The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Minneapolis Community and Technical College

Project Details

Title	Effective Institutional Structures and Practices for Internal Communication and Institutional Decision-making	**Status**	REVIEWED
Category	5-Leading and Communicating	**Updated**	09-13-2010
Timeline		**Reviewed**	10-04-2010
Planned Project Kickoff	03-10-2010	**Created**	03-05-2010
Target Completion	12-31-2011	**Version**	1 of 1

1: Project Goal

A: The questions which this Action Project will address are the following:

1. What are the most effective lines of communication across the college to:

- to obtain information,
- provide input on important issues, and
- understand campus decision-making processes

1. How can existing structures and resources be used more effectively to increase communication and involvement with decision-making and campus initiatives?
2. What new structures and resources should be put in place to improve communication and involvement in decision-making initiatives?

2: Reasons For Project

A: Over the past two years, MCTC has engaged in an on-going conversation about the means to improve internal communication about important college issues and decisions. In response to that conversation, an Action Project, *Engaging Employees in Internal Communications by Maximizing Technology*, was initiated in the spring of 2008. The primary outcome of that project was a College Blog. As reported in the September 2009 Action Project Update, the employee engagement with the blog was minimal and the Action Project Team concluded that additional internal communications tactics needed to be developed. The blog in and of itself did not solve the internal communications issues. Over the past ten months, the topic of internal communication and decision-making has continued to be an area of interest. Improving internal communications was the primary focus of the AQIP Strategy Forum team (November 2008), a faculty development day (February 2009), an Excluded Administrators' meeting (April 2009), a follow-up Excluded Administrators' retreat (July 2009), and a faculty break-out session during Fall Opening Days (August 2009).

The result of all this conversation is the conclusion that explicit, transparent communication and decision-making processes will help to advance the goal of effective communication across all units of the College. Hence, this Action Project is an important priority for all College constituents.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All organization areas and all employees at the College will be affected by this Action Project.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: First and foremost will be improved communication tools and increased understanding about decision-making at the College. Although the focus of much of the discussion thus far has been about administrative processes and responsibility, this action project will impact and require process changes from all leadership and organizational groups at the College - including unions, employee units, and faculty coordinators.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The timeframe for this project expands a year-long timeframe. This will allow time for information-gathering in preparation for developing and proposing solutions for improved communication across the campus.
Spring Semester 2010:

- Process map current processes for communication and decision-making. Answer the question: What is occurring now in the college related to decision-making and communications? What committees are in place that make decisions and how are recommendations communicated? How are decisions communicated?
- Create a decision-making matrix for major decisions at the College (Map out how some decisions have been made in the past two years. Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.
- Disseminate AQIP leading and communicating questions and answers to the college
- Create a communication/decision-making checklist that outlines steps to follow in recommending and communicating decisions. A communication checklist that serves as a template/tool for leaders and employee groups to keep them informed and to assist them in understanding how communication should flow in decision-making groups on campus;
    - Ensure that proposed matrices are vetted through various leadership groups and with online tool
    - Identify proposed improvements for communication through technology
    - Identify metrics for assessing success of recommendations.

Opening Days Fall 2010

- Present college-wide conversation on the communication tools, decision-making matrix, and communications checklist.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: This Action Project will reside in an online eFolio (electronic portfolio) which will allow for interactive communication to all employees. The committee will take recommendations to important meetings (cabinet, union, etc.) to create awareness and get feedback. eFolio tool will be used to provide updates and elicit input.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The overall outcome for this Action Project is increased employee satisfaction through the PACE Survey. At the most concrete level, the primary outcomes of this action project will be:

- The College community indicates, through an employee survey, which areas of our communication strategies are working and which areas need improvement.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The Internal Communication Action Project (ICAP) Committee met nine times throughout the year to examine the previous year's efforts in this area, to develop a commitment declaration and to roll out some of the plans.

The current ICAP Committee recognized that different things have been tried; none of them delivering the "silver bullet." Internal communications is an ongoing process and needs to have a holistic plan, rather than singular tactics. At the same time, faculty and staff wanted some concrete tools. As a result, this year, the ICAP committee created the following resources to address and improve employee satisfaction and communication:
1. Decision-making Checklist for all key institutional functions (i.e., budget, hiring, programs, policies, facilities, etc.) so that the College community better understands how decisions are made at the institution,
2. Best practice guidelines for minutes/notes for all college-wide groups, including an expectation that minutes/notes will be posted and available electronically,

3. A bi-weekly employee e-mail newsletter, and
4. Modified Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) Survey questions related to communication and decision-making to serve as a benchmark to be trended for at least 3 years.

The ICAP committee has recommended that the following considerations be met to address and improve employee satisfaction and communication:
1. A new website and employee intranet (to launch by January 2011),
2. Track trends for PACE results related to communication and decision-making,
3. All groups on campus use the resources created and shared by the ICAP committee, and
4. Bring in a third party consultant to identify why we have our results to the PACE survey, including structural dissatisfaction and communication inefficiencies.

