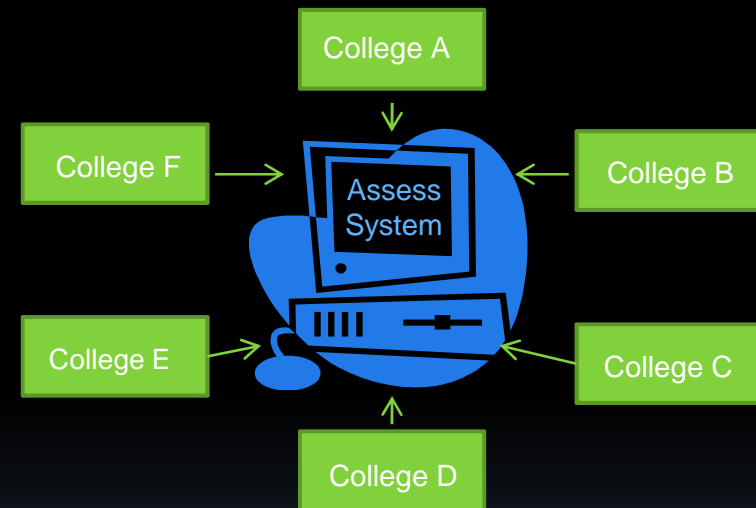


# IMPLEMENTING & SUSTAINING A CENTRALIZED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

2008 Texas A&M University  
Assessment Conference

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# Workshop Objectives

- Discuss theoretical frameworks for campus innovation and change.
- Explain what factors were involved in the adoption of an assessment system at one university campus.
- Describe strategies for implementing a new assessment system.
- Create a plan for successfully implementing a university assessment system.



# Theoretical Frameworks

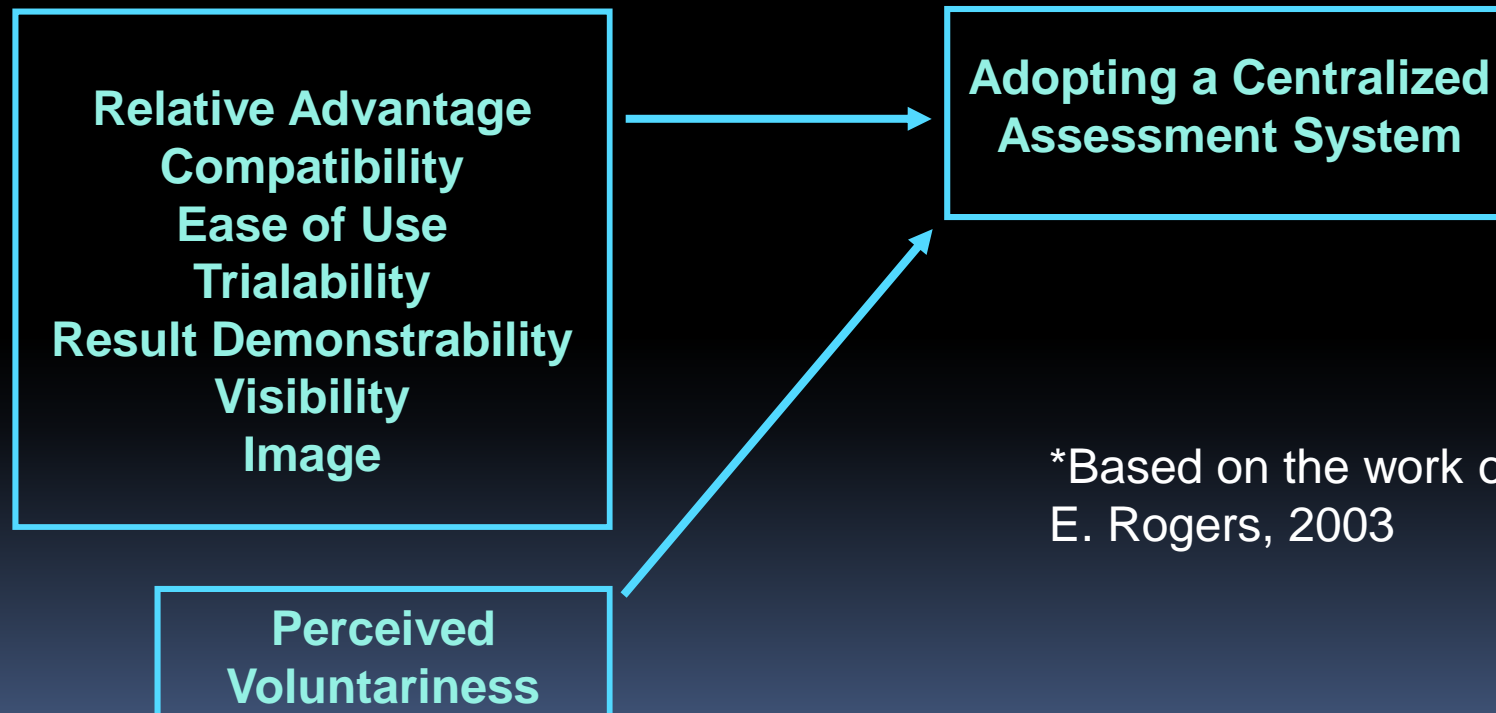
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# Theoretical Framework

Moore & Benbasat's Instrument for Measuring Perceptions Toward an Innovation (1991) \*

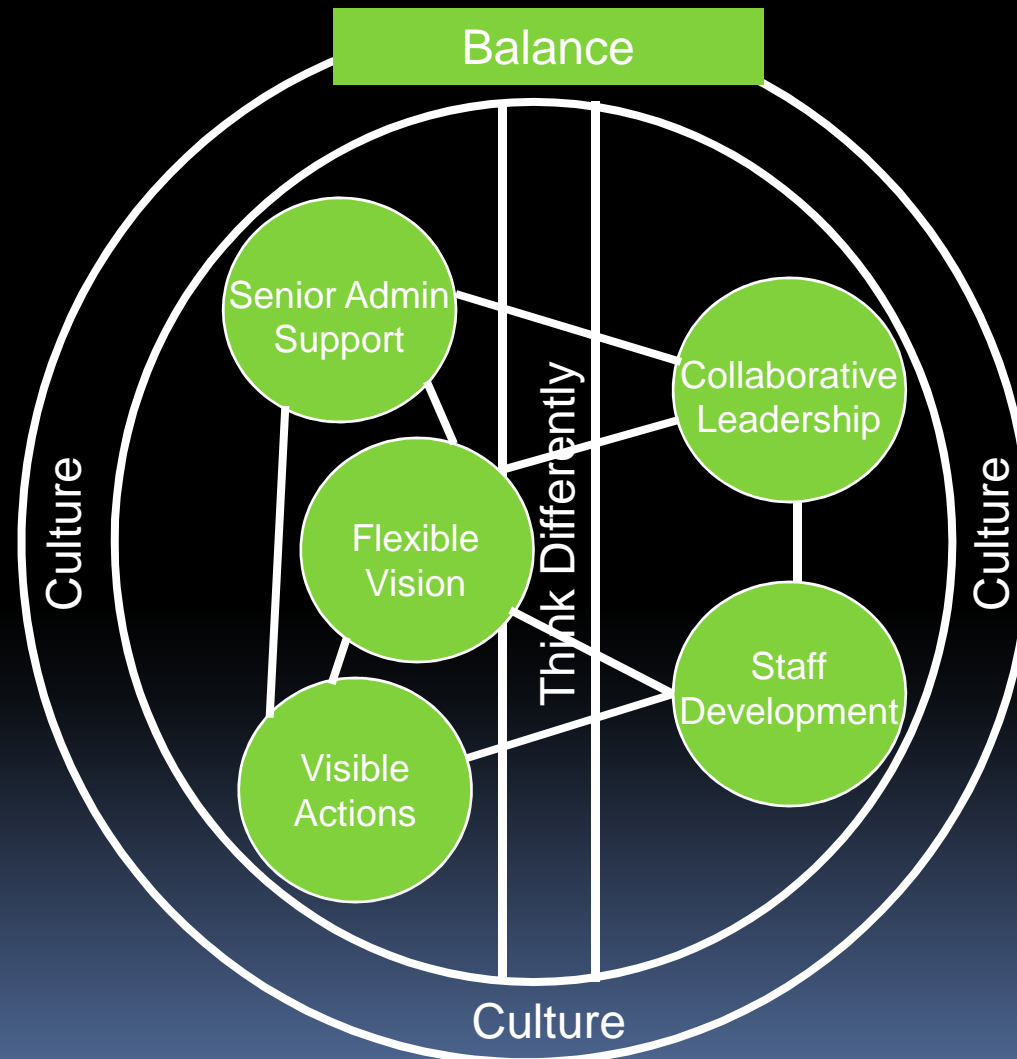
Independent variables that determine extent of adoption

Dependent variable that is explained



\*Based on the work of E. Rogers, 2003

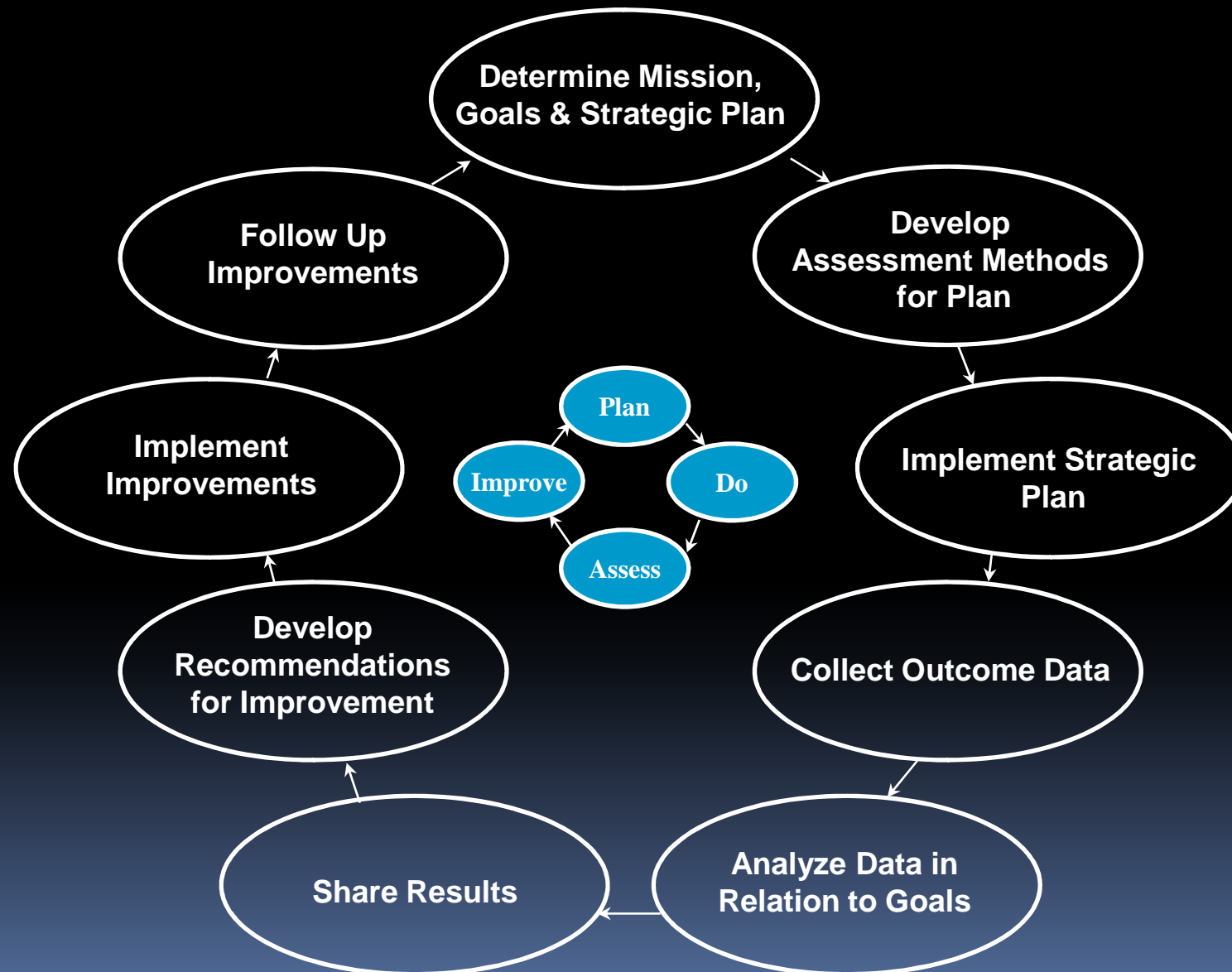
# Theoretical Framework: Eckel & Kezar's Mobile Model for Transformational Change (2003)



