AQIP Action Project Update & Review:

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS BY MAXIMIZING TECHNOLOGY

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MCTC participates in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) of the Higher Learning Commission which emphasizes two purposes for accreditation: assuring quality and stimulating improvement. AQIP infuses the principles of continuous quality improvement and systems thinking into the academic culture.

AQIP Action Projects are designed to be the kickoff for a continuous series of projects aimed at quality improvement. MCTC is expected to have at least three action projects in progress at all times. For more information on Action projects, visit the AQIP website.

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

Overview

Planned dates for project: 2008-2009

Primary Category: Leading and Communicating

Goal for project: 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.

Organizational areas - institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units - most affected by or involved in this Action Project: College-wide initiative

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.

Annual Update: 2009-09-11

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

MCTC Submission:
Since the update from one year ago, the following achievements have been accomplished:

a. In order to assess how much MCTC employees were using the blog as a routine communication vehicle, we added a weekly report on the Blog displaying daily average visits, postings, and comments. As of September 9th (61 weeks since the first active entry), the total number of blog entries was 433, the total number of comments was 584, and the total number of visits was 11, 382. The average number of entries per week was 7, the average number of comments per week was 10, and the average number of visits per week was 187.

b. The College President began recording and posting regular podcasts regarding important current issues/questions at the College. Some examples:

- Historic AQIP Accreditation Visit: This video-cast was produced and posted prior to the College's Quality Check-up Visit by a team in March 2009.
- Budget Talk: Produced in February at the start of budget discussions, this video-cast provided information regarding the development of the FY2010 budget.
- Commitment to Students & Travel: The video-cast provided answers to faculty/staff questions about the college's commitment to students in the face of budget cuts and the criteria for approving requests for out-of-state travel.

c. When initial weekly reports indicated that usage of the blog was weak, we undertook an aggressive campaign to encourage college administrators and supervisors to use the blog as the primary source of distributing information and to post regularly.

d. We began posting the President's Cabinet weekly meeting minutes each week.

e. To facilitate easy use, the blog was organized by topic categories such as Councils and Committees, Department Speak, 21st Century Teaching, Free Marketplace, Going Green, Health and Wellness, Library love, Lunching, Podcasts and Video-casts, Rants and Raves, Rumor Busters, Spotlight On, Training/Career Opportunities and Working the Blog. In addition, sections highlighting recent comments and Hot Topics were added.

f. The results of the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) indicate statistically significant improvement between the 2008 mean and the 2009 mean on all of the questions related specifically to communication. On a five point scale, the results were:

- For the question regarding the extent to which information is shared within the institution, the mean for 2008 was 2.79 while the mean for 2009 was 3.25. The national mean for this question was 2.89.
- For the question regarding the extent to which employees feel able to appropriately influence the direction of the institution, the mean for 2007 was 2.91 while the mean for 2009 was 3.23. The national mean for this question was 2.98.
- For the question regarding the extent to which open and ethical communication is practiced at the institution, the mean for 2008 was 2.99 while the mean for 2009 was 3.34. The national mean for this question was 3.09.
- For the question regarding the extent to which employees feel they receive adequate information about important activities at this institution, the mean for 2008 was 3.42 while the mean for 2009 was 3.65. The national mean for this question was 3.49.
- A 2009 custom question regarding the extent to which employees feel their supervisor or administrator keeps them informed about important matters of the college had a mean of 3.61.

AQIP Review *(09-12-09):*
The college should be commended for developing an action plan for institutionalizing the engagement of employees using communications technology. This is an important Action Project that not only deals with AQIP Category (5) Leading and Communicating, but also (4) Valuing People, (6) Supporting Institutional Operations, (8) Planning Continuous Improvement, and (9) Building Collaborative Relationships.

The project update indicates this work continuing the previous year from May 2008. The college indicates that it made reasonable progress that resulted in significant improvement in communications, as evidenced by the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) survey. The president appears to be a driving force for change in this important area, and the project team appears to have a clear understanding of the challenges and outcomes necessary to improving communications within the college.

