The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Colorado Mountain College

Project Details		
Title	Implement an Effective Leadership & Communication System to Become a High Performance Organization	**Status** COMPLETED
Category	5-Leading and Communicating	**Updated** 09-30-2011
Timeline		**Reviewed** 10-06-2011
Planned Project Kickoff 05-01-2010		**Created** 03-26-2010
Actual Completion 11-29-2011		**Version** 2

1: Project Goal

A: We have been making progress over the past two years with training employees to use continuous improvement methodology, with over 100 employees trained to date. Our goal is to have all our full-time employees and as many of our part-time employees trained in continuous improvement by the targeted completion date for this project. We need to continue to share and use knowledge regarding AQIP and the practice of continuous improvement. We do not consistently close the continuous improvement feedback loop. Roles, responsibilities & protocol need to be clearer, with greater collective focus, alignment, accountability, and elimination of redundancies that interfere with the operational & strategic effectiveness of the leadership system. We would like to more fully realize human potential & our commitment to student success.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In our 10 year history with AQIP, every brainstorming has had effective leading & communicating as an issue and this has been a hindrance to progress. At the 2009 AQIP Strategy Forum, we used an ER analogy to describe this project: we need to be first responders to this issue and know / understand our roles & responsibilities (ICS). Data from a leadership inventory, employee survey, and the Strategy Forum's Quality Culture & Infrastructure Survey provided further impetus for this project. On our strategic plan, a key strategic focus area for the college is to be our communities' first choice for leadership by building our capacity for organizational excellence.

In addition, we desire a culture that embodies a spirit of collaboration and the capitalization of individual & collective strengths.

Some Strengths	Some Weaknesses
Heart/will of our people	*Need for greater focus, clear roles/responsibilities*
Spirit of collaboration, new culture	*Turnover of leadership, need for information/training regarding our quality journey*

Some Opportunities	Some Threats
Balance campus, unit & college priorities	*Two-thirds of leadership has been at CMC less than 5 years*
Focus on strategic areas	*Resource limitations, need for reallocation as appropriate*

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All college leaders, beginning with the College Leadership Team, President's Direct Reports and the Quality Team

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Leadership that is invested in the practice of continuous improvement. Greater knowledge and application of continuous improvement, particularly in the use of data for informed decision-making and the engrafting of any necessary changes to processes. Improved clarity of roles, responsibilities & protocol; focus; alignment; consistent closing of the continuous improvement feedback loop; and

reduction of inefficiencies that interfere with the operational and strategic effectiveness of the leadership system.

5:	**Project Time Frame Rationale**

A: Effective leadership and communication are often problematic for organizations, but are amplified at CMC because of its organizational makeup. So, although we plan to work on this project for the next three years, we may need to address additional aspects of effective leading and communicating when we reach the target completion date. Our hope is that by the completion date, the processes the college leadership utilizes to help CMC function effectively as one college will be embedded within its daily functioning and resemble those of a high performing organization.

6:	**Project Success Monitoring**

A: *Year 1:* a) Shared Leadership handout- discuss & implement in terms of authority
b) Draft protocol for dealing with conflict (VEV has a prototype for this)
c) Communication protocol signed & followed
d) Common Reader by Patrick Leone: "5 Dysfunctions of a Team"
e) Administer, analyze & apply the Leadership Inventory and interventions from P. Leone's book, Quality Infrastructure inventory from the 2009 AQIP Strategy Forum & the Chronicle's Great Colleges to Work for Survey, as well as our internal annual Employee Survey
f) Utilize the college wide balanced score card to help monitor progress
g) Create a Quality Team (the impetus for this came from our 2009 Strategy Forum) to oversee continuous improvement teams/projects
h) Implement the zero-based budgeting process
i) Training in & use of continuous improvement methodology
j) Training in & use of appropriate data for informed decision-making
k) Develop & utilize a web-based form for capturing college wide improvement practices
k) Officially kick-off this effective leadership & communication system AQIP project
Years 2 & 3: Continue to implement and monitor the impact of year 1 activities as well as modify/add activities that promote effective leadership & communication based on feedback from measures.

