

Measuring Assessment Climate: A Developmental Perspective

John F. Stevenson, Elaine Finan, and Michele Martel
University of Rhode Island
October, 2016



FRAMEWORK

5 Stages in Organizational Capacity for Learning Outcomes Assessment in Higher Education

1. Denial: “It’s a passing fad”
2. External demand: “Administration says we must; we say give us time and resources!”
3. Tentative commitment: “Leaders are committed; some of us are ready to follow.”
4. Full-scale effort: A critical mass accept the necessity; policies and resources are in place to help.
5. Maintenance & refinement: “We see the value and regularly use the results at all organizational levels.”

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WHAT WE DID: SAMPLE

Online survey administered to all department chairs,
3 times in 7 years

Response rate:

Fall 2009: 29 of 51 = 56.9%

Fall 2012: 36 of 61 = 59.0%

Fall 2015: 28 of 49 = 57.1%

In 2015, 18% of the chairs/directors indicated they had taken one of the prior surveys



WHAT WE DID: SURVEY DESIGN

Response format:

Likert-scale items

(1=strongly disagree -> 5=strongly agree)

Total survey items:

2009: 37 items

2012: expanded to 44 items

2015: revised and expanded to 52 items

One open-ended response

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SURVEY DESIGN (cont'd)

Content organized in six major domains dealing with aspects of progress in building organizational capacity for assessment:

- Personal attitudes toward assessment
- Campus norms
- Leadership commitment
- Infrastructure support for assessment
- Department-level implementation
- University-wide implementation





