative process. An example of employing collaborative strategies in assessment can be seen in how we approach faculty and staff when working together. We can minimize the existing power differential by adjusting how we intervene. If you are reviewing an assessment plan with a faculty member and notice that their data collection methods are not aligned with the learning outcomes, ask for information with a focus on learning more from them, which then invites a conversation. For example, “I’m wondering about this particular assignment and what it looks like,” or “I’m not sure I understand how the questions on this test relate to this outcome. Is it possible that students might be learning about this outcome in another area of your program?” or “Could there be another way to word this learning outcome that might reflect what you hoped they would learn? What do you think?” By shifting our own perspective to one of curiosity, adjusting our language to be less absolute, and inviting others to share their perspectives and reactions, we are fostering collaboration and promoting autonomy of faculty and staff in the assessment process.

Building upon faculty/staff strengths. While continuing to nurture positive and collaborative relationships with faculty and staff, the assessment practitioner has a good understanding of what strengths and resources they bring to the process. The next step is to highlight what has been more or less helpful, acknowledge what has worked in the past (not simply what did not work), and discover places where those problems did not exist (i.e., exceptions). An example of this strategy is learning what type of information (i.e. data) faculty or staff are already gathering in their regular practices (e.g., exams, meetings with students, outreach programs, capstone projects). Then, the assessment professional could explore (a) what has worked in the past with the goal of doing more of what works (building upon resources); (b) what has proven to be a challenge or obstacle; and, most importantly, (c) where an identified obstacle does not manifest itself in their assessment process (i.e., exception). For example, if a faculty member describes how challenging it can be to engage fellow faculty members in submitting assessment data, the assessment practitioner might inquire about those faculty who typically have been good about submitting assessment data, discussing how that process was different. Employing this strategy helps to lessen resistance because one is not imposing additional burden upon them or their existing processes. Building upon exceptions also allows faculty and staff to feel more positive about the process, while assessment practitioners focus on what has worked and where obstacles did not exist.

Changing the doing and viewing of the problem. Assessment professionals have long practiced the mantra of “doing more of what works, and if it doesn’t work, then do something different,” which is also prevalent in solution-focused interventions. However, one challenge in assessment occurs when faculty or staff get stuck in a pattern of maintaining the status quo through continuing to conduct assessment tasks that are easy to do but have consistently lacked value for the department or program, and have not led to usable results. This type of resistance can make it difficult to implement change. Changing the doing and viewing of the problem involves facilitating a shift in perspective for faculty and staff. Supporting collaborative relationships, while highlighting strengths, will facilitate this reframing process. As a result, the assessment professional is in a good position to help faculty and staff overcome their resistance in trying something different. Faculty and staff are more likely to receive suggestions when the assessment professional has already communicated a genuine, caring interest (by employing strategies from the R and A components). Changing the doing and viewing of the problem involves going with the flow, inviting criticism and feedback, and frequently requesting client input (Murphy, 2008). For example, when a faculty member shows concern that their data collection methods are not providing useful findings, the assessment practitioner can facilitate an idea based on a pride point already expressed by fellow colleagues in the department. For instance, “several faculty seem pleased with the quality of the capstone projects, what about the thesis essays that students write during their senior seminar? How might the essays offer insight as to how well students are performing on those learning outcomes?” By helping the staff member to shift perspective from what is not useful to what could be useful, the assessment professional is acknowledging existing resources in the process, helping the staff member to focus on positive and productive actions rather than the problems with assessment.

The goal of building motivation for change is future oriented: plant a seed that will bloom later.

R-Reflect

Assessment professionals are often responsible for facilitating decisions supported by data, but we also understand that changes happen slowly in higher education. The Reflect component uses MI strategies to notice resistance and work together with the individual faculty or staff member to redefine it. The mindset involved in these strategies involves gentle persuasion and unconditional support that focuses on enhancing readiness for change. Originally developed for addictions counseling, MI strategies have been notably effective in resolving ambivalence, which is often a barrier in taking the next step. In acquiring this stance, it is important to have “a strong sense of purpose, clear strategies and skills for pursuing that purpose, and a sense of timing to intervene in particular ways at incisive moments” (Miller & Rollnick, 1991, pp. 51–52). In assessment work, this component can be most useful when facing resistance from faculty or staff and understanding when they are ready to take action independently, if at all. Especially if departmental dynamics appear challenging, these strategies can be incredibly helpful as they encourage the individual to

think deeply about what would be meaningful in their assessment process. Much of the work in this category involves helping the individual to see and articulate this meaning, rather than the assessment professional prescribing an assessment task.

It can be helpful to remind faculty and staff that assessment is a learning process for everyone involved; perfection is not our goal, and each project furthers collective learning.