7:	**Project Outcome Measures**

A: Leaders will demonstrate increased understanding of AQIP, continuous improvement methodology and demonstrate interdependence (CMC as one college) i.e. leaders & other constituents will report that the college's leadership system models excellence and functions as one college with students as the focus. Meeting minutes & feedback from constituents will reflect more efficient processes & decision-making. Also, our leadership performance indicators on our balanced scorecard will reflect progress e.g. employee satisfaction, retention, development opportunities, etc. Our Systems Portfolio will better reflect college wide improvement of processes. We will demonstrate significant improvement on ratings associated with the Leadership Inventory from P. Leone's book, Quality Infrastructure inventory, on feedback from AQIP, the Chronicle's Great Colleges to Work for Survey, as well as our internal annual Employee Survey. We will be more effective with existing resource allocation as demonstrated by the zero-based budgeting process e.g. better alignment of budgeting and planning priorities.

Project Update

1:	**Project Accomplishments and Status**

A: CMC is in its second year of its implementation of this project. However, the college has been addressing the focus areas of the project since we developed the project during the 2009 AQIP Strategy Forum. Based on feedback from AQIP and the leadership's knowledge of CMC, the college has been focusing on improving leading and communicating processes at its leadership and other meetings and via the Web, email, etc. The college leadership has also been working with its respective staff members to improve communication college wide. The Quality Team that was formed following the last strategy forum to help lead and further continuous improvement college wide oversaw 16 AQIP teams that targeted key college wide processes for improvement during 2010 and 2011 to help CMC get the approval to begin offering its first bachelor's degrees during fall 2011. These teams included: new program development, program review, marketing, teaching and learning and these teams have added sub teams when needed. Documents reflecting the progress of these teams are available under the AQIP tab of the CMC portal. The involvement of employees on teams has led to over 150 employees (over 50% increase from last year) who have been trained in continuous improvement tools and are

applying these tools daily. At least another 40-50 employees will be trained in continuous improvement this fall while these teams target some key areas that have been targeted for improvement e.g. developmental education, general education. We continue to be a part of Strategic Horizons which is a consortium of community colleges that share best practices several times a year, including visits to top performing organizations. Strategic Horizons assists us with building capacity, improving sustainability, organizational design and planning.

We have monitored our progress on the following efforts related to this project:

- Shared leadership – CMC's organizational structure has been modified to be clearer & is being implemented
- One of our two threats to a strong leadership structure is that 2/3 of leadership has been at CMC for less than 5 years (this turnover is partially explained by retirements and voluntary turnover and new leadership is bringing new ideas and the entire leadership is focusing on a corridor model that will maximize resources and diminish the impact of individual leaders leaving). Recruitment, hiring and retention policies are being evaluated by HR currently and that department itself has undergone major leadership changes.
- The college regularly utilizes a college-wide balanced scorecard to monitor key performance indicators that are key for student success e.g. retention, course completion, student, employee & community satisfaction, partnerships, etc.
- The Quality Team has been successfully overseeing AQIP teams and projects, with recommendations going to the College Leadership Team
- Zero Based Budgeting was implemented and its processes are being further improved (The process was developed after an AQIP team examined the traditional budgeting process at the college and developed zero-based budgeting.)
- Training in and use of continuing improvement methodology is continuing with fall 2011 AQIP Teams trained by the President
- Training in and use of data for decision making is continuing with data not only being increasingly posted on the portal and main website, but also being more frequently presented and utilized for decision-making

- The Quality Inventory from P. Lencioni's book (that became a common reader for the leadership), the Quality Infrastructure Inventory recommended from the 2009 Strategy Forum, the Chronicle's Great College's to Work For Survey and our annual Employee Survey are regularly conducted with the employees. The two inventories were conducted each December with the President's Direct Reports and the results suggested that although CMC has good leaders who are committed to student and employee success, there continues to be a need for greater accountability, especially in how well we communicate and use data for further improvement. The new organizational structure is designed to assist with this. These data were also shared and utilized by the leadership to target improvements in the area of communication at every opportunity. The results of the 2010 Chronicle survey of CMC employees indicated that while job satisfaction, professional development, compensation & benefits, facilities and supervisors were "good", pride was "very good to excellent", shared governance and communication were a relative weakness for the college. The Chronicle survey will be administered again during spring 2012. The CMC annual Employee Survey conducted each year from 2005 through 2010 (data available on the portal under the AQIP tab) is based on the AQIP categories and shows how we have improved across all of the categories since 2008 and are making good progress on our continuous improvement journey. Based on this survey, communication and planning continuous improvement continue to be a relative challenge for the college. Consequently, additional items related to improving communication were added to the 2010 survey.

The only initiatives that were laid out in the original version of this project that we did not progress as well on were the communication/conflict protocol (insufficient buy-in) and the usage of a web-based form that was developed for capturing processes improved by employees. We will continue to work on making better use of the continuous improvement form. Otherwise, we have made good progress on this project's initiatives.

