

Annual Update – Action Project Team Three – Improving Communication 9/14/06

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

The Internal Communications team met 8 times between November 2005 and April 2006. The team discussed results from the Constellation Survey that had been administered to the entire staff in November 2004 and discussed at Conversation Day in March, 2005. The team listed themes and examples of communication that were working well at the time of the survey.

Over half the team went through 8 hours of comprehensive Appreciative Inquiry (AI) training. In addition, the team looked at statements from the Constellation Survey that were more negative and used the AI technique of “reframing.”

The team also investigated the prospect of doing a follow-up all staff “climate” survey one year after completion of Constellation. The team brought in additional college resource staff to discuss this possibility. This discussion was further brought to the President’s Cabinet and the decision was mutually agreed upon not to do so in 2006.

Once that decision was made, the team decided to collect data by interviewing other staff. The team formed six questions in three categories (information; involvement; communication) that will be the trial AI interview questions as the team members approach individual college staff to hear “stories” of internal communication best practices.

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

There are 11 team members and one trained quality facilitator leading the work of the team. Composition is representative of faculty, administration, and support staff. Because the work of this team grew both out of Vital Focus work and the continuing struggles between labor unions and management at WCTC, the team is comprised of the following representatives: college administration; faculty union executive or negotiations team member; support staff executive or negotiations team member; college negotiations team member; communication skills faculty; frontline supervisor; and additional faculty and support staff. The team also has resource staff from institutional research, community and corporate training, and an additional support staff person.

All review (guidance) team members and resources to each action project team received minutes and handouts from all meetings in order to keep them abreast of team activities. There are accreditation updates with action project reports given at college-wide in-service days. In addition, we have recently held a joint meeting with all action project team members, review (guidance) team members and staff resources so that common issues and questions could be clarified and discussed.

We have developed an AQIP webpage as part of our internal communication system that includes minutes and handouts from each of the three action project teams as well as a variety of accreditation updates, news from the Higher Learning Commission and information about AI.

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

1. Most of the team has been trained in AI theories and techniques. The team's future work will include conducting both trial and comprehensive interviews with a wide variety of WCTC staff members to involve more staff and collect feedback regarding best practices and to identify roadblocks/barriers to effective internal communication.
2. There are 8 meetings scheduled for Fall 2006.
3. Once trial interviews have been conducted, the team will evaluate the questions and the results before embarking on a larger scale interview process with more WCTC staff members.
4. What we learn from these interviews will guide the team in narrowing its project focus.
5. Measures of success will be determined based on the focused project goal.
6. Study other institutions' action projects related to improving internal communication.

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

There were three very effective practices that grew out of the Action Projects at WCTC this year. First of all, because each team was comprised of a diverse representation of departments and processes, there was understandable need for learning, group dynamic "forming and storming," and realizing the differences between agreement and consensus.

Next, most team members went through 8 hours of AI Inquiry training so that we could use this process to hear the "stories" that our staff told in relation to the work of each of the teams. Those team members that have not yet completed this training will do so within this school year.

Finally, the three team facilitators and the college AQIP liaison met during the off team meeting weeks to share best practices, discuss common issues, and help one another gain a common understanding of the processes being improved by each team's work.

Because of the overall heightened college awareness of the need to improve communication, other committees and initiatives at WCTC have made communication improvements as well. For example:

- The "all-staff" email procedures have been examined and rewritten to be more effective.
- Internal staff portal has been launched to make it easier for individuals to get information.

- During the search for a new college president, staff listening sessions were held. From these sessions, a leadership profile was created in order to aid in the search and hiring process.
- The process being used to develop WCTC's System Portfolio is deeply rooted in gathering feedback from all stakeholders, communication, and inclusiveness. The exchange of information is at all levels, not a top down approach. We are holding feedback sessions for different employee groups where criteria questions related specifically to groups are being discussed and feedback collected, i.e. faculty are being asked the questions related to Student Learning; some support staff are being asked to respond to questions in Supporting Institutional Operations; all staff are being asked questions related to Valuing People and Leading and Communicating.

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

The major challenge continues to be the large scope of our project. The team is working to narrow the scope into something more accomplishable.

WCTC has experienced turnover in its top administration (one of whom was a team member) within the past year. In addition, we are losing another team member to retirement. Because of this and the fact that this is a cross-functional team with wide representation from across college disciplines, keeping the team cohesive will continue to be challenging.

There has been a long history of labor-management strife at this institution. This continues to be a challenge college-wide, not just for this team.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this project, explain your needs here and tell us who to contact and when?

Not at this time, thank you anyway.