Enhancing readiness to change relies on a strong relationship between the practitioner and the individual faculty/staff member as well as the autonomy of the individual. By first gaining a thorough understanding of previous experiences faculty and staff have had with assessment, it will be easier to notice when they are contemplating their next step toward action. Instead of assertively advocating a new idea or suggestion to a colleague, the assessment professional recognizes this person as the expert of their program, curriculum, or course and asks them to identify which option they view as most beneficial, based on how they perceive possible consequences. This tactic invites the faculty or staff partner to weigh both the short-term and long-term advantages and disadvantages of a particular option that they believe will address their assessment needs. When their colleague is hesitant to adopt a particular action, the assessment professional accepts that this individual may not be ready and welcomes the opportunity for discussion to see the problem from their perspective, also known as rolling with resistance in MI (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). At this point, it is helpful to ask follow-up questions without any judgmental tone, to better understand their reasons for ambivalence, while also being careful not to persuade them toward a particular direction or solution.

The goal of building motivation for change is future oriented: plant a seed that will bloom later. One way of planting a seed is to highlight the consequences one is currently having that conflict with his or her individual values, a skill known as “developing discrepancy” (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). This strategy is consistent with academic freedom principles (“American Association of University Professors,” n.d.), as it involves frequent reminders of all choices that are available to the individual. An example of this sounds like, “This option is considered a best practice, but what do you think would fit best for your program/department/discipline needs?” Align assessment strategies as solutions for the problems that faculty or staff are already concerned about, while also validating their feelings and ideas. An example of this could be, “It sounds like you are frustrated with the results because they point to challenges with students in your colleague’s courses. How can we communicate the data in a way that meets your department’s needs?” When using this style it is important for the assessment professional to find out: (a) what are faculty and staff most concerned about as it relates to student learning, (b) what options have they already considered, (c) which choice(s) seems most plausible based on their identified costs and benefits, and finally, (d) what seems to be getting in the way of trying that option.

This way of connecting in the counseling literature is referred to as holding up a mirror. The practitioner is actively listening without reacting, while reflecting back the problem and potential solutions as they hear them with an empathetic mindset (Rogers, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1954). Reflecting in this way helps the client effectively understand their challenges and weigh their choices realistically and nonjudgmentally. Arnold (2014) suggests that this process facilitates a more focused awareness of available options and eventually leads to tangible efforts, yet the practitioner must be careful to not impose his or her needs on the individual. By entirely focusing on the faculty or staff member and understanding their experiences, the assessment practitioner is tapping into the individual’s autonomy and motivation, allowing for change to occur.

E–Empower

The Empower component in the RARE model represents a paramount goal in higher education assessment: to cultivate a positive and inclusive assessment culture on campus by empowering faculty and staff members to feel confident in their assessment practices. Rooted in positive psychology theory, the focus is to make the process of assessment more meaningful, or “fulfilling” in positive psychology terms, and shift our focus from strictly what needs to be fixed or changed (Seligman, 2011). This is not to say that assessment professionals should ignore aspects of the process that are going completely wrong; rather, the goal is to supplement the practice of identifying a hitch in the system with intentional

optimism and empowerment of faculty to build upon resources that will enable them to navigate a more meaningful assessment process.

The core elements of positive psychology align particularly well with the theories inherent in the first three components of the RARE model, i.e., humanistic, solution-focused, and motivational interviewing, and these elements can be applied to help assessment professionals better understand faculty needs. Some of the positive psychology strategies that translate well to assessment practice include the following: (a) focusing on what is going well, (b) building upon what is enabling success to help them flourish, and (c) PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment; Seligman, 2011). This is done by offering a balance of supportive language with encouragement that guides faculty and staff to feel more confident experimenting with assessment. It can be helpful to remind them that assessment is a learning process for everyone involved; perfection is not our goal, and each project furthers collective learning. When departments are overly critical in reporting their annual assessment results, the assessment practitioner can help reframe their narrative in the feedback they provide. For example, reframing feedback by recognizing strong methodology, complimenting well-written program learning outcomes, and gently raising questions that promote inquiry about student learning, can encourage departments to pursue their own questions in future assessment processes and yield more meaningful results. By employing the strategies of empowerment, nurturing positive relationships, acknowledging strengths and existing resources, and reflecting upon readiness to change, assessment practitioners can offer faculty and staff the opportunity to take ownership of their assessment process, which ultimately increases faculty buy-in and promotes their engagement in meaningful assessment practices.

Putting it All Together: Case Example

We understand relationship building and collaboration to be central tenets to inclusive assessment and have developed this model as one response to the gap between principles and effective practice. In having academic and professional training that integrates the theories embedded in our model, we also recognize the need to directly apply and further explain the discipline-based language and concepts embedded in the mindset we are proposing in our approach. Below is a case example designed to exemplify the value and benefits of using the RARE model through a common assessment scenario with an academic department.

