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Spokes of Change: Applying the Principles to ACCELERATE Change

Emily Braught Ph.D.

Author Note

Emily Braught <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4600-2916>

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Abstract: The ACCELERATE Assessment Principles for Best Practice offer a revitalized framework for advancing sustainable assessment practice. This article explores how the ACCELERATE principles operationalize the mechanics of change, positioning ACCELERATE within the broader landscape of organizational change theory and arguing that its ten principles function as both a roadmap and a catalyst for institutional transformation. By integrating a well-established change management framework, Kotter's stages of change with ACCELERATE, this paper will explore how the principles parallel phases of organizational change.

Keywords: *assessment, ACCELERATE principles, change management, Kotter's stages of change*

Introduction

A persistent problem in higher education assessment is turning findings into meaningful and durable change. Despite decades of exhortations to "close the loop," assessment often remains episodic, compliance-driven, and siloed from teaching and learning. Practitioner preparation and institutional investment tend to emphasize technical skill rather than change leadership (Gagliardi et al., 2018). For many practitioners, using assessment data to drive change is dependent on exceptional leadership or postponed until the next budget, accreditation, or planning cycle (Cogswell & Henning, 2025a). In other words, change is left to chance.

Assessment as a Catalyst for Change

Some scholars assert that assessment is not just compatible with change management—it is change management (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025). Historically, assessment provides information, helping institutions know what needs to change and how to change it (D'Souza, 2025). Scholarly critiques are focused on the extent to which assessment actually drives improvement (Banta & Blaich, 2010; Kuh & Ewell, 2010). Cogswell and Henning (2025a) argue these critiques stems from the compliance orientation of assessment, which makes continuous improvement "merely an ideal" (p. 24). Skepticism around whether assessment actually leads to improvement is compounded by practitioner preparation and institutional investment that regularly prioritize technical skill rather than change management (Gagliardi et al., 2018). For many practitioners, the process of using assessment data to drive change is left to chance, reliant on exceptional leadership, or postponed until the next budget, accreditation, or strategic planning cycle (Cogswell & Henning, 2025b). In short, assessment has the potential to act as a systemic engine of change, but that potential can be blunted by training, incentives, and organizational cultures that center reporting and compliance. Assessment can transcend institutional siloes by

drawing “threads” of data across units and generating institutional connections (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). However, for assessment and change management to truly power one another, assessment leaders must orient their practice towards people and processes of change, and away from focusing primarily on methods and reports. That orientation is precisely what ACCELERATE foregrounds.

Organizational Change and Its Relevance to Assessment

In theory, assessment processes have contributed to understanding what needs to change in a system and how to change it, therefore playing an important role in higher education change processes (D’Souza, 2025). Assessment processes align well with processes of change; however, scholars have frequently critiqued the degree to which assessment processes actually contribute to improvements and transformation (Banta & Blaich, 2010; Kuh & Ewell, 2010). In their 2025 edited volume intersecting assessment and change management, Henning and Cogswell (2025a) attribute this disconnect to the compliance-driven nature of assessment which renders continuous improvement “merely an ideal” (p. 24).

More and more, change leadership is an essential skill for higher education leaders, across functional areas, including assessment. Scholars describe the difference between change management and change leadership as a difference of scale change management is more focused on individual projects and change leadership is focused on managing ongoing structural change (Akpoveta, 2024). Higher education’s understanding of change management reflects an interdisciplinary body of organizational change literature. Assessment scholars have connected assessment processes theories of change management and change leadership like Bridges transition theory, Hiatt’s ADKAR model, Porter’s relationship awareness theory, Lewin’s model of change, and emergent change theory (Cogswell & Henning, 2025a).