2: Institution Involvement

A: A shared vision and mission i.e. to create better futures for our students, communities, our partners and our team members has been the driving force for increasing involvement. The President and others have communicated this purpose and continuous improvement philosophy at numerous gatherings to get employees to focus on their role in the college's progress with its vision and mission. Employee goals were tied to the strategic plan and balanced score card. The college plans to base pay for performance on college wide progress with the key performance indicators of the score card. Employee orientation introduces new employees to the "CMC Way" and the college's vision, mission and values. This orientation will prove helpful as we fill current and future vacancies and allow for smoother successions. The Quality Team has increased employee engagement with process improvement. Our Community College Survey of Student Engagement data demonstrate how well we compare to cohort colleges on the five benchmarks and are indicative of our progress with creating an environment for student success. Other examples of involvement are represented in our engagement

and accountability AQIP projects and the close collaboration amongst Student Affairs Council, Instructional Leadership Team and the Joint Leadership Team has led to greater emphasis on sharing assessment best practices, data and continuous improvement methods with faculty and staff.

3: Next Steps

A: We will continue to monitor our progress and determine areas to improve using the surveys outlined above, TaskStream and the college's balanced score card. The 2012-2015 strategic planning process is involving all constituents over the next few months in determining what is most important to the college's future. We would like to continue to work on leadership related initiatives, but wish to retire this project in its current state, since we have made good progress with embedding leadership development in our daily practices and will incorporate that work and continue it with a new project that will focus on how well we develop and implement bachelor's degrees. We plan to share what we have learned about leading bachelor's degree development and implementation at various upcoming meetings and conferences.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: It's not surprising that bachelor's degrees quickly became a catalyst for strengthening our two-year processes while building the capacity for the offering of four-year programs. The college galvanized its existing resources over a short time to create a framework for successfully seeking and obtaining the necessary approvals for the offering of bachelor's degrees. The benefits of the college's direction are clear. Internally, we have learned to become more agile, responsive and flexible after about 40 years of being more reactive. Although a work in progress, at the heart of our success has been a leadership that is willing to work to improve itself-its levels of collaboration and communication to capitalize on people's strengths to build the college and focus on that greater good, rather than their campus or area. Externally, the college is already becoming recognized as a viable contributor to its economies. Other unintended consequences of adding four-year degrees have been related to the improvement of all our processes, an even more positive college wide image or profile and many new partnerships with educational and business entities.

The Assessment in Three Dimensions Model, Quality Team, balanced score card and TaskStream are proving to be instrumental in really changing our culture to one of inquiry and evidence building. The Shared Leadership Model will also help us achieve our mission and vision, as well as fully realize our core values by helping to clarify roles, responsibilities and accountability.

5: Project Challenges

A: Communicating results on the college's progress and decision-making to all employees. Focusing on what is most important to the college instead of too many things continues to be a challenge. As we work on our 2012-2015 strategic plan, we hope to increase this focus. Effective communication, accountability and keeping the momentum of data based decision-making going for college-wide efforts may also have its challenges. We are still working on the actualization of the Shared Leadership Model, but this model will help clarify roles, responsibilities and accountability issues. Amidst any challenges we might encounter, we will continue to communicate at every opportunity using multiple methods of communication.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This long-term, 3-year project has certainly yielded tangible results for the College. The overarching goal of the project, Leading and Communicating (Category 5), has fostered college-wide communication from the leadership team and improved efficiency of processes used at the College. As a result, the College is demonstrating the traits of a high-performing institution. In doing this project the College is also creating more opportunities for students by using action driven teams who were instrumental in creating bachelor degree opportunities for students. The College indicated in its original action project that it "would like to more fully realize human potential and [its] commitment to student success." The outcomes of this project suggest that college is meeting this challenge. The goal for year 2 of this AQIP Action Project was to "[c]ontinue to implement and monitor the impact of year 1 activities as well as modify/add activities that promote effective leadership & communication based on feedback from measures." The list of results presented speaks for itself in that the College met and likely exceeded its goals. The lists suggest that the leadership team has initiated many processes and started many projects that lend themselves to a healthy, vital organization. The young tenure, less than five-years, of some of leadership team members may actually be an advantage of the Institution because the team demonstrated that

progress is possible in a short amount of time. The team continues to use data to move forward and make further improvements. The leadership team continues to connect ideas learned from reading to action items and research points. Such progress and leading by example will continue to promote buy-in from all college employees. The spirit of the original project is still present in the Institution's actions and commitment to making data driven decisions that impact communication and leadership decisions. The College acknowledges that it still has a gap in communication/conflict protocol. The College has the tools in place to make progress in this area, and its continued persistence in completing this project will provide the energy needed for continually monitoring and improving of relevant processes.

2: Institution Involvement

A: One of the reasons the College designed this AQIP Action Project was to encourage feedback from constituents. With this feedback, they wanted to communicate how decisions were being made to create efficient processes. The College continues to move forward with this design and continues to involve multiple stakeholders, including students and employees. The senior leaders at the Institution, including the President, continue to move forward with message that continuous improvement is a valued and practiced philosophy. As a result, all employees are now involved in the process by having employee goals that are tied to the strategic plan and balanced score card.

One of the changes that has likely impacted culture is that employees are introduced to the philosophy of continuous quality improvement at new employee orientation. In addition, this project has prompted the College to share data and information with employees which has led to collaboration among academic departments and student services. The project has even impacted students as represented by the results on CCSSE which suggests progress in creating an environment that promotes student engagement. Congratulations on a job well done. Leading and Communication (Category 5) are evident in the involvement of all employees and students; hence, people at the Institution are involved in making CMC a high performing institution.

3: Next Steps

A: In the original project, the Institution reports that in its 10-year history with AQIP Leading and Communicating (Category 5) has been a re-occurring theme of interest to employees because they believe this is an area in need of improvement at the Institution. The College knows that this process takes time. As a result, the College wishes to retire this project in its current state.

The College does plan to work on processes that move them forward as a high performing institution which practices AQIP principles such as gathering input from stakeholders who will participate in the strategic planning process. The College has the building blocks in place for continuous quality improvement processes. Because the College community has achieved demonstrable outcomes, the College may find this is a reason for a campus celebration. The College is sharing their accomplishments with other Institutions by participating in meetings and conferences. Good work on taking a large project and operationalizing its outcomes at institution levels (such as CCSE data) and the individual-level (employee evaluations).

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: As a result of this successful project, the College is renewed in believing in itself and its own potential. Internal stakeholders realize they can change and they can grow. Agility is a quality they value and recognize. A shared vision of using assessment data and shared leadership is moving the College forward. The tangible outcomes are visible to external stakeholders. Probably the most treasured best practice is the self-worth and renewed confidence the Institution now has as a result of this project. Good work on creating a culture of inclusion and demonstrating that internal communication does foster an environment that makes employees responsible and accountable.

5: Project Challenges

A: The College thinks working to improve communication and move forward with a shared-collective vision may be a challenge. One of the ways the College may want to embrace this challenge is by remembering that culture change takes time. Reflecting on the positive cultural shifts that have already happened and the successful processes that have been implemented as a result of the action project will provide the energy and stamina needed to stay the course and continue to make positive lasting progress.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: We will continue to monitor our progress and determine areas to improve using the surveys outlined above, TaskStream and the college's balanced score card. The 2012-2015 strategic planning process is involving all constituents over the next few months in determining what is most important to the college's future. We would like to continue to work on leadership related initiatives, but wish to retire this project in its current state, since we have made good progress with embedding leadership development in our daily practices and will incorporate that work and continue it with a new project that will focus on how well we develop and implement bachelor's degrees. We plan to share what we have learned about leading bachelor's degree development and implementation at various upcoming meetings and conferences.

2: Success Factors

A: The AQIP Reviewer who gave feedback on this project in October 2011 summarized the answer to this question very well for us:
"As a result of this successful project, the College is renewed in believing in itself and its own potential. Internal stakeholders realize they can change and they can grow. Agility is a quality they value and recognize. A shared vision of using assessment data and shared leadership is moving the College forward. The tangible outcomes are visible to external stakeholders. Probably the most treasured best practice is the self-worth and renewed confidence the Institution now has as a result of this project. Good work on creating a culture of inclusion and demonstrating that internal communication does foster an environment that makes employees responsible and accountable."

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: Communicating results on the college's progress and decision-making to all employees. Focusing on what is most important to the college instead of too many things continues to be a challenge. As we work on our 2012-2015 strategic plan, we hope to increase this focus. Effective communication, accountability and keeping the momentum of data based decision-making going for college-wide efforts may also have its challenges. We are still working on the actualization of the Shared Leadership Model, but this model will help clarify roles, responsibilities and accountability issues. Amidst any challenges we might encounter, we will continue to communicate at every opportunity using multiple methods of communication.