Dr. Smith is an associate professor of sociology who has recently been tasked with coordinating the assessment process in his department. He is already overwhelmed with his teaching load and research projects and now he has been appointed to lead his colleagues in annual program-level assessment. Assessment duties in his department are turned over to a new person every year or two, and Dr. Smith has inherited the current assessment plan from previous faculty in his department. Although the student learning outcomes are well articulated and align with the overarching goals of his department, Dr. Smith is frustrated because he thinks the assessment process has been a waste of time and resources. In general, he and his colleagues feel that programmatic assessment is “yet another thing we have to do for accreditation, so let’s just get it over with.” Dr. Smith does not agree with some of the measures that they have been using to assess their goals. The department is using a standardized, content-based test and students are achieving above expectations on it; however, the students are not performing well on their capstone projects. Dr. Smith reached out to the Office of Assessment after attending a meeting facilitated for each department’s assessment representative.

Employing the RARE Model

Our primary task as assessment professionals is to ensure that the sociology annual assessment plan is effective in measuring their program learning outcomes. The ultimate goal is to help Dr. Smith and his colleagues construct a more meaningful assessment process that will provide them with valuable information about what their students are learning, not simply fulfill their regional accreditation requirements. Through the process, our hope is to support a positive shift in the assessment culture within the department. Below is an

illustrative example where an assessment professional could employ the strategies within the four components of the RARE model.

**Through the process,
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within the department.**

R–Relate. Dr. Smith is new to the assessment process and you are in the early stages of working with him. Building the relationship is essential, as you notice that he already seems hesitant to engage in the assessment process. Picture yourself in Dr. Smith’s position and imagine what would be frustrating about the assessment process as he experiences it. While you might not agree with his perspective you can still seek to understand his challenges and verbally empathize, which will support a collaborative relationship. Validate his perspective and validate his frustrations with a process that has not previously helped his department or students taking courses in the major.

A–Acknowledge. Build upon the resources of Dr. Smith and the sociology department. Start by forming allies/advocates within the department, including the faculty who work closely with Dr. Smith and already use assessment strategies in their courses; they may, for example, speak to the benefit of using an authentic assignment, or they can share their perspective of how students are performing in key areas. Become familiar with their program learning outcomes and potential measures that can be used, or are already being used effectively. By identifying the strengths of their current practices and their existing resources, you are helping Dr. Smith to see assessment through a different lens. Encourage his ideas for strategies and solutions. Ask questions to help him identify those resources, such as: What strategies are you already using that work well in your department? How can they be applied to this situation? Also, because you have developed a strong collaborative relationship, while helping to reframe his perspective of the perceived problem, Dr. Smith may be more willing to receive suggestions or ideas from you, the assessment professional.

R–Reflect. When you meet with Dr. Smith ask him about his most pressing concerns as a faculty member. Validate his frustrations and seek to understand his views without being negative. Identify areas where he and his colleagues have taken risks and seen the benefit with student learning (i.e., developed a new course with an innovative teaching approach that has increased enrollment in the major, etc.). Assess where and how the department seems ready to take steps towards action. Show the value of assessment for things that Dr. Smith has identified as a concern (i.e., in getting new sociology courses approved for general education requirements). Meet Dr. Smith and his colleagues where they are in the assessment process, facilitate identifying possible alternative measures (i.e., using rubrics to score key assignments), and assist in weighing the implications associated with each option. Seek to understand how assessment can help with problems they are already interested in and motivated to solve.

E–Empower. After establishing a positive and collaborative relationship, acknowledging strengths, and reflecting on readiness to change, the assessment practitioner can then continue to foster optimism in the assessment process. Recognizing productive changes, no matter how minor, as positive feedback can provide encouragement. Celebrate successes in the process and avoid focusing solely on what is not working. At your next assessment meeting with faculty members as a group, ask Dr. Smith to share his successes in reconstructing a meaningful assessment process for his department. Highlight faculty and staff accomplishments and improvements in their assessment processes to serve as an example of how assessment can be useful and meaningful. These strategies can also promote faculty empowerment and support the cultural shift on campus.

Concluding Thoughts

Our hope is that the RARE model can serve as a guide for assessment practitioners as they encounter challenges in their work with a faculty or staff member when trying something new, improving a plan or process, or changing direction entirely. We found the process of coming together to discuss our common disciplinary background in counseling and ways of grounding our approach in theory and research to be refreshing and professionally validating. It can benefit fellow assessment professionals from other disciplinary paths to similarly share the impact of their own professional backgrounds, particularly as their specific knowledge

and training connects to implementing principles of effective assessment practice. We hope that by sharing our stories we can encourage the assessment community at large to uncover the mindset and processes embedded in their individual professional identities to further improve how we understand the collective identity of assessment professionals.

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