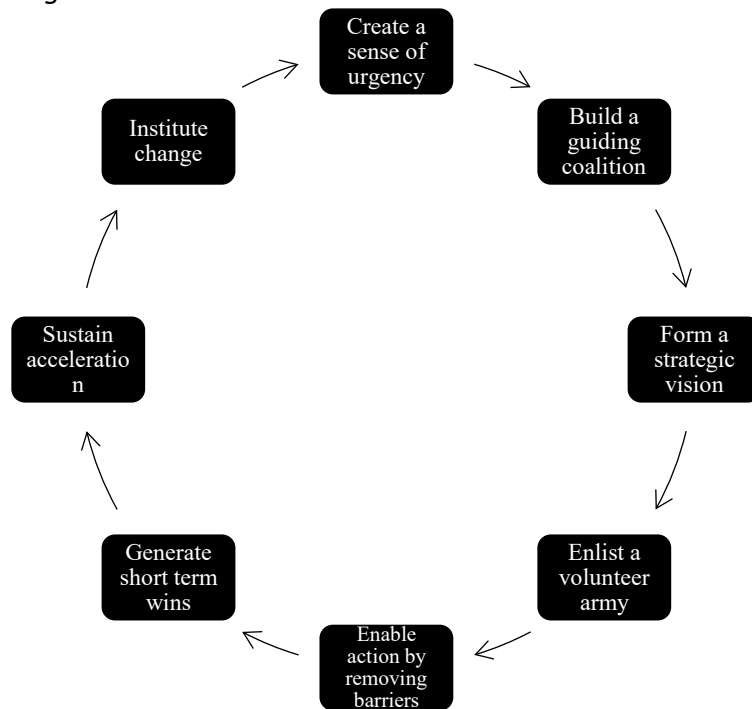
While most scholarship acknowledges that institutions of higher education are far too complex for one change management/leadership approach to work exclusively (Kezar, 2014), one of the most well-known models for understanding organizational change is Kotter’s (2012) eight step change model. Similar to the steps of the assessment cycle, it describes change as circular. Kotter’s 8-Step Change Model offers a comprehensive, sequential approach to guiding organizations through successful transformation (See Figure 1). It begins with establishing a sense of urgency, which helps stakeholders recognize the need for change and understand the risks of maintaining the status quo (Kotter, 1996). Once urgency is created, leaders form a guiding coalition—a group of influential individuals committed to driving the change effort. Together, this coalition develops a clear vision and strategy that articulates the desired future state and outlines how the organization will achieve it.

With a vision in place, effective communication becomes essential. Leaders must consistently and persuasively communicate the vision across all levels of the organization to foster understanding, alignment, and commitment. Kotter’s model also emphasizes empowering employees to act on this vision by removing structural, procedural, or cultural barriers that may hinder progress. This phase encourages broad participation and helps embed a sense of ownership in the change initiative.

Generating short-term wins is another critical step; early successes build credibility, boost morale, and reinforce the value of the transformation (Kotter, 1996).

Figure 1

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model



The final steps focus on sustaining and institutionalizing change. Kotter warns against celebrating too soon; instead, organizations should consolidate gains and use the momentum of early wins to drive deeper, more comprehensive changes. This stage involves refining systems, structures, and policies to support the new direction. Ultimately, the change must be anchored in the organization's culture so that new behaviors and practices become normalized and are sustained over time. By following these eight steps, organizations can navigate the complexities of change with shared language and a common frame of reference for managing change; however, simply applying the model is not a guarantee of a change's success (Appelbaum et al., 2012).

Kotter's framework has been applied often in higher education and is ideal for large scale changes in complex organizations with many stakeholders (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). In an illustrative case study, Lane et al. (2014) applied Kotter to demonstrate how change management principles can foster a sustainable culture of assessment. Wentworth et al. (2020) describe the use of the framework to implement a new student evaluation of teaching through case research, highlighting the powerful impact prioritizing a guiding coalition had on their success, and drawing attention to the negative impact of leadership improvements on their ability to sustain acceleration. Kang et al., (2022) examine how an interdisciplinary team applied and adapted Kotter's change model within a higher education engineering department and how the model's eight steps interacted with the department's structural,

