

## **Abstract**

Assessment takes place throughout the collegiate context involving a range of diverse individuals and they need to be valued, appreciated, and respected for their unique individual, disciplinary, and professional contributions to assessment. Those working in assessment are encouraged to consider adopting collaborative, shared approaches to leading and accomplishing interdependent processes and outcomes, often described as *distributed leadership*. This article begins by articulating the significance of leadership for assessment, continues by describing how a distributed leadership perspective may be useful, and concludes by defining and promoting conditions to support distributed leadership for assessment. As a concept, distributed leadership has the potential to influence the individual identity development of the assessment professional, involve other stakeholders engaged in the learning enterprise, inform institutional cultures for assessment, and provide opportunities to strengthen the assessment profession.



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# **Distributed Leadership for Assessment: Considerations for Individuals, Institutions, and the Profession**

## **Introduction**

For assessment practitioners, there has been significant recent interest in identifying, describing, and clarifying the various roles and responsibilities associated with the identity development of these professionals (Ariovich et al., 2019; Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018; Polychronopoulos & Clucas Leaderman, 2019). Often this identity involves developing and deploying specialized expertise through actions such as using various assessment methods, analyzing findings, communicating results, facilitating change, navigating complex political relationships, managing projects, and engaging in reflective practice and ongoing professional development. Assessment professional identity development for individuals also recognizes and values the various backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives of those involved in this work, along with respecting and appreciating the multiple pathways taken by individuals attracted to assessment as a profession.

Although growing in numbers, importance, and influence on college and university campuses, assessment professionals are not engaged in assessment activities in isolation. Because students increasingly participate in a variety of structured, educationally-purposeful, and aligned learning experiences on their pathway to graduation, they do so in instructional contexts occurring both within and outside the classroom setting (Jankowski

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& Marshall, 2017; Kuh et al., 2017). This has resulted in broadened stakeholder engagement in assessment reliant on an increasingly wide range of individuals from all parts of the collegiate landscape (Hundley & Kahn, 2019). Indeed, as Table 1 highlights, there are hosts of individuals and contexts associated with higher education assessment.

Table 1  
*Individuals and Contexts for Higher Education Assessment*

<i>Individuals engaged in higher education</i>	<i>Contexts involved in higher education</i>
<b>assessment include:</b>	<b>assessment include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presidents, Provosts, &amp; Institutional Policymakers</li> <li>● Deans &amp; Leaders of Divisions/Units</li> <li>● Department Chairs &amp; Program Directors</li> <li>● Faculty Governance Leaders/Members</li> <li>● Individual Faculty &amp; Staff Colleagues</li> <li>● Professionals Supporting Assessment Practices &amp; Processes</li> <li>● Institutional &amp; Program Partners</li> <li>● Students &amp; Student Government Members</li> <li>● Alumni</li> <li>● Employers &amp; Community Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Institution-wide Goals for Learning</li> <li>● Initial Socialization &amp; Integration Touchpoints</li> <li>● General Education Programs</li> <li>● Academic Programs &amp; Courses</li> <li>● High-Impact Practices &amp; Related Interventions</li> <li>● Support Services &amp; Resources</li> <li>● Administrative Functions</li> <li>● Learning Experiences in Co-curricular, Community, International, &amp; Experiential Learning Settings</li> </ul>

**The modern-day assessment movement began in the 1980s with calls for greater accountability and transparency of higher education institutions from a variety of influencers: federal and state governments, regional and specialized accreditors, higher education governing bodies, and institutions themselves.**

Some of the activities in which individuals are involved in these contexts include identifying and documenting what students should know and be able to do upon completion of an assignment, course, experience, or program (Banta & Palomba, 2015); creating welcoming and student-oriented institutions (McNair et al., 2016); attending to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion through culturally responsive teaching and assessment practices (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020); and using data, experiences, and insights to understand, promote, and improve student learning and institutional effectiveness (Kuh et al., 2015; Webber & Zheng, 2020). To accomplish all of this, “leadership at all levels is necessary to create a student-centric culture that values evidence-informed interventions, improvements, and innovations” (Hundley & Keith, 2020, p. 2.). This article begins by articulating the significance of leadership for assessment, continues by describing how a distributed leadership perspective may be useful for those involved in assessment, and concludes by defining distributed leadership for assessment and promoting its use in various contexts.

**Significance of Leadership for Assessment**

The modern-day assessment movement began in the 1980s with calls for greater accountability and transparency of higher education institutions from a variety of influencers: federal and state governments, regional and specialized accreditors, higher education governing bodies, and institutions themselves (Astin, 2012; Banta & Palomba, 2015; Hundley & Kahn, 2019; Kuh et al., 2015). During this time, increased attention was being paid toward the issues of teaching and learning, including the real and perceived tensions between assessment for both improvement and accountability purposes, along with how to effectively engage faculty in the assessment process—work that continues today (Banta et al., 2015; Ewell, 2009; Maki, 2012). This was also occurring during a time when institutions began competing in a more crowded higher education marketplace, teaching

more diverse students, operating with dwindling fiscal resources, and increasing their attention to educational quality and value (Van Ameijde et al., 2009). It also meant the need to prioritize and sustain leadership for assessment by involving leaders throughout the institution (Gray, 1997).

Assessment leaders can be broadly classified as those who have primary responsibility for assessment as a principal or sole part of their job descriptions or those who have responsibility for assessment as part of a larger—and often related—set of duties (Hundley, 2019a). The former, as Nicholas and Slotnick (2018) noted, typically include “administrators or faculty with the following job titles: Director of Assessment, Associate/Assistant Director of Assessment, Coordinator of Assessment, and Assessment Specialist” (p. 6). The latter often include other colleagues ranging from institutional leaders to unit or program leaders to individual contributor faculty and staff members—all of whom contribute, either directly or indirectly, to assessment activities on campus.

Assessment in higher education requires broad leadership for its sustainability. Everyone has the potential to be an assessment leader (Hundley, 2019b), including *the individual assessment professional*, who works in partnership with others to design, implement, assess, improve, and document learning; *other stakeholders involved in the learning enterprise*, including faculty, staff, students, and employers or community members; and *formal institutional leaders*, such as presidents, provosts, deans, unit leaders, and chairs or program directors. Thus, assessment leaders at all levels will benefit from an understanding of leadership styles, contexts, and perspectives to inform their leadership approaches.

The impact of leaders and their leadership style is critical to academic and administrative effectiveness (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017). Thus, approaches undertaken by assessment leaders may be informed from the broader leadership literature. Despite its various manifestations, there does not appear to be a single, concise definition of the ambiguous concept of *leadership* (Smith & Hughey, 2006), although since the 1930s, “different views of leadership emerge, from inducing obedience, to moving the organization in a specific direction, to the art of persuading, influencing or inspiring others” (Lu et al., 2017, p. 640). As Gigliotti and Ruben (2017) noted, “leadership efforts and leadership outcomes may be planned or unplanned, formal or informal, may involve verbal and nonverbal messaging, and depend as much on followership dynamics as much as leader activity” (p. 97). Within the broad education sector, Simkins (2005) offered some emerging views of leadership, including the notion that leadership represents processes of mutual influence, takes place as part of a larger social system, can occur anywhere and be demonstrated by anyone, and is often context-dependent.

This view of leadership is reinforced by several scholars and has salience for how professionals in higher education may conceive of their work. Kouzes and Posner (2006) found that effective leaders understand the people with whom they work, including their roles, the function of their specific jobs, and the larger organizational structure; their approach was adapted by Smith (2013) to focus on leadership-centric considerations for assessment professionals. Other scholars discussed how higher education institutions are not as well-suited to top-down approaches to leadership (Bolden et al., 2009), instead preferring to build and sustain cultures respectful of academic freedom, autonomy, and professional expertise over those focused on positional power (Bento, 2011). Finally, Jones and Harvey (2017) provided additional context to leadership in college and university settings that requires new leadership responses to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Leaders in higher education should be encouraged to work collaboratively and in a participatory manner with colleagues in all areas of the institution on processes related to enhancing the institution’s effectiveness (Jones et al., 2012). This means having a high degree of respect for professional autonomy and disciplinary judgement while recognizing that engagement with this work is often context-specific and dispersed among various groups of people (Bento, 2011). Indeed, embracing a shared approach to leadership can help “create collaborative environments, innovative changes, and educational performance excellence” (Migliore, 2012, p. 37). This was corroborated by findings from Bolden et al. (2009) who indicated that “the majority of research on leadership and management in

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higher education concludes that leadership in universities is widely distributed” (p. 258). Given the collaborative, interdependent way leadership is—or should be—manifested on college and university campuses, a distributed leadership perspective may be useful in influencing the individual identity development of the assessment professional, involving other stakeholders engaged in the learning enterprise, informing institutional cultures for assessment, and providing opportunities to strengthen the assessment profession.