# Learning Organizations

- They “engage in an ongoing process of improvement by constantly evaluating their performance, identifying problems, trying various remedies, measuring their success, discarding those that do not work, and incorporating those that do” (Bok, 2006: p. 316).
- “Faculties seem inclined to use research and experimentation to understand and improve every institution, process, and human activity *except their own*” (Bok, 2006: p. 317).

# Learning Organization





# Case Study

The basis for rethinking implementation

# Case Background

- Study conducted to explore extent of and reasons for adoption of a centralized assessment system (REAL)
- REAL an online database with:
  - program assessment plans
  - annual reporting of results
  - sample instruments and rubrics
- Mixed methods approach used
  - electronic survey of faculty (n = 568, *Inquisite*®)
  - telephone interviews of adopters (n=9, *Digital Logger*®)

# “Just in Time” for Accreditation

- Director of Assessment hired 2 years before regional accreditation/ brought software
- Appointed an Assessment Committee (9 academic deans) to review plans and direct activities
- REAL had sample plans & instruments and “best practices”
- 54 depts posted 168 assessment plans online within 3 months
- Finished 2 ½ cycles and had a positive site visit
- Process languished after site visit

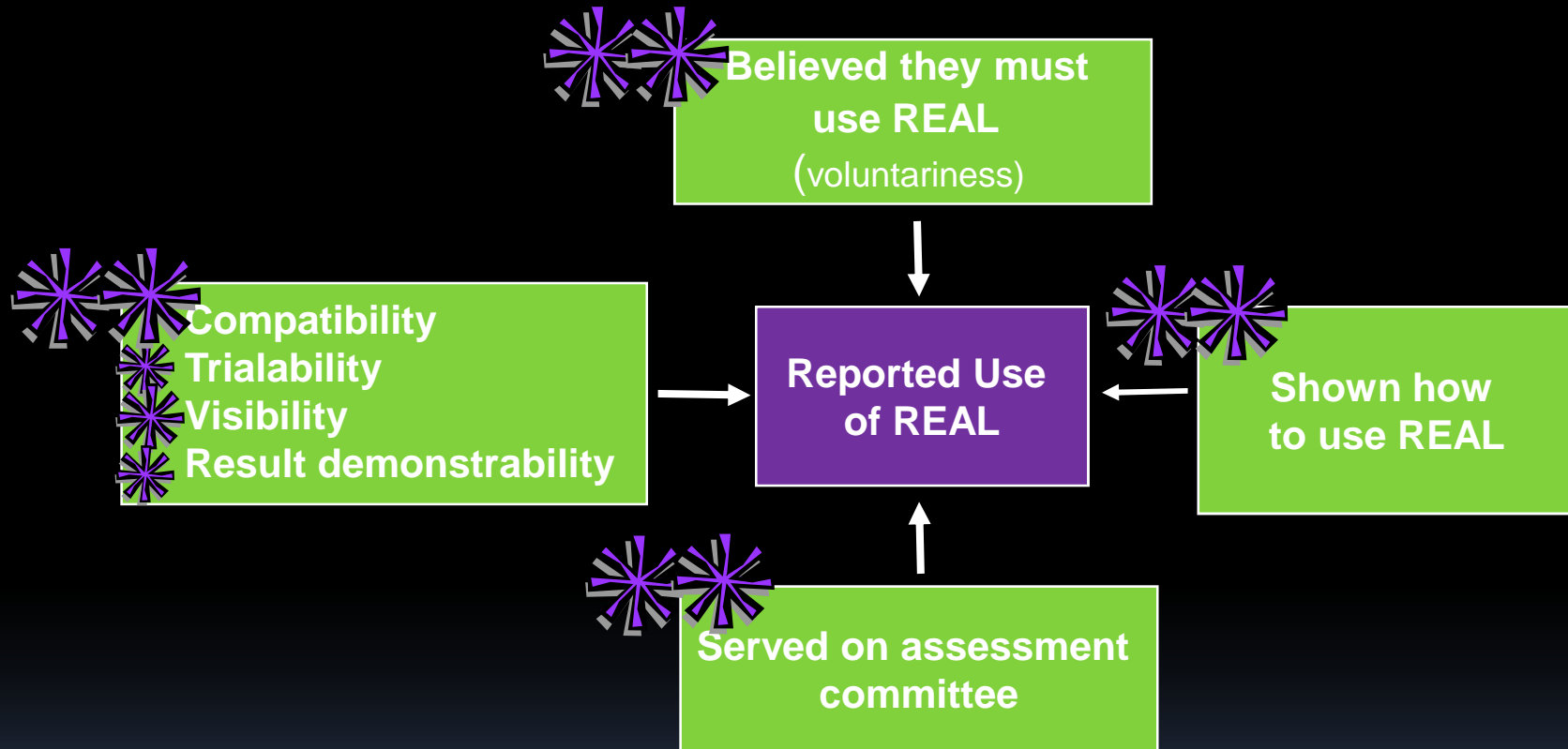
# Survey Results


- 40% had never heard of REAL
- 81% reported “never” using REAL (64%) or using it “1-5 times” (17%)
- 86% reported REAL had not helped their department improve teaching or learning
- 25% reported little training
- No incentives offered


# Survey Results

- Did not think REAL:
  - Had advantage over previous practices
  - Was compatible with their work
  - Was easy to use
  - Was visible on campus
  - Was a status symbol on campus
- What would increase use?
  - staff development, compatibility with faculty work, advantage, senior administrative support (in decreasing order)

# Survey Factors that Explained Adoption



 Significantly predicted REAL adoption (logistic regression)

 Significantly associated with REAL adoption (correlation)

# Interview Results

- Interview participants (n = 9), experienced users, believed REAL had great potential to improve teaching and student learning
- Director reported very specific impact
  - 2517 instructor dialogues, 768 learning outcomes defined, 534 evaluations of student demonstrations and 352 program improvements (2003-04)

# Interview Results

- Yet they reported:
  - REAL “not looked at or talked about” among the faculty
  - College deans, campus leaders who should have been key players in assessment, were not much involved with REAL.

# Interview Themes

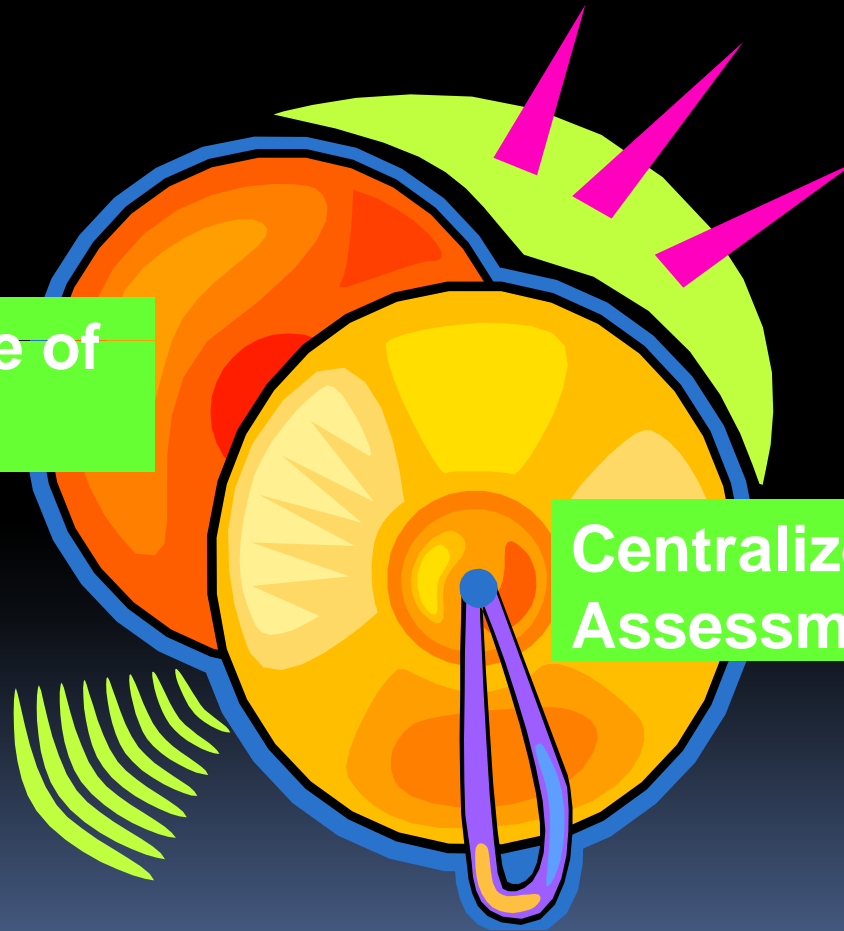
- Need for mandate
- Clash with faculty & campus culture  
(not what professors do)
- Not thinking differently yet  
(not for improvement, not feel responsible for assessment)
- Achieving the Director's dream
- Infrastructure problems (not easy)

# Culture Clash

Greatest barrier to adoption

Faculty Culture of  
Autonomy

Centralized  
Assessment System



# Culture Clash

- REAL work not valued like research
- REAL not related to teaching
- Work of administrators
- Too busy and REAL makes their work harder
- Uncomfortable with being evaluated, especially in class
- Already doing a good job of assessment



# What is REAL?

I am an assistant professor,  
chasing tenure,  
keeping up with coursework,  
participating in university service,  
and I have a family.

It's hard to take on new initiatives  
unless forced to,  
and then only grudgingly.

REAL is one of dozens of initiatives  
swirling around in a storm of issues.

It seems so relevant to those promoting it,  
but they should look closely at the work of faculty  
before making assumptions about adoption.



# Director's Dream

- Vehicle for systematic planning and assessment
- Vehicle for campus research & collaboration
- Organizational learning system
- Capture student performance with numerical rubrics
- Collective responsibility for improvement of the curriculum and university
- Transparency about learning for the public



# Conclusions

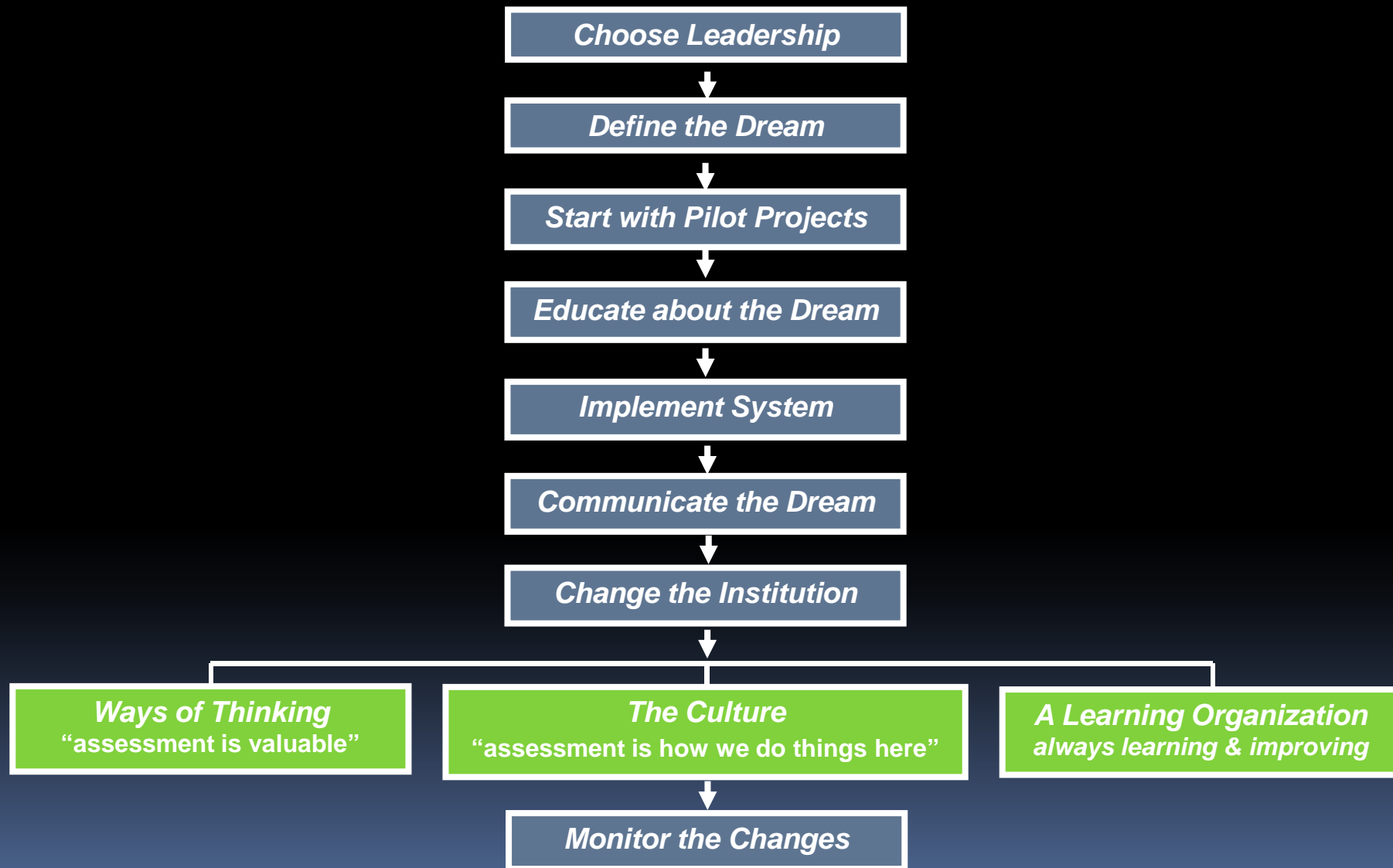
- REAL adopted by small proportion of faculty who:
  - Were required
  - Received training
  - Understood its value
  - Served on assessment committees
- Majority of faculty were not REAL users.
  - Not the fault of REAL
  - Incompatibility of centralized system with culture of autonomy
  - Insufficient strategies to change culture



# Strategies to Enhance Adoption

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# Making the Dream Come True



# Supporting the Dream

- Mandate system
- Integrate with policies and practices
- Encourage membership on assessment committees
- Use friendly software
- Facilitate collaborative projects
- Give research “credit” for projects
- Develop rewards and incentives
- Create assessment awards
- Give OK to make mistakes
- Put money behind it
- Make it relevant to faculty work





# Exercise

Create an Implementation Plan  
for a Centralized Assessment  
System

# References

- Bok, D. (2006). *Our underachieving colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Eckel, P. D., & Kezar, A. (2003). *Taking the reins: Institutional transformation in higher education*. Westport CT: Praeger.
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