cultural, human, and power dynamics. They found that the model functioned as a better guide when it was not followed as a rigid, linear process and instead is embraced as iterative and more aligned with the more autonomous nature of faculty culture. More recently, Harris (2026) applied case study research at a public and private institution and came to similar conclusions: following Kotter's structured steps is only a part of the puzzle. Harris (2026) identified the importance of emphasizing trust-building, communication, and stakeholder engagement as a part of each step on the staircase of promoting change. Ericson et al (2026), in a recent study about teaching evaluation reform, further emphasizes that faculty especially appreciate and respond to change management practices that are highly collaborative and work with shared governance and decentralized academic department cultures. Yousey-Elsener & Bayless (2025) discusses how one institution's leaders applied connections with Kotter's model at multiple stages of the assessment process. While Kotter's framework offers a glimpse into how change processes can work, when considering the framework's possible relationships with assessment, it affirms what many scholars have suggested of assessment in higher education today - assessment efforts go beyond data quality, and takes on the iterative work of mobilizing people, collaborating, and co-creating. ACCELERATE supplies principles that help assessment teams center practices that promote change.

The ACCELERATE Principles Through the Lens of Change

The ACCELERATE principles align closely with Kotter's (1996) eight-step model of organizational change because both emphasize change and assessment depends on relationships, shared understandings, distributed ownership, and culture as much as technical processes. While Kotter's model explains how organizations move through change, ACCELERATE identifies the assessment conditions that make such movement possible within higher education contexts. Table 1 illustrates how each ACCELERATE principle connects to one or more of Kotter's stages, revealing that effective assessment practice is deeply intertwined with the mechanisms of organizational change rather than existing as a separate or purely technical activity.

Several ACCELERATE principles align with Kotter's early stages of establishing urgency, building coalitions, and forming strategic vision. For example, *Aligned Purposefully* parallels Kotter's emphasis on creating urgency and developing a strategic vision because both focus on clarifying why assessment matters and how it connects to institutional mission, student learning, and improvement priorities. Similarly, *Transparent & Trustworthy* reinforces Kotter's call to build a guiding coalition by cultivating credibility, communication, and trust across campus stakeholders.

Other ACCELERATE principles align with Kotter's middle stages, which focus on broad participation and empowerment. *Collaborative & Co-Creative* and *Continuously Cultivating* reflect Kotter's emphasis on enlisting broad participation and sustaining acceleration by positioning assessment as a distributed institutional responsibility rather than the work of a single office or administrator. Similarly, *Energized by Expertise* complements Kotter's focus on building coalitions and enabling action by recognizing and leveraging the diverse expertise of faculty, staff, students, and assessment professionals, strengthening both the credibility and capacity of institutional change efforts. *Equity & Empowerment-Motivated* likewise aligns with Kotter's focus on removing barriers because equity-oriented assessment practices

intentionally address structural inequities that limit participation in decision-making or access to institutional evidence.