On a parallel track, coinciding with the work of the ICAP Committee, was the administrative decision regarding the organizational leadership structure. Two initiatives that were launched in July and August were:
• Reorganization of administrative leadership structure, eliminating the President's Cabinet and creating a 21 member Leadership Council that includes all 18 college administrators as well as the director of marketing and communications, the director of finance and the special assistant to the president for diversity and anti-racism initiatives, and
• A more intentional approach for input/communication through the Executive Committee and Faculty Coordinators.

2: Institution Involvement

A: ICAP held regular meetings, communicated findings through e-mails and All-College meetings. The College has been its own best example in keeping these issues front and center and creating a motivation for continued exploration of solutions.

3: Next Steps

A: The ICAP committee will continue to meet through November 2010 to further analyze the PACE survey questions that will become the benchmark for the 3 year trend in employee satisfaction and communication, to finalize the resources created for use by the campus groups and find a place to house the resources that is easily accessible for everyone, and to create the list of the necessary areas to analyze and the desired outcomes of bringing in a third party consultant to campus.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Share practices that could be adopted or adapted at other institutions:

- Internal newsletter
- E-mail protocol for internal announcements
- Reorganization of College leadership
- Meeting minute template

5: Project Challenges

A: One of the main challenges is the belief that this is solely a communications issue. However, the ICAP committee believe it is much larger than this.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The Institution should be commended on its progress during the most recent reporting cycle. During this time, the successfully completed work addressing objectives outlined within their original Project Declaration including the development of a decision checklist, best practice guidelines for meeting minutes/notes, a digitally-based employee newsletter, and a modified PACE Survey. Each of these items will certainly lend themselves to assisting the Institution in addressing their primary project goal(s) of, "...establishing effective lines of communication.", "...making more effective use of existing organizational structures/resources.", and/or "...identifying new structures and resources to improve communication and institutional decision making." The Institution has clearly demonstrated a degree of **focus** with respect to elements of the initial project goals.

What is not entirely clear is whether the Institution engaged in "...communication and decision-making process mapping" or "...developed a decision-making matrix [see 'rationale' section in the initial Project Declaration]" to assist in the development of the Decision-Making Checklist?

In addition, the ICAP Committee has made some strong recommendations for further development including: 1) the development of a new intranet site, 2) monitoring satisfaction survey trends, 3) full deployment of the new tools and resources made available by the ICAP Committee, and 4) the engagement of a third-party consultant to evaluate institutional communication and/or decision-making. These recommendations suggest that the institution is keen on providing its internal stakeholder groups with **information**, is **measuring effectiveness** and may use results for **continuous improvement**, is intent on being transparent with the newly created resources, and open to **involving** outside perspectives to optimize the results of their project.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The engagement of the appropriate key stakeholder groups is essential to the socialization and institutionalization of changes to behavior, process, culture, etc. It appears that the MCTC has done an adequate job in the initial deployment of these changes across many of its organizational stakeholders and sharing information through various channels including meetings and emails. To ensure that the changes are sustainable, it is essential that the messages are reinforced and supported via executive administration on an on-going basis.

3: Next Steps

A: In regard to next steps, the Institution has demonstrated a degree of **foresight** in terms of planning ahead to evaluate, **measure for effectiveness**, and continuously **improve** its newly deployed processes/tools. As one reflects upon the initial project goal(s) as outlined in the initial Project Declaration, three measures may be immediately apparent. These metrics include determining whether or not the most effective channels of communication have indeed been selected/deployed, evaluating whether existing structures/resources are being optimized to improve communication and decision-making, and assessing whether or not new structures and resources that have been deployed are further improving institutional communication and/or decision making. For example, MCTC may consider assessing the Institution's decision-making and communication processes in light of the recent reorganization to their academic governance structure. In other words, did the new 21-member Leadership Council lead to better decisions and were the proper channels in place to share those results across the institution? If this is an appropriate consideration, then how will success be measured? Again, just an example...hopefully it will resonate as the Institution plans for the next project cycle. Otherwise, great work thus far!

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Since the publication of the Spellings Report (2006), institutional transparency has become a growing concern in higher education. While the Spellings Report was primarily targeting transparency with the *external* stakeholders, many of the arguments for such practices hold true for internal stakeholders as well. As such, MCTC has done a fantastic job, thus far, increasing transparency and accessibility of **information** to its internal stakeholders through the development and deployment of several newly created communication channels/tools. Changes to the institutional governance structures may also contribute to improved decision making and

increased communication. The AQIP team looks forward to their on-going progress through project completion in December, 2011.

| 5: | **Project Challenges** |

A: Loud and clear....the challenge(s) that may be implicitly suggested here are not unique to this institution. The key to adoption by some of your institutional members may be the appropriate *incentive* and/or demonstration of a *return on investment* (*ROI*)...particularly to your key constituents (e.g., students, faculty, employers, and alumni). In today's economy, where Institutions are working with limited resources, there must be a measurable *value-add* justification for garnering support.

| 5: | **Project Challenges** |

A: