

## Action Project

**Title:** Creating a Framework for Continuous Improvement

**Version:** 1

**Institution:** Heartland Community College

**Status:** Completed

**Submitted:** 2014-02-27

**Category:** 8-Planning Continuous Improvement

### Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2014-02-22

Target completion date: 2014-07-01

Actual completion date: 2015-12-31

### Project Detail

#### PROJECT GOAL

Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

This project will establish the infrastructure for continuous improvement at the College. The infrastructure created will allow us to determine what to improve, how to improve it, who is responsible, and how we will know it improved.

#### REASON FOR UNDERTAKING THIS PROJECT

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

As a College, we lack a cohesive approach to continuous improvement. We change, often in a reactive mode, but we don't know if we improve. Some factors that brought this need to light include:

- The College constantly being asked to do new things;
- Prior difficulties in preparing our Systems Portfolio;
- Need for better process orientation, as identified by planning processes and outside consultants;
- Significant turnover in key leadership positions and organizational restructuring.

The project is a priority as it will strengthen the culture and build capacity in our overall organization.

## ORGANIZATIONAL AREAS AFFECTED

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

*All areas of the College* will be positively impacted by an infrastructure for continuous improvement. Benefits to all divisions and employees include:

- increased clarity around expectations;
- increased engagement across the college in continuous improvement;
- improved organizational efficiency;
- intentionality in identifying new initiatives.

## KEY ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve

As mentioned in #1 above, this project will change the organization's approach to all processes. We intend that our processes related to strategic planning, operational planning, strategic budgeting, and measuring effectiveness will be positively impacted.

We expect this Action Project will particularly foster improvements in key organizational processes in Category 4 (Planning and Leading) and Category 5 (Knowledge Management and Resource Stewardship).

## PROJECT TIMEFRAME RATIONALE

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

We established a relatively short timeframe for this project as it is an integral precursor to any future Action Projects. In establishing a consistent weekly meeting time (at least initially) for four months, our team has prioritized time for this project. This framework is the foundation for establishing a culture of continuous improvement. Our project team agrees that such a framework has been needed for quite some time, and has been delayed due to our culture of "building the plane as we are flying it". We will "stop flying" for this brief four-month period in order to create a structure to guide others in their future flights.

## PROJECT SUCCESS MONITORING

Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing

Our initially identified constraints include time and focus. We will overcome this by adopting a parking lot to capture distractions/future items/additional ideas. Our team has agreed we must define our scope, meet regularly, and hold one another accountable for maintaining our focus as outlined. As mentioned in #5, our team will maintain momentum by committing to a weekly, consistent meeting time.

An initial outcome of this Action Project is the creation of a customized SharePoint site designed specifically to support improvement projects at our institution. This Action Project team will recommend revisions to the site as we progress. The site is a deliverable that will not only help us monitor our own progress, it will serve as a template site to assist future teams in monitoring their success.

## PROJECT OUTCOME MEASURES

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

Indicators of success include the following as they relate to an organizational framework for continuous improvement:

- Sustainable teams established, members named (by position), and charters created
- Template for monitoring team success created (SharePoint site)
- Potential next steps identified (i.e., alignment of AQIP and institutional processes; parking lot of future Action Projects this project may spawn; etc.)

## Annual Update

### CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

General project status: Completed? In progress? Reopened? Suspended? Original project start date? Original project end date? Anticipated completion date if not completed? Briefly describe the current status of the project Explain how this project relates to to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's most recent or soon-to-be submitted Systems Portfolio, if applicable

This project is currently complete, and has been strategic in promoting Continuous Improvement efforts. The emphasis on college-wide efforts to systematically and systemically document and improve processes will address a pattern of outstanding opportunities that were identified in our Systems Portfolio feedback. That feedback encouraged the institution to use data for informed decision making.

### ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

List the project goals as stated in the original project declaration along with the metrics/measures for assessing the progress for each goal

1. Sustainable teams established, members named (by position), and charters created
2. Template for monitoring team success created (SharePoint site)
3. Potential next steps identified (i.e., alignment of AQIP and institutional processes; parking lot of future Action Projects this project may spawn; etc.)

The team monitored the progress of the project with the help of some features available in SharePoint. In particular, the status bar indicator provided a visual of progress toward as individual tasks completed within the project.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

Describe what has been accomplished with this project over the past year, specifically referring to quantifiable results that show progress. You may need to include a discussion clarifying how the original goals and anticipated outcomes may have shifted during the year

The goals of this project were accomplished. Three committees were created and

operationalized to oversee the college's efforts toward continuous improvement, an AQIP Coordinating Committee, Institutional Effectiveness Council, and Compliance Committee. The Institutional Effectiveness Council, in alignment with AQIP, develops and guides the processes and procedures for continuous improvement (CI) at the College, specifically, for strategic planning, operational planning, strategic budgeting, and measuring effectiveness. The AQIP Coordinating Committee's role is to promote a collaborative campus environment and processes conducive to fostering continuous improvement and completing the requirements of an AQIP Institution. The Compliance Committee's role is to systematically and holistically coordinate compliance requirements across the college.

## INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Describe how various members of the learning community have participated in this action project. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the project's duration, particularly during the last year

A team of staff and administrators attended the strategy forum in February 2014 and returned to campus to work on this action project. Over the course of the project's duration, the team invited other members of the campus to participate as needed. In particular, the Director of HR was involved in conversations related to changing job descriptions for the newly identified AQIP Category Champions. Also, as the project team moved closer to finalizing the charters for the three newly formed committees, supervisors of staff identified to be on these committees were invited to share thoughts, concerns and recommendations. Careful consideration was given to ensuring that the IE Council, AQIP Coordinating Committee, and Compliance Committees had representation from all employee groups, including executive, administrative, faculty, professional technical, and classified. In addition, there is representation from all areas of the college.