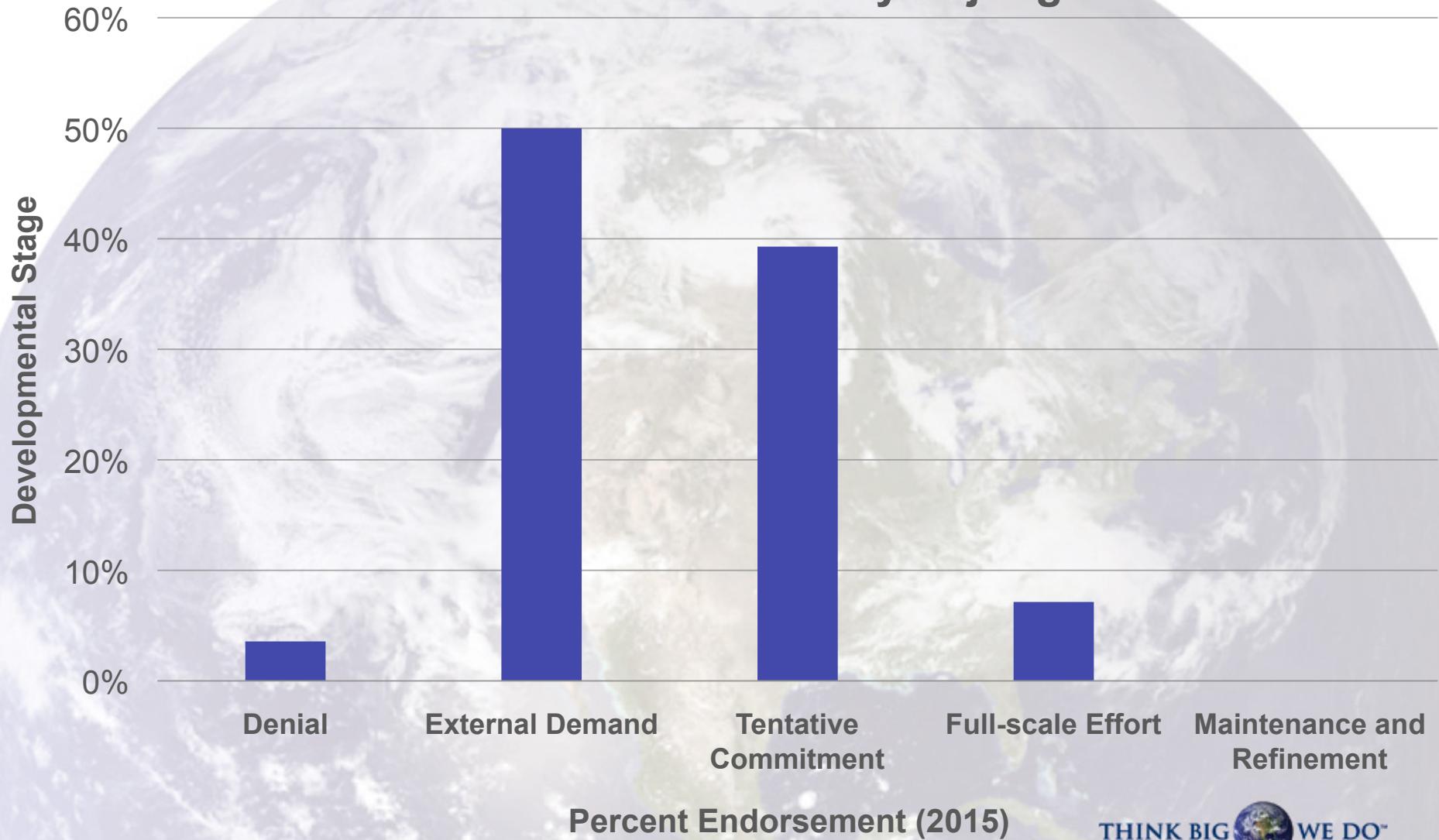
WHAT WE FOUND

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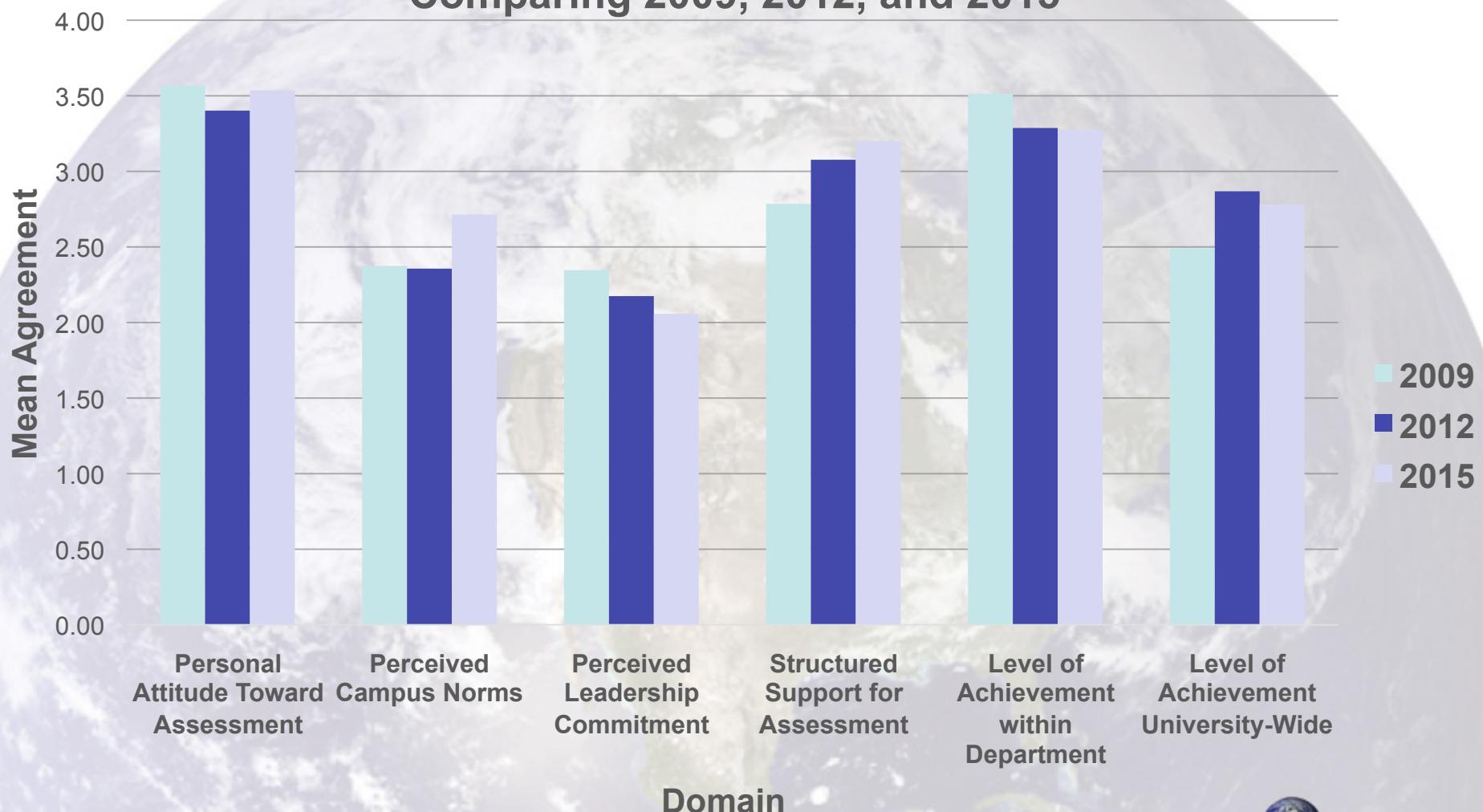
In which stage in the development of learning outcomes assessment would you judge that URI is?