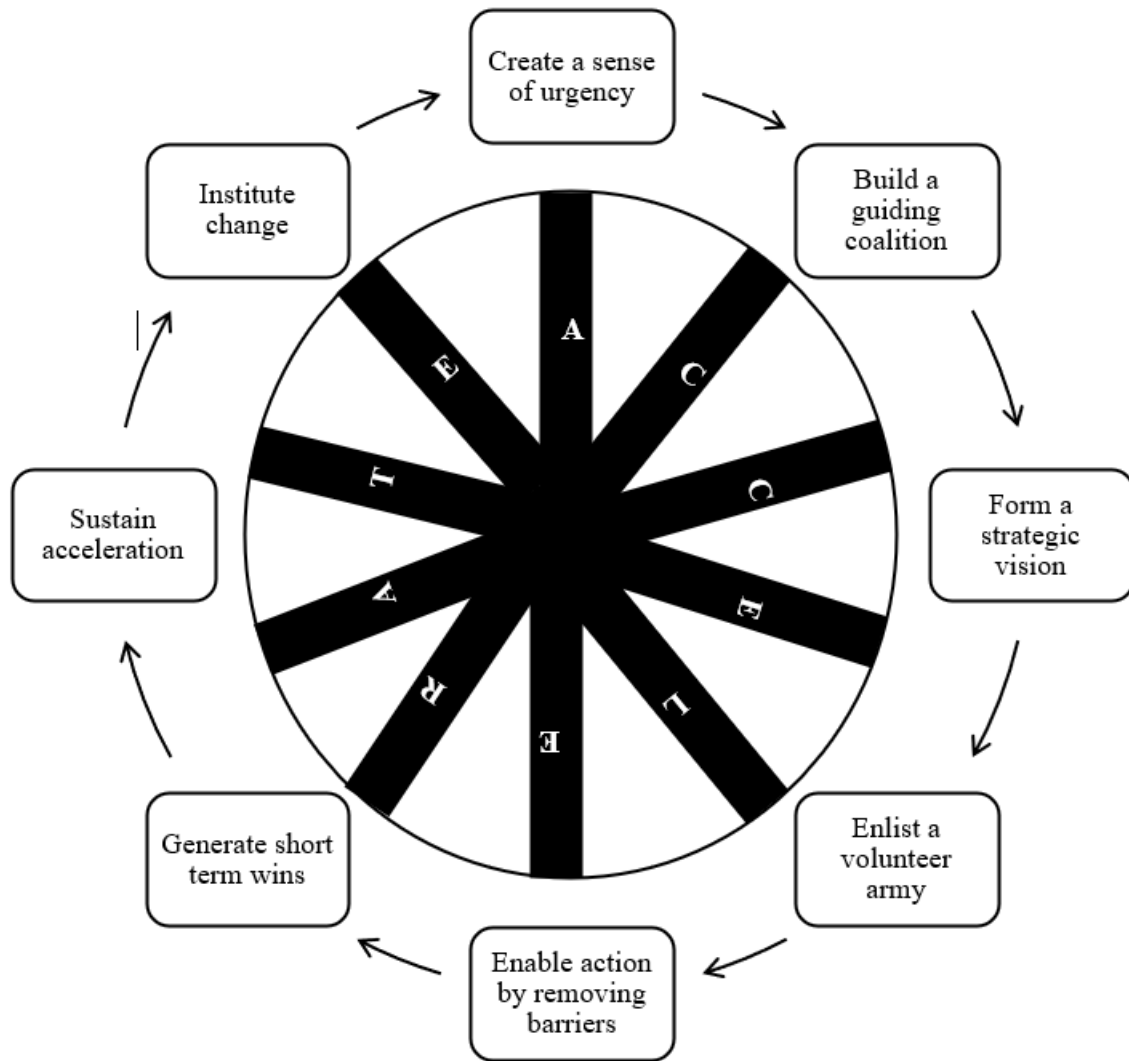
Likewise, *Responsiveness-Oriented* and *Action-Driven* parallel Kotter's emphasis on generating short-term wins and maintaining momentum by encouraging institutions to act on evidence in visible, timely, and iterative ways. *Action-Driven* further reinforces Kotter's later stages by embedding evidence-informed action into institutional routines, helping successful assessment practices become normalized rather than remaining isolated improvements. Finally, *Enduring & Evolving* mirrors Kotter's final stages of sustaining acceleration and institutionalizing change by emphasizing that assessment must become embedded within institutional culture rather than remaining episodic or compliance driven. *Learning-Centered* also aligns with Kotter's emphasis on sustaining change by ensuring that the shared vision of improving student learning remains the enduring purpose that guides ongoing assessment and adaptation. Both frameworks stress that improvement is ongoing and requires reflection and reinforcement over time.

As illustrated in Table 1, the ACCELERATE principles do not correspond neatly to isolated moments within Kotter's sequence; instead, they function across multiple phases simultaneously. This overlap is particularly important in higher education settings, where change rarely unfolds in a strictly linear manner. Together, the two frameworks complement one another: ACCELERATE provides principles for high-quality assessment practice, while Kotter offers a process for embedding these practices within lasting organizational culture change. Table 1 outlines connections across the two frameworks.