### **Distributed Leadership as a Useful Perspective for Those Involved in Assessment**

As a concept, *distributed leadership* has gained attention in the United States and abroad in the last twenty years in all types of organizational and institutional settings, largely informed by disciplines such as sociology and political science in addition to the management literature (Bento, 2011). Although there is not an agreed upon definition of distributed leadership (Thorpe et al., 2011), the perspective nevertheless “recognizes that there are multiple leaders and that leadership activities are widely shared within and between organizations” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). Indeed, distributed leadership may more accurately describe interactions between individuals and recognize how leadership qualities are promoted throughout the organization (Gosling et al., 2009). This is corroborated by Hundley (2019b) who notes that for assessment leaders in collegiate settings, such leadership often occurs by influencing others for whom direct authority may be lacking.

There are similarities between distributed leadership and the related concepts of shared, collective, collaborative, emergent, and democratic leadership, although their use varies between organizational and cultural contexts (Bolden, 2011). While distributed leadership is often used interchangeably with related terms, Spillane (2005) made some important distinctions:

Shared leadership, team leadership, and democratic leadership are not synonyms for distributed leadership. Depending on the situation, a distributed perspective allows for shared leadership. A team leadership approach does not necessarily involve subscribing to a distributed perspective in which leadership practice is viewed as the interaction of leaders, followers, and situation. Similarly, a distributed perspective allows for leadership that can be democratic or autocratic. (p. 149)

There are some ways in which distributed leadership is both conceptualized and implemented in practice. The main premises of distributed leadership are that there exists a group or network of individuals in which openness to leadership boundaries is encouraged and where varying types of expertise is distributed across the many, not the few (Woods et al., 2004). This is reinforced by Van Ameijde et al. (2009) who described such leadership in higher education as a process benefiting from mutual influence and reliant on both individual and group expertise. Gronn (2002) identified two properties necessary for distributed leadership: interdependence and coordination. *Interdependence* is manifested by overlapping and complementary responsibilities, while *coordination* involves managing interdependencies to ensure people and resources are aligned to achieve the required performance. Such interdependence and coordination represent similar themes associated with longstanding approaches to assessment (Banta & Palomba, 2015); emerging assessment trends (Hundley & Kahn, 2019); considerations for improving and scaling student learning (Fulcher & Prendergast, 2021); opportunities to engage students as partners in assessment (Curtis & Anderson, 2021); and the skills, competencies, and approaches identified as important to assessment leaders and professionals (Ariovich et al., 2019; Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018). Distributed leadership has the potential to embrace *all* individuals involved in contributing to the teaching and learning process. These include faculty and staff engaging in instruction, designing new environments for learning experiences, providing support services for students, and implementing professional activities that sustain an assessment culture (Jones et al., 2012).

Lest distributed leadership be viewed as the panacea for all that troubles higher education institutions, there are some limitations to this perspective. First, any leadership

behavior is always influenced by power relations in higher education—including institutional cultures that may not embrace a distributed approach; it simply “recognizes leadership outside lines of authority that are characteristic of formal hierarchies” (Bento, 2011, p. 23). Second, delegation does not equate to distributed leadership, nor does distributed leadership automatically improve conditions; instead, it is “the nature and quality of leadership practice that matters.” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 33). Third, distributed leadership does not remove the need for formal leaders in higher education; indeed, “strong, visible, personal leadership is appreciated when it brings clarity and a sense of direction” (Bolden et al., 2009, p. 275). Finally, simply adopting a distributed leadership perspective may not address other longstanding issues within higher education; these include fragmentation and silo mentalities, role ambiguity, slow decision-making processes, individual differences in ability, and unrealistic expectations of performance (Bolden et al., 2009).

Despite these limitations, there are benefits to adopting a distributed leadership perspective. Properly embraced, such an approach can improve “spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices” (Gronn, 2002, p. 447). Within higher education institutions, adopting a distributed leadership perspective has been shown to promote responsiveness to stakeholders, provide greater transparency and timeliness to decision-making processes, and foster greater teamwork and communication (Bolden et al., 2009). Moreover, Jones (2014) reported that distributed leadership has the potential to focus on respect rather than regulation, a trusting culture supportive of autonomy, improved conflict resolution skills, and an emphasis on collective versus individual activity. To be successful, distributed leadership “needs institutional commitment, support from formal institutional leaders, and tailoring to the specific institutional context and culture” (Jones, 2014, p. 139).

Organizational culture refers to the artifacts, behaviors, espoused values, and inherent assumptions of an organization (Schein, 2010). The value of assessment is reflected in the mission and the integration of assessment into campus processes; it relies on the intersection of culture, leadership, and institutional policies to shape assessment practices and approaches, including its role in improving student learning (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016; Kezar, 2013). This requires leaders to “situate the definition of culture in the context of the discipline and institution so that assessment is a meaningful process and outcome” (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016, pp. 55-56). Against the broad backdrop of a distributed leadership perspective, it is now appropriate to define distributed leadership for assessment, including promoting its use in various contexts.

## Defining Distributed Leadership for Assessment and Promoting its Use in Various Contexts

Embracing the perspectives described above and adapting an approach articulated by Hundley (2019a), an emerging definition of distributed leadership, in the context of higher education assessment, is as follows: *Distributed leadership for assessment encourages vesting approaches to and decisions about student learning and institutional effectiveness in individuals and groups using collaborative, inclusive, and democratic processes, including sharing responsibility and authority for this work with stakeholders throughout the collegiate learning enterprise.*

Operationalizing this definition in practice relies on three important considerations. First, distributed leadership recognizes that expertise and experience with assessment ranges from novice to advanced practice; this requires ongoing professional development, mentoring, peer learning, and sharing of promising practices. Second, distributed leadership respects the various methods faculty and staff members employ in designing, implementing, assessing, and improving learning opportunities for students; this rejects a one-size-fits-all mentality and embraces the diversity of our students and learning environments, including the complexities of student learning and the various conditions contributing to that learning. Finally, distributed leadership involves making this work intentional, pervasive, and ongoing; this requires developing the identity of individual assessment professionals, engaging stakeholders involved in assessment throughout the learning enterprise, promoting an institutional assessment culture, and advancing the assessment profession.

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## Developing the identity of individual assessment professionals

Individual assessment professionals can use their roles to demonstrate and advocate for the principles of distributed leadership in their spheres-of-influence, even if they lack formal leadership authority. In part, this is accomplished through development and refinement of specific, integrated competencies needed by individual assessment professionals, regardless of context: strategic thinker, resource aligner, information user, and relationship builder (Hundley, 2019b). *Strategic thinkers* consider goals for learning and align them to broader plans and priorities of the institution and the requirements and expectations of various internal and external stakeholders. *Resource aligners* ensure sufficient human, fiscal, physical, technological, and information resources are secured, allocated, and used appropriately to support achieving goals for learning. *Information users* insist on using inclusive and credible evidence from various sources and contexts to make decisions and guide improvements in support of student learning and institutional effectiveness. Finally, informed by a model from Clucas Leaderman and Polychronopoulos (2019), *relationship builders* work effectively with students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders in mutually responsive and supportive ways to develop, implement, assess, improve, and communicate the goals for, interventions used in, and outcomes of various learning processes.

These four leadership-oriented competencies complement recently documented ways to construct and support the identity development of individual assessment professionals as described at the beginning of this article (Ariovich et al., 2019; Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018; Polychronopoulos & Clucas Leaderman, 2019). Individual assessment professionals working in a context where broader leadership for assessment may be lacking have an opportunity to begin leading by example through demonstrating and practicing these competencies. In settings where assessment leadership is more well-developed, these competencies may help inform professional development opportunities and provide sources of strength on which to build greater capacity. These competencies can also be useful in helping individuals inventory their own professional practice and make changes to behaviors, equipping others with similar habits of mind, embedding them in job descriptions, and promoting a sense of individual identity development. They also inform how the individual assessment professional may engage other stakeholders involved in assessment throughout the learning enterprise.