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

MCTC Submission:
The college webmaster sends a weekly report to all employees which summarizes and grades the previous week's activity on the blog. Because the action project strategy must be evaluated relative to employee participation, the data on visits, postings, and comments are the best indicators of College employee involvement. The Blog Action Project Committee has met monthly to monitor progress and recommend and implement improvements to the blog.

AQIP Review (09-12-09):
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 implementation 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. This project update indicates there are 433 blog entries, 584 comments, and a total visit count of 11,382, and the college posits that the overall average number of visits per week increased from 7 to 187. A number of college documents were posted on the communication site that included the President's Cabinet Minutes, faculty and staff topic areas, and communication on the development of the college's budget process. The Blog Action Project Committee met monthly to monitor progress and recommend improvements and presumably communicated these results to key leadership and to the broader community.

Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

MCTC Submission:
The College has decided to continue to offer and utilize the blog as one avenue of communication but will no longer rely on the blog as the intentional and primary tool of communication. Despite the improvement of the mean scores on the PACE survey related to communication (as reported in question #1), the Committee received feedback from two of the four employee bargaining units requesting that the College leadership not use the blog for general communication. This request was framed as responding to employees who complained that they do not have time to login and regularly check another communication vehicle beyond the internal email system. Because of the reaction and limited utilization of the blog, we have begun to employ other strategies to communicate with all employees - including the College website and internal email system as well as regular college community conversations with the President and face-to-face open meetings on significant institutional issues, such as the budget. The webmaster has created links on the homepage of the College website for employees and students to obtain information about current issues.

The planned next steps for this Action Project will be to retire the Project as soon as the new communication action project declaration of commitment is approved. Work is underway to identify the focus and team that will lead the effort. The webmaster and his staff will continue to facilitate the blog, but this experience has highlighted the absence of a college intranet as an internal problem that hampers our efforts at using technology for communication. During FY10, the College will redesign the website and will incorporate intranet capabilities. The next communication action project will result in a communications matrix that will clarify who is responsible for communication on specific topics and what communication tool and target will be used.

AQIP Review (09-12-09):
Faculty leadership should create buy-in and usage of the college blog. The faculty union collective bargaining agreement, which at one point clearly identified email as the only officially recognized form of internal communication, is a practice that certainly could present implementation challenges as the institution seeks to promote use of the blog. Because of bargain unit issues, the blog will be continued, but will not be used as the primary source of internal communication. This results in the retirement of this Action Project and the identification of a new project about communication within the college. No doubt, the institution will need to continue to engage stakeholders and resources in discussion to ensure that each of the component parts of the project integrate with the overall systems, processes and procedures of the college.

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

MCTC Submission:

We are not satisfied that this action project resulted in any effective practice(s) that we would recommend to other institutions. However, the project was useful in that we tested out a new method of communication and learned two things:

a. having a structure that required a unique login was a barrier for many employees, and

b. introducing a new communication venue using technology presented a greater cultural change than anticipated. Face to face discussions and presentations have been the historical practice at MCTC.

AQIP Review (09-12-09):

While the college indicates its dissatisfaction with the results of the Action Project, important knowledge was gathered from this process. While the project team might desire a more positive ending, they obtained important information about how communication flows within the college. Certainly, they are able to boast that communication questions in the PACE survey averages increased. Given these average increases were statistically significant, this project received notable results.

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

MCTC Submission:

We continue to believe that the College needs to have an active action project focused on communication and decision-making and we plan to launch a new project in a few weeks. The Action Project Committee is satisfied that we learned what we needed to learn about the use of a blog as a communication tool and that as we move forward, the next action project will address how we remodel our existing communication structures, particularly the website, to further the goal of meeting College employees needs and expectations regarding communication.

AQIP Review (09-12-09):

As noted in the last year's reviewer comments, change is incremental. Implementing complex, information technology projects involve many interrelated tasks, and the college indentified the many steps necessary to complete an effective project communicating internally. The project team has a clear understanding more of the challenges and outcomes necessary to ensure the ultimate success of an internal communication system. It would be evident that team members' modeling use of the blog will serve as future champions on a new Action Project. The project champions will need to continue institutional-wide dialogue to ensure a collaborative implementation and continuous improvement of the college's processes, which are important for overall institutional effectiveness.

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?

MCTC Submission:

At this time, we are not requesting AQIP's help on this or the future communication action project.