



*AQIP Action Project Update & Review:*  
**Engaging Employees in Internal Communications by Maximizing Technology**

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*Prepared by:*

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**Action Project Title:  
Engaging Employees in Internal Communications by Maximizing Technology**

**Overview**

Lead: Jean M. Heyer, Director of Communication  
Planned project kickoff date: 08-01-2008  
Target completion date: 04-30-2009

**Primary AQIP Category:** Leading and Communicating

**Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:**

In the last year, it became clear in the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) survey, and focus groups conducted in December 2007, that employees want to see communication at the College strengthened.

**List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:**

College-wide initiative

**Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):**

Over the course of nine months, we will have the opportunity to introduce and refine the new blog, electronic newsletter and podcast.

**Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:**

The measure or indicator that will tell us whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goal will be the PACE survey. We will analyze the results of the survey in 2009 to see if there is an improvement in response to questions relating to communication. We will also create several questions related specifically to the blog with regard to satisfaction and usage. We will continue to analyze this survey over time to monitor continued improvement.

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**Annual Update: 2008-09-12**

**Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.**

The AQIP committee for "Engaging Employees in Internal Communication by Maximizing Technology" has accomplished a great deal in a very short period of time. We began meeting on May 14 and have had seven meetings since then. Our College President has been the driving force behind this project, which was initiated in response to an interest from employees regarding strengthening internal communications. "The Plaza" blog was created by IT staff in July and tested for several weeks by a random group of employees representing most College departments and divisions. We had a soft launch the week of August 18 to coincide with faculty members returning for fall semester. Gill Creel, a faculty member who is our E Learning Coordinator and also on this AQIP committee, has held six trainings to date to show faculty the blog and teach them how to post information and comments. Approximately 25 people have attended. In the blogs first four weeks, there have been approximately 50 posts and comments.

**Review (09-30-08):**

The update indicates that work on this Action Project began in mid-May. Considering that short time frame, the institution has made a strong start on this communication initiative that aligns closely with the fifth AQIP category, Leading and Communicating. In addition to holding a number of project meetings, the college created and launched a blog, designed for enhancing internal communications.

**Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.**

The six committee members working on this AQIP project have been very motivated and actively participated in getting the blog launched within just three months. As mentioned above, in the testing phase, several dozen employees, representing most departments and divisions, were asked to try out the blog. At the all staff meeting, scheduled the day faculty members returned to campus, President Phil Davis talked about the blog in his opening remarks. A handout was provided to all staff letting them know the blog was up and active. An all staff email was also sent. Trainings were offered to faculty and scheduled for future dates for other staff members. President Davis has already posted two Cabinet meeting summaries, which staff and faculty members have been requesting to see. AQIP committee members have been communicating with individuals, making suggestions for blog posts and encouraging employees to post comments.

**Review (09-30-08):**

In addition to the active participation of the project's six team members, this communication initiative involved a cross-section of college employees during the testing phase of the blog. Email, printed material, and training opportunities also have been used to introduce staff to the blog and to offer them ideas for productive ways to make use of it. In the previous section of the Action Project update, the institution indicated that a faculty member who serves as E Learning Coordinator and as an AQIP committee member "...has held six trainings to date to show faculty the blog and teach them how to post information and comments." The update also states that about 25 people participated in these six trainings, which makes for an average of 4 or 5 people per training. In addition, the institution reported that there have been about 50 posts made to the blog over a four-week period. The update does not indicate how many of those posts were made by individuals outside of the Action Project team or administration. Although it is too early in the implementation phase of the blog to assess usage, it seems a fairly accurate observation that the blog has not yet caught on among faculty, in spite of active faculty participation in the development and roll-out phases of the blog. Based upon this reviewer's knowledge of and experiences with two-year colleges in the MnSCU system, the somewhat obvious observation made here is that faculty leadership in creating buy-in and promoting usage of the college blog is key to its success. Another variable that comes to mind is the faculty union collective bargaining agreement, which at one point clearly identified email as the only officially recognized form of internal communication. Perhaps that is not still the case, but even vestiges of that practice certainly could present implementation challenges as the institution seeks to promote use of the blog.

**Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.**

Now that the blog has been up for about a month and classes have been in session for several weeks, we are starting a new round of promotion to encourage employees to visit the blog, post information and provide comments. The Communication Director will appeal to Cabinet members to create regular posts on the blog. AQIP committee members are also communicating with individuals who send all-staff emails and urging them to use the blog. A good example of this is an email conversation about student loans and financial aid. A discussion began on email and an employee, on her own accord, suggested it be moved to the blog. Gill Creel will also be going to department and division meetings throughout the College to encourage blog use and offer training to staff and faculty who need it. In addition, we are looking at ways to drive employees to the blog. One thing we are going to do is post the cafeteria menu on the blog. The first podcast for the President will be produced in early to mid-October. The first issue of the electronic newsletter will be published by November 1.

**Review (09-30-08):**

The update describes actions the institution has taken to promote use of the blog. As with any change initiative,

potential users must see a need for taking the time to acquaint themselves with the new processes until they become "habitual users." A presidential podcast, discussion issues, and the cafeteria menu are three examples of potential uses for the blog.

**Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.**

This project is so new that we have not yet established any "effective practices" that we can comment on.

**Review (09-30-08):**

This reviewer concurs with the institution's conclusion that it is too early in the project to identify effective practices resulting from the Action Project work. However, the planners and implementers have the opportunity to be on the look-out for emerging effective practices throughout this academic year.

**What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?**

A challenge we face is getting employees into the habit of viewing the blog on a daily basis. We want it to become the place where people go to find information they need. To be successful, we need to discourage people from sending all staff emails when the information provided would be more appropriate for the blog. We need to help staff and faculty members feel comfortable with posting and commenting on the blog. We need the blog to be an engaging and informative dialog, which will promote a better understanding of the work of different units and build interpersonal relationships. As indicated in our commitment declaration, it is our intention that the employee-driven and moderated blog will result in employees having more input into:

- Identifying and supporting strategic directions and initiatives
- Responding to emerging college issue
- Developing strategies to improve College policies and procedures.

Our Strategic Planning and Accountability Department is planning on using the blog in the near future to gather information in preparation for the College's strategy and AQIP quality visit. A simple example of an emerging issue has already occurred and the blog played a useful role: During recent construction on campus, the employee lounge was temporarily shut down. A conversation began on the blog concerning people's disappointment about not having a private place to go to eat lunch or take a break. A number of people posted comments, which quickly led to an employee from Operations offering a temporary spot to relocate the lounge. We have not yet employed the blog for developing strategies to improve College policies and procedures, but still consider this an important purpose for the blog.

**Review (09-30-08):**

The update provided here offers a reminder that change is incremental. As noted in an earlier section, the college already has begun to identify a number of ways to lead potential users to the blog. Team members' modeling use of the blog could also serve as an effective means of "recruiting" users. Although it may seem an obvious point, levels of use will vary. Some employees may be blog readers long before they feel comfortable with posting on the blog or long before they feel the need to post to the blog. The initial project description indicates that the "...measure or indicator that will tell us whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goal will be the PACE survey." However, tracking the number of hits to the blog site may serve as a formative measure of initial blog site usage.

**If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?**

Since this project is still in its early stages, we don't need help stimulating progress at this time.

**Review (09-30-08):**

Global judgment: The institution is making reasonable progress.