

Fall 2009

Communication Action Project Update and Review

Annual Update: 2009-09-14

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

Previously, the project focused on specific tasks that we thought would improve campus communication. The team created a set aside time for campus meetings on Friday afternoons, a lounge area in addition to the cafeteria where faculty, administration, and staff could eat lunch together, 360 degree evaluations of supervisors by faculty in addition to the typical faculty evaluations by supervisors, creation of a faculty senate, and the creation of a college wide employee newsletter called The HEN (Heartland Employee Newsletter). Since these tasks and the organizations to sustain them were for the most part up and running, the final job for the group was to try to evaluate the awareness of the campus that these campus communication tools and projects were out there and in the cases of 360 degree evaluations and Friday set aside days, to see if people liked them. Consequently, at our spring 2009 campus conversation day, we surveyed everyone participating to see if they were aware of the communication projects listed above. In the case of the Friday afternoon set asides, we asked more specifically if they thought that they were working. Additionally, in the case of our 360 degree evaluations, we had informal conversations with supervisors to get their sense of the value of the information they received from their faculty. The results of these various assessments were mixed. For example, in terms of awareness, most people were aware of the Campus Newsletter but only a very few people were aware that there was a lunch lounge other than in the cafeteria. With respect to the Friday set asides, most people liked the concept but a vocal minority complained that now Fridays have become overburdened with meetings. Finally, faculty supervisors were appreciative of the feedback they received in the 360 degree evaluations but several noted that at least some of the negative feedback was less than constructive and that they were at a loss as to what to do with this venting. As a result of this feedback some steps were taken to try to make people more aware of these various communication projects and to improve their usefulness. For example, the Faculty Senate had a mixer at a local watering hole and invited the entire campus. In advance of completing the supervisor 360 degree evaluation forms this past spring, faculty were reminded to make their comments constructive so supervisors might be more readily able to address them. The Instructional Development Center, the "owner" of the lunch lounge space, included "lunch open to faculty and staff" on their monthly calendar of events. Other employee groupings beside faculty were encouraged to create their own version of a faculty senate to spur communication. Finally, an AQIP Celebration day was held at the start of the fall 2009 semester in part to remind people of these and other various accomplishments of the AQIP program.

Review (09-27-09):

Heartland College continues to make reasonable progress towards completion of the Fostering Community through Enhanced Campus Communication action project. While the institution did not meet its initial target completion date of December 2007, the proactive approach taken by the College should provide for a system that closes the communication gaps at the institution and may help to create a culture of open, consistent dialog. Past year's accomplishments included

evaluating campus awareness and effectiveness of the communication tools implemented to enhance college communication which included the 360 degree evaluations, the Heartland Employee Newsletter (HEN), and creation of a Faculty Senate. Providing the campus community opportunities for feedback and studying the results is critical for creating a culture of continuous quality improvement. Based on the feedback, steps such as encouraging other employee groups to form senates and an AQIP Celebration Day were taken to further improve communication. While the primary category is Category 4: Valuing People, the action project aligns with Category 5: Leading and Communicating, Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations, and Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement. The action project is being retired.

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

Each project manager simply solicited volunteers across the campus in order to see that the project came about. There were very few incentives used to entice potential participants and as a result it was hard to get a group beyond the core committee members.

Review (09-27-09):

Active participation in action projects can be a challenge. Without incentives the action team was challenged with recruiting staff and faculty to participate in team activities. Perhaps other avenues for participation could include partnering with other College committees and teams. Staff maybe more willing to serve on sub-groups or single project specific work teams which can be an effective tool for addressing an issue. At their creation, it is important to define the purpose, schedule of meetings, timelines including deadline and date for disbandment, outcomes and communication requirements.

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

Now that a rudimentary assessment of the several projects recommended by the Campus Communication Team outlined in question one has been conducted, this project is being retired. Energies are being redirected into continuing and improving each of those specific projects.

Review (09-27-09):

The project is being retired.

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

We believe the Friday set aside time for campus meetings, the 360 degree evaluation of faculty and their supervisors, the campus newsletter, the creation of a Faculty Senate, and the creation of a space to have lunch have all been somewhat effective in enhancing campus communication. Most likely the supervisor evaluations and the Friday set aside time have made the most impact on the most people.

Review (09-27-09):

Several effective practices were identified such as creation of the Faculty Senate. Benchmarking with other institutions may provide additional ideas for strengthening the Faculty Senates and enhancing communication efforts.

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

Review (09-27-09):

Finding communication methods that are effective for the entire campus community will continue to be a challenge. Institutions must remain cognizant of “information overload” while attempting to effectively communicate to faculty and staff. Heartland College has set the foundation to continue to bridge the communication gaps created in the work environment. As noted, increasing campus-wide understanding and awareness of and participation in AQIP activities is an on-going challenge. Establishing the Faculty Senate and encouraging other employee groups to establish similar structures is essential to ensure efforts are not lost.

F. 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?

Each of the several subprojects noted in the questions above that came from this larger project of Enhancing Campus Communication will face their own unique problems. Some common threads of problems include problems of the relevance of the subproject, problems of awareness and participation, and problems of penetration across the entire campus. As a general example, many across the campus still believe that AQIP and AQIP projects are for the faculty or for the instructional side of our campus and not a program for the entire campus. This feeling still exists despite the communication efforts to the contrary. Clearly, the supervisor evaluations and the faculty senate are on the instructional side and this has been used to support the argument. The campus should continue to work to encourage other employee groupings to organize and to create institutions that allow for sharing across the functional and physical areas of the campus.

Review (09-27-09):

Global Judgment: Heartland College has made reasonable progress toward completion of the action project.