Assessment Climate Survey

Domain-based Scales Averages:

Comparing 2009, 2012, and 2015



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STATISTICAL FINDINGS

- Domain scale Cronbach's Alphas: .61 - .81
- Campus Norms supporting assessment increased significantly from 2012 to 2015 ($F(91) = 3.94$; $p < .03$)
- Discriminant Function Analysis:
 - Using domain scales to predict 2015 Stage
 - Leadership Commitment plays the dominant role in a single function solution ($\chi^2 = 13.52$; $p < .004$)

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ITEM-LEVEL CHANGES ($p < .05$)

Campus Norms:

- Faculty resist assessment because they fear negative findings: ↓
- Faculty value transparency including disclosure of student learning outcome: ↑

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Leadership Commitment:

- Our college deans recognize and support the value of assessment: ↓
- The administration keeps track of assessment activities and results: ↑
- There are negative consequences for choosing not to do assessment: ↓

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University-wide Implementation:

- A majority of undergraduate programs have now gone through at least one cycle: ↑
- University-wide objectives for student learning outcomes are specified, measured, and reported on a regular basis: ↑

(Still only 11% agreement, but that's an improvement.)

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ITEM-LEVEL CHANGES

(approaching significance, p<.10)

Infrastructure Support:

- There is adequate training: ↑
- There are models for what is expected: ↑
- There is an office on campus that provides many kinds of assistance: ↑
- There is a helpful website: ↑

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QUALITATIVE COMMENTS THEMES IN 2015

- Workload burden
- Consistent with values
- Antagonistic to values
- Accredited programs should get a break

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USING THE RESULTS: ACTION RESEARCH

- Chairs “pushed” by the survey questions
- Assessment Office analyzes the results and participates in drawing conclusions
- Tailored reports to decision-making bodies:
 - Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee
 - Individual college deans
 - Provost and Deans’ Council
 - Chairs

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“GOOD NEWS – BAD NEWS”

- We seem to be advancing in some ways and regressing in others!
- The mandate is clear: external requirement drives internal top-down demand
- Chairs can see value inside their own programs
- The structures and policies are increasingly recognized
- Leaders don't seem to respect or care about the work or its results

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ACTIONS TAKEN

- Annual recognition event for assessment reports meeting peer review criteria
- More emphasis in academic program review process
- Dean of one large college increased structure for support and tracking within the college

Helping out:

- New general education assessment leap
- Reduction in reporting requirement for accredited programs

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CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

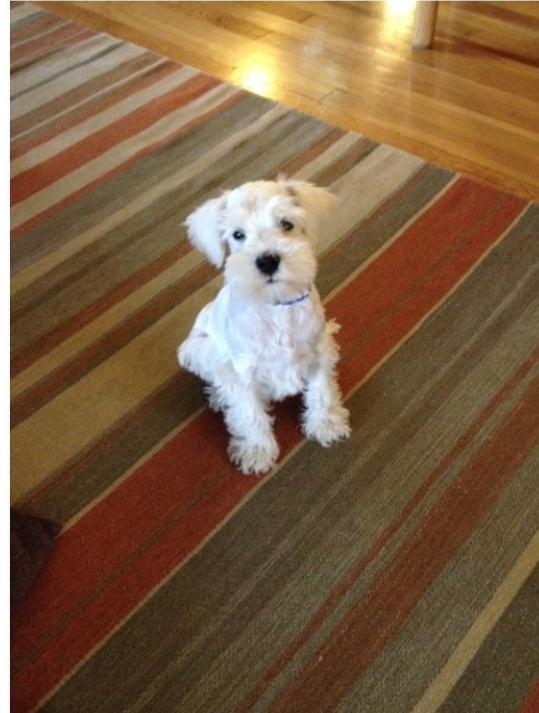
How to move to next stage (4)?

- Published literature: Leadership commitment to the value of assessment for internal improvement is a key to success in gaining faculty support and actual use
- Leaders need to “talk the talk” and “walk the walk”
- Infrastructure enables success but does not motivate it
- Peer leaders can connect to faculty values and model practical solutions

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THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



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