## BEST PRACTICES

Describe the effect that this project has had on the institution, students, and others in the learning community. What has the institution learned that can be identified as good practice to use in other aspects of its quality work or from which other institutions might benefit?

This project kicked-off a multi-year journey towards building a culture of quality within the institution. It is anticipated that this project will result in more efficient use of resources, with an intentional focus on alignment of AQIP processes with planning and budgeting activities. The institution learned that changing organizational culture doesn't happen overnight and found it effective to start with a small win and build from there.

## ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

Describe the anticipated challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project's goals

Since the college is seeking to change its organizational culture to focus on continuous improvement, the biggest anticipated challenge is how to effectively manage this change. There is a need to balance rolling information out in a timely manner with concern for overwhelming faculty and staff with new learning. As such, the Institutional Effectiveness Council has been and will continue to be very intentional in designing and delivering messages and activities around this initiative. Another anticipated challenge is overcoming residual negative perceptions of AQIP from its initial roll-out to the institution in 2005. There are many individuals still around from this time who remember the initial enthusiasm

for AQIP and how it dissolved into being viewed as something for just for faculty. So, changing mindsets and reigniting enthusiasm may be difficult.

## PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

In light of the project goals, current circumstances, institutional learning from this project, and anticipated barriers to success, list the next steps to be taken over the course of the next 12 - 24 months in order to complete or institutionalize the results of the action project. Provide a timeline for completing each next step

There are several activities being planned over the next 12-24 months:

1. Each year, the college hosts two semester kick-off events with a keynote address and professional development sessions. During the 2014-2015 school year, the theme of both kickoff events is From Can Do to Can Do Well: Attaining Excellence, Affirming Our Values. The keynote address and breakout sessions will align with the theme of continuous improvement.
2. Also, over the next year, there will be scheduled activities to intentionally engage middle managers who supervise the majority of workforce and are integral to the success of this effort. One such activity is inviting all administrators to a College Advisory Council meeting to invite feedback on how to engage the rest of the campus in CI work.
3. There will also be scheduled Pep Rallies with the President where the entire campus is invited to learn about updates on CI work and provide feedback.
4. During the spring 2015 semester, the AQIP Coordinating Committee is also planning to host a campus conversation day where the entire campus will be able to learn about and brainstorm ways to engage in continuous improvement activities.
5. The Institutional Effectiveness Council is also developing a 3 year plan with activities to build the continuous improvement culture.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

Provide any additional information, inquiries, or concerns that the institution wishes for reviewers to understand regarding this action project

Because the team stayed within the initially defined scope, all project milestones have been achieved and the project has been completed. As the Institutional Effectiveness Council looks to the next phase of its multi-year journey of building a culture continuous improvement, insights from the peer reviewers on how to move in this direction in an incremental manner would be appreciated.

## Annual Update

### REASON FOR COMPLETION

What is the primary reason for closing this project?

This project has moved well beyond the initial scope of establishing a structure for continuous improvement. As reported in the update, an Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Council was created with a formal charter identifying purpose, goals, timelines, and members among other items. The IE Council then reconstituted the College's AQIP Coordinating Committee and created a new Compliance Committee. Again, formal charters were created for each. Following the establishment and clarity of this framework, progress took off rapidly. (See #2 below.)

## SUCCESS FACTORS

What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

Once all three committees were formalized and functioning, much advanced. The IE Council has a 3 Year Plan for Continuous Improvement, with seven initial projects organized around four main outcomes to enable employees to *1) articulate what CI and AQIP are, 2) use a systematic and systemic approach to documenting and improving processes, 3) align improvement efforts with institutional strategic plan and AQIP, and 4) view CI and AQIP as important to achieving individual and institutional goals*. Some of those projects enlisted the support of the AQIP Coordinating Committee and necessitated creation of diverse, College-wide subcommittees. Projects which emanated from the results of this project to Create a Framework for CI include but are not limited to:

- Create and Oversee CI Project Processes – creation of electronic Projects Portfolio which has over 40 College-wide projects in less than a year. Projects are tracked, reviewed, supported (see next bullet), and connected to appropriate AQIP categories.
- Develop 3-Year CI Professional Development Plan – creation of videos and templates for professional development around the FOCUS-PDCA model of continuous improvement. These resources are available to all College employees. Individualized support can be requested or they may be accessed electronically for independent use by an individual or team.
- Refine Strategic Planning Process – survey to College staff assessing employee satisfaction with current plan and process; revised simpler and summarized “strategic map” version for campus use; subsequent subcommittees – one to create and propose new strategic planning process for academic year 2016-17 and another to obtain KPI measures for strategic plan ending in 2017.

## UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?

A project around continuous improvement inevitably indicates a very broad scope and creates a somewhat complex series of initiatives. The project team recognized this and intentionally limited this particular project scope to defining a framework, or infrastructure, to foster CI. Once established, that infrastructure quickly had numerous tentacles, advancing several initiatives simultaneously (some examples indicated in #2 above). To maintain a well-informed cadre of employees and ensure diverse input, the number of individuals engaged through multiple committees and subcommittees creates additional challenges in an institution with already-stretched human resources. Additionally, a challenge of this project was to clarify to external reviewers that progress was indicated by the establishment of resources for CI (committees, charters, processes, timelines, resources, metrics) versus the measurement of KPI's against prior benchmarks. In other words, our project may be unique in that goals focused on *establishment*, not measured improvement over former metrics.