Conceptually, Kotter's change steps can be understood as the rim of a bicycle wheel, providing structure, direction, and forward motion for organizational change (See Figure 2). Scholarship detailing Kotter's application in higher education reinforces the need to apply the stages in a fluid – not linear – manner (Ericson et al, 2026; Harris, 2026; Kang, 2020; Wentworth et al, 2020) and change leaders ideally focusing on multiple stages simultaneously and revisiting stages as needed (Kezar, 2014). Kotter's phases reflect the forward, circular movement of change. It is through focusing on and accomplishing elements of Kotter's change process that the bicycle wheel might move. The ACCELERATE principles, by contrast, function as the spokes of that wheel. The principles act as load-bearing support structures that connect abstract change stages to everyday institutional practice. This distinction matters. Kotter's model explains *what must happen* for change to succeed, ACCELERATE details everyday assessment practices and relationships that make sustained movement possible. ACCELERATE addresses this gap by strengthening the internal supports that allow institutions to move through change without collapse. When spokes are weak or missing, change may still occur, but it is more likely to wobble, stall, or depend on extraordinary effort rather than institutional capacity. In this framing, principles such as *Collaborative & Co-Creative* or *Transparent & Trustworthy* do not correspond to single moments in a change process; instead, they distribute responsibility, reduce strain on leadership, and stabilize movement across multiple phases, bolstering the likelihood of success.

Figure 2

Kotter and ACCELERATE Bicycle Metaphor



Note. A=Aligned Purposefully, C=Continuously Cultivating, C=Collaborative & Co-Creative, E=Equity & Empowerment Motivated, L=Learning-Centered, E=Energized by Expertise, R=Responsiveness Oriented, A=Action-Driven, T=Transparent & Trustworthy, E=Enduring & Evolving

Table 1*Aligning ACCELERATE Principles and Kotter's*

ACCELERATE Principle	Kotter Step(s) Alignment	Why They Align	Literature Supporting Alignment
Aligned Purposefully	Step 1: Create a sense of urgency and Step 3: Form a strategic vision & initiatives	Purposeful alignment requires clarity on <i>why</i> assessment matters (urgency) and how it connects to mission and improvement (strategic vision).	Driscoll et al. (2021); Jankowski & Marshall (2017); D'Souza (2025)
Continuously Cultivating	Step 4: Enlist a volunteer army and Step 7: Sustain acceleration	Continuous cultivation builds ongoing engagement, momentum, and institutional capacity—mirroring Kotter's emphasis on mobilizing people and sustaining change.	Dixon & Jankowski (2025); Kezar (2014)
Collaborative & Co-Creative	Step 2: Build a guiding coalition and Step 4: Enlist a volunteer army	Co-creation requires shared leadership, broad participation, and distributed ownership of improvement processes.	Cox et al. (2017); Harris & Bensimon (2007); Lovett (2021); Penn (2025); Pollack & Pollack (2015); Yousey-Elsener & Bayless (2025)
Equity & Empowerment-Motivated	Step 5: Enable action by removing barriers	Empowerment and equity-centered work reduce structural, cultural, and procedural barriers to meaningful participation and change.	Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025); Taylor (2022); Fay (2020); Bandari (2020); Yousey-Elsener & Bayless (2025)
Learning-Centered	Step 3: Form a strategic vision and Step 7: Sustain acceleration	Keeping learning at the center mirrors Kotter's call for a clear vision that drives ongoing improvement and long-term adaptive learning.	Jankowski & Marshall (2017); D'Souza (2025)
Energized by Expertise	Step 2: Build a guiding coalition and Step 5: Enable action by removing barriers	Expertise strengthens coalitions, improves credibility, and equips people with the knowledge needed to act effectively.	Ericson et al. (2026); Harris (2026); Kang et al. (2022); Wentworth et al. (2020); Dixon & Jankowski (2025)
Responsiveness-Oriented	Step 6: Generate short-term wins and Step 7: Sustain acceleration	Responsiveness emphasizes timely action and iterative cycles—parallel to celebrating early wins and using	Dixon & Jankowski (2025); Galbraith (2012); D'Souza (2025)

		momentum to propel long-term change.	
Action-Driven	Step 6: Generate short-term wins and Step 8: Institute change	Action-orientation leads directly to visible progress and embeds change in organizational routines, a major focus of Kotter's later steps.	Gambino (2025); Cogswell & Henning (2025a)
Transparent & Trustworthy	Step 1: Create urgency, Step 2: Build a guiding coalition, and Step 8: Institute change	Transparency builds trust, creates buy-in, legitimizes the coalition, and supports long-term institutionalization of new practices.	Gambino (2025); Kuh et al. (2015); Taylor (2022); Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025)
Enduring & Evolving	Step 7: Sustain acceleration and Step 8: Institute change	Long-term evolution aligns directly with sustaining change and embedding new habits, structures, and cultures across the system.	Dixon & Jankowski (2025); Jankowski & Marshall (2017); Walvoord (2010)