## Engaging stakeholders involved in assessment throughout the learning enterprise

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Stakeholders involved in the learning enterprise—individual faculty and staff members, employers, community members, and students themselves—need to be engaged in distributed leadership for assessment, often working with each other and in partnership with individual assessment professionals and institutional leaders. Van Ameijde et al. (2009) identified several conditions to promote distributed leadership reliant on such a team-oriented, collaborative approach. These include autonomy, clearly defined goals and responsibilities, internal support and expertise, information sharing, coordinated activities, and inclusiveness. As Lu et al. (2017) reminded, the goal “should be not only on developing individual leaders, and building human capital, but also on developing leadership throughout the organization, to develop social capital and networked relationships” (p. 646). As with individual assessment professionals, the four specific, integrated competencies described above also have salience for stakeholders engaged in assessment and improvement efforts as these approaches can help develop the distributed leadership capacity of talent across the institution.

The *Excellence in Assessment Designation* (EIA) provides plentiful examples of how to engage stakeholders in assessment and improvement, often using the principles of distributed leadership. Launched in 2016, the EIA is a national recognition focusing “on intentional integration, meaningful alignment, and faculty-led assessment, thereby recognizing campuses that are engaging in the full breadth and depth of vertically and horizontally integrated student learning outcomes assessment” (Kinzie et al. 2017, p. 2). Campuses receiving this designation develop assessment approaches unique to their context.

As examples, Banta and Kahn (2017) discussed how to effectively engage stakeholders in a large, complex, decentralized institution; Fulcher and Sanchez (2018) described how a networked approach to assessment serves colleagues, programs, and students; Baham (2019) outlined the value of shared governance in this work; Horissian (2020) explained the need to develop a supportive infrastructure to connect people, functions, and resources; and Wilkins and Donat (2021) emphasized the importance of collaboration to foster stakeholder engagement. While these exemplars provide compelling examples of how distributed leadership is employed in their various approaches to assessment, formal leaders also play a crucial role in promoting an institutional assessment culture.

### Promoting an institutional assessment culture

Given the legitimacy and authority associated with their role, individuals holding formal leadership titles (presidents, provost, deans, unit leaders, department chairs, etc.) have a unique vantage point from which to advance important institutional, unit, department, and programmatic goals for student learning and success. Hundley (2019a) developed five imperatives for such formal leaders to embrace to promote an institutional assessment culture:

1. *Leaders must make assessment a priority.* This includes involving all the relevant stakeholders in assessment work; developing assessment plans that include goals for student learning; securing resources to support assessment, including time, collaboration space, and fiscal and human resources; implementing learning processes to provide students multiple opportunities to acquire and demonstrate competence; and communicating—in a transparent manner—to showcase learning outcomes to stakeholders.
2. *Leaders must attract and retain talent to support assessment.* This involves clarifying roles and expectations for assessment as position descriptions are developed and approved; recruiting and selecting talent with a commitment to assessment; onboarding new talent with interventions, such as mentoring and professional development, aimed at reinforcing assessment as an important priority; and creating ongoing conditions to retain talent by valuing their assessment contributions.
3. *Leaders must develop capacity for assessment.* This involves developing capacity for assessment at all levels of the institution—beginning with institution-wide goals for learning and extending to learning taking place at the program and course levels, as well as in co-curricular and other experiential learning contexts; leveraging institutional systems, processes, and structures to support assessment work; and promoting intentional opportunities for continued engagement in assessment activities and initiatives, both locally and elsewhere.
4. *Leaders must reward, recognize, and promote assessment.* This involves rewarding assessment by providing tangible resources that reinforce desired behaviors at institutional-, program-, and individual-levels; recognizing assessment by identifying and celebrating exemplary practices undertaken by faculty and staff members in support of student learning and institutional effectiveness; and promoting assessment by communicating the outcomes of learning processes and sharing lessons learned with others in both the immediate campus community and throughout the broader higher education community.
5. *Leaders must sustain a culture supportive of assessment.* This involves aligning assessment outcomes to planning, budgeting, and resource allocation decisions and processes; developing learning goals broadly and pervasively throughout the campus; implementing a variety of interventions at several touchpoints to reinforce learning goals; regularly assessing progress on learning outcomes at multiple levels and in

various contexts; using inclusive and credible evidence to communicate findings and guide ongoing improvements; and continually engaging all stakeholder in ongoing assessment and improvement processes.