Integrating Assessment and Change Management: Implications for Practice

Assessment as an asset for continuous improvement and change processes is possible, but it requires assessment practitioners to push beyond their role of implementing assessment and step into a space of change making. Assessment scholars have emphasized that contemporary higher education requires assessment practitioners to move beyond technical expertise and actively embrace responsibilities for institutional change (Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Walvoord, 2010; Cogswell & Henning, 2025a).

Returning to the bicycle metaphor introduced earlier, Kotter's stages provide the directional movement of institutional change, but movement alone is insufficient without the stabilizing support that connect strategy to practice. In the domains that follow, the ACCELERATE principles function as the spokes that distribute tension across the wheel of change and allow movement. To operationalize the alignments presented in Table 1, the following sections are organized around key domains of change practice that emerge from the intersections between ACCELERATE principles and Kotter's model. Rather than addressing each principle in isolation, these sections reflect and model how multiple principles and change stages function in iterative and intertwined ways in practice.

Vision, Purpose, and Urgency

Focusing on vision, purpose, and urgency reflects the ACCELERATE principles of *Aligned Purposefully* and *Learning-Centered*, aligned with Kotter's Steps 1 (creating urgency) and 3 (forming a strategic vision). ACCELERATE's principle of *Aligned Purposefully* parallels Kotter's first three steps by establishing why assessment matters, connecting assessment to mission, and identifying the strategic goals that will be advanced. Both frameworks begin with aligning, then sharing, purpose and direction across the organization.

In practice, establishing a clear purpose and sense of urgency means ensuring that assessment activities are explicitly linked to institutional mission statements, accreditation standards, and

program-level learning outcomes, while also helping the organization understand its shared responsibility to define, meet, and measure goals (Driscoll et al., 2021; Jankowski & Marshall, 2017). Leaders play an essential role in articulating why assessment matters. Driscoll et al. (2021) describe these actions as laying the “groundwork” by posing important questions and clearly communicating intentions in the language of faculty. At this stage, assessment leaders can also use data to demonstrate why change is needed, increase awareness of critical issues, and begin to mobilize action (Kezar, 2014). Kotter’s description of shared vision emphasizes the ability to “create a verbal picture” (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025, p. 29). Purposeful alignment across organizational goals, institutional mission, and program-level learning outcomes helps create this clear and understandable verbal picture for constituents (D’Souza, 2025).

People and Collaboration

Understanding the combined influence of the principles *Collaborative & Co-Creative*, *Continuously Cultivating*, and *Energized by Expertise*, in alignment with Kotter’s Steps 2 (building a guiding coalition) and 4 (enlisting broad participation) situates assessment and assessment leadership as relational. Kotter’s emphasis on guiding coalitions and broad engagement is mirrored strongly by ACCELERATE’s *Collaborative & Co-Creative*, *Continuously Cultivating*, and *Energized by Expertise*. These three principles attend to the human element of change, focusing on the people who are a part of assessment and change processes (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025).

Like spokes on a wheel, collaborative relationships distribute strain across a system. When assessment work depends too heavily on a single office, champion, or administrator, institutional movement becomes unstable and vulnerable to disruption. Cross-functional collaboration distributes ownership and strengthens the institution’s capacity to sustain forward momentum even amid leadership turnover, competing priorities, or organizational fatigue. In studies about Kotter’s application in faculty settings, scholars emphasize the necessity that faculty expertise is valued, that shared governance and collaborations are embraced, and faculty autonomy is expected (Ericson et al, 2026; Harris, 2026; Kang, 2020; Wentworth et al, 2020). Both frameworks emphasize that change depends on people working together.

While technical expertise is important and *Energized by Expertise* connects to expertise in technical and disciplinary contexts, this ACCELERATE principle also focuses on valuing the experience of faculty, staff, and students. Translating the emphasis on expertise into practice means intentionally building cross-functional assessment teams that leverage diverse experiences of all institutional actors, including institutional research, faculty governance, academic affairs, and student affairs practitioners. Building cross-functional teams reflects the idea that regardless of one’s role, everyone on campus is part of an integrated learning system designed to support learners (Penn, 2025; Jankowski & Marshall, 2017). Collaborative assessment processes can help generate institutional buy-in (Cox et al., 2017), particularly when intentionally designed to foster shared accountability among administrators, faculty, and staff for making progress toward improvement goals (Harris & Bensimon, 2007). Reflecting on assessment practices at Carnegie Mellon, Lovett (2021) emphasized that assessment efforts are more impactful when responsibility is distributed across multiple institutional structures and stakeholder

groups rather than isolated in a single group. Of course, even with distributed responsibilities and collaborative relationships, people can still face barriers to success.

Removing Barriers and Empowering Action

This domain integrates *Equity & Empowerment-Motivated* and *Transparent & Trustworthy*, both aligned with Kotter's Step 5 (removing barriers to action). These principles are discussed together because equitable participation and transparency function as core mechanisms for identifying and dismantling structural and cultural barriers to change. As Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025) argue, assessment practices require intentionally shifting accountability and participation structures so that marginalized voices are included not only as sources of data, but also as partners in interpretation and decision-making. Central to this work is data democratization, which moves assessment evidence out of restricted or centralized spaces and into the hands of those closest to teaching, learning, and student support (Hinds et al., 2021). Data democratization does not mean indiscriminate access to dashboards or reports. Rather, it requires ensuring that evidence is accessible, interpretable, and situated within meaningful institutional contexts. As Taylor (2022) demonstrates, when data are treated as decontextualized commodities rather than socially embedded resources, they can reinforce managerial logic and constrain practitioners' agency. In contrast, institutions may support equitable use of evidence by pairing disaggregated data with facilitated dialogue, shared definitions, and interpretive guidance that acknowledges context and power. When assessment information is shared transparently and accompanied by opportunities for collective sensemaking, they foster trust, agency, and more equitable participation in decision-making rather than reinforcing existing hierarchies of expertise or authority (Taylor, 2022). Further, Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025) emphasize that assessment professionals must remain attentive to who has access to evidence, how findings are disseminated, and whether reporting practices prioritize actionable change for students and communities rather than merely satisfying upward accountability expectations.

Beyond expanding access to assessment evidence, democratization requires intentionally cultivating the capacity and confidence of those expected to act on that evidence. As Banta and Blaich (2011) argue, people with even a small interest in assessment should be able to access relevant information easily and connect with someone who can help them interpret and use it. Data democratization therefore extends beyond making reports or dashboards available; it seeks to reduce bottlenecks, broaden participation in interpreting findings, and position faculty, staff, and other frontline practitioners as active contributors to institutional improvement rather than passive recipients of assessment results (Bandari, 2020; Fay, 2020). Organizations with more democratic data cultures are more likely to engage frontline employees in decision-making, foster openness to change, and diffuse evidence-informed practices throughout the institution (Brower et al., 2020), reflecting Kotter's understanding that removing barriers involves enabling people closest to the work to participate meaningfully in change.

Communication is key for instituting change. Kotter argues that it is essential to repeat wins and actions early and often (Kotter, 2012, p. 70). Indeed, focusing on documenting to meet compliance-based accreditation standards may detract attention from opportunities to communicate in more "maximally useful" ways (Gambino, 2025). Kotter conveys communication's importance not as a

singular step, but rather an element interwoven throughout (Gambino, 2025); however, *the Transparency and Trust* principle connect to the core purpose of meaningful communication. Transparency does not stop at simply distributing some relevant information in an email, sending a link to a dashboard, or including some relevant information on publicly available sites. Transparency focuses on going above and beyond, presenting maximally useful information to stakeholders in a helpful timeline (Gambino, 2025; Kuh et al., 2015). Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025) when describing the *Transparency & Trust* principle emphasize ongoing maintenance and a laser focus on communication, explaining the most basic of expectation being acknowledgement of the work and labor going into different stages of assessment processes across cycles. By pairing transparent communication with accessible data and equitable opportunities for action, assessment leaders strengthen both the trust and institutional capacity necessary for sustained organizational change (Hinds et al., 2021; Taylor, 2022).

Momentum Through Early Wins and Responsiveness

Responsiveness-Oriented and *Action-Driven*, align well with Kotter's Steps 6 (generating short-term wins) and 7 (sustaining acceleration) in part by emphasizing early evidence of progress, and sustained momentum. To maintain momentum, institutions can highlight and celebrate early assessment successes, such as improved learning outcomes, streamlined processes, or enhanced student engagement, through campus-wide communications and leadership recognition.

As managers of change, responsiveness goes beyond only reacting to learner needs to incorporate the full picture of faculty and staff within the system level context. Higher education institutions often experience concatenation—the cumulative layering of strategic priorities and the organizational structures built to support them—which can contribute to overload and change fatigue (D'Souza, 2025; Galbraith, 2012). As Dixon and Jankowski (2025) argue, adaptability is a cornerstone of emergent change, allowing policies and practices to adjust dynamically to evolving institutional needs and avoiding burnout among faculty and staff. Sustainable change and sustainable assessment, therefore, requires adaptability and responsiveness to faculty, staff, and students concerns.

Long-Term Culture Building

Enduring & Evolving alongside elements of *Transparent & Trustworthy* connects with Kotter's Steps 7 and 8 (sustaining acceleration and institutionalizing change). These principles are grouped to emphasize that sustained change requires both ongoing momentum and the embedding of new practices into institutional culture. *Enduring & Evolving* echoes Kotter's steps of sustaining acceleration and institutionalizing change. *Transparent & Trustworthy* reinforces these efforts by ensuring that stakeholders understand how change is progressing, where accountability resides, and how assessment decisions and resulting actions are communicated over time. After all, change is sustained not individually, but in community and as an organization (Kezar et al., 2023; Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda, 2025). Some leaders are quick to assume sharing quick wins means that longer-term changes will naturally occur, but they should be mindful to maintain a sense of urgency and continue to engage their community (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025). Transparency also acknowledges the labor of assessment by making contributions, feedback, and resulting actions visible, thereby reinforcing trust and sustaining stakeholder investment in continuous improvement. Some leaders are

quick to assume sharing quick wins means that longer-term changes will naturally occur, but they should be mindful to maintain a sense of urgency and continue to engage their community (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025). Both frameworks understand change as long-term and requiring reflection and maintenance. Sustaining meaningful change therefore requires codifying related assessment expectations within institutional structures, resource allocations, performance measures, and organizational purpose, ensuring that assessment becomes part of the institution's everyday work rather than a temporary initiative and creating the conditions for long-term impact (Dixon & Jankowski, 2025; Yousey-Elsener & Bayless, 2025).

Conclusion

Together, these domains illustrate how the ACCELERATE principles extend and operationalize Kotter's model within higher education contexts and for assessment and evaluation work. While Kotter's framework provides a structured sequence of change, ACCELERATE highlights the more relational and iterative dimensions necessary for implementation in decentralized, shared governance environments. Organizing the discussion in this way makes visible how multiple principles and steps interact simultaneously in practice, rather than unfolding as a strictly linear process. When guided by ACCELERATE's principles, assessment transcends compliance to become a justice-centered, sustainable mechanism for institutional improvement. ACCELERATE functions as both a roadmap and a catalyst: it offers practical prescriptions for how assessment activities recruit people, remove barriers, produce visible wins, and ultimately embed new practices into institutional culture. ACCELERATE thus serves as a bridge between assessment practice and organizational change theory, offering higher education a contemporary model enduring and continuous improvement.

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About the Authors

Emily Braught, Director of Assessment and Strategic Initiatives, Indiana University Indianapolis, ebraught@iu.edu