Granted, these leadership imperatives may represent a tall order to promote an assessment culture that both embraces and relies on distributed leadership for its success. Institutions with less developed or emerging approaches to assessment are encouraged to begin by first making assessment a priority and aligning people, plans, and resources accordingly. Those working on campuses with intermediate-to-advanced assessment programs may find it useful to periodically inventory policies and practices—such as those associated with recruitment, promotion and tenure, professional development, and rewards and recognition—to ensure they are continually supportive of the assessment culture the institution seeks to cultivate and sustain. Senior leaders—presidents, provosts, deans, for example—are in the best position to influence these leadership imperatives at scale, while leaders in other settings—in individual departments or programs, for example—have an opportunity to consider how these imperatives may be adapted to their local context. Regardless of where these leadership imperatives are implemented, colleagues seeking to embrace distributed leadership for assessment will benefit from broader conversations on this topic, including those emerging from the assessment profession itself.

**To foster distributed leadership in the assessment profession, more opportunities are needed to showcase when, how, and where such approaches are effective.**

### Advancing the assessment profession

Individuals attracted to the assessment profession reflect broad, diverse, and growing audiences. These include *practitioners* engaged in the direct work of assessment; *partners*—such as faculty and staff members and external constituents—engaged in assessment as part of larger and related sets of responsibilities; *administrators* who champion and use assessment findings to advance a superordinate student learning and development strategy; and *scholars* who research, disseminate, and encourage evidence-informed approaches to learning, assessment, and improvement. Those employed in the assessment profession will undoubtedly need ongoing development and support to advance their professional identity concerning the “*what*” of assessment, including interventions, methods, approaches, structures, and processes, along with the “*why*” of assessment, including promoting student learning, addressing equity gaps, developing interventions to serve diverse students, and communicating progress and outcomes of learning to various audiences.

Distributed leadership also has an opportunity to inform and influence the “*how*” of assessment. In addition to the *Excellence in Assessment Designation*, discussed above, two other contemporary national assessment initiatives demonstrate how distributed leadership intersects with and advances important priorities in the profession. The *Grand Challenges in Assessment Project* involves the development of national and local strategic plans to address inequities in higher education, increase the responsiveness of pedagogical improvements, improve communication, and integrate planning around actionable assessment findings (Singer-Freeman & Robinson, 2020). This project exemplifies distributed leadership across the profession through its intentional involvement of national subject matter experts and local practitioners to advance important learning and assessment goals across the higher education ecosystem. Relatedly, the *Equity-Centered Assessment Landscape Survey* is a recent initiative representing “an opportunity to uncover the various assessment practices being implemented around the United States and Canada to support and address equity” (Henning et al. 2021, p. 16). The purpose is to equip assessment practitioners with models and examples to advance equity locally through adaptations of promising practices elsewhere. These national initiatives embrace the emerging definition of distributed leadership for assessment by focusing on student learning and institutional effectiveness; involving various individuals and groups; using collaborative, inclusive, and democratic processes; and sharing responsibility and authority for assessment and improvement with multiple stakeholders.

To foster distributed leadership in the assessment profession, more opportunities are needed to showcase when, how, and where such approaches are effective. National conferences and associations devoted to assessment can be a venue to equip individuals with professional development opportunities to sharpen competence and confidence around distributed leadership. Publications focused on the assessment professional are another



way to disseminate scholarship on how distributed leadership contributes to cultures supportive of student learning and institutional effectiveness. Finally, individual assessment practitioners can serve as mentors in modeling distributed leadership in practice. Indeed, while the initiatives described above provide national examples of distributed leadership for the assessment profession, most individuals will likely find the context of their work more local in nature—on a campus, as part of a program, and even in a classroom or experiential learning setting. In these settings, professional identity development is “about being in the world, but increasingly it must also be about being in a multiplicity of worlds or communities, and professional identity and its development is thus complex” (Trede et al., 2012, p. 378).

Assessment is similarly complex; the work is important and continuous, involving a diverse array of individuals from various instructional contexts. Those involved in championing and supporting assessment efforts are encouraged to lead by example by recognizing the significance of leadership for assessment, adopting a distributed leadership perspective, and promoting distributed leadership in their individual and collective spheres-of-influence. Our students, our colleagues, our institutions, and our profession will be better as a result.

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