

Inver Hills Community College
IMPROVE COMMUNICATION, DECISION MAKING AND VALUING EMPLOYEES
Report 2007-08

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

The need to address effective communication and decision-making processes was identified through the Employee Climate Survey Results of 2006, breakout sessions at staff and faculty development sessions, and at the Institutional Effectiveness Council meetings. A committee was formed with representation from staff, faculty and administration and spent the remainder of the 2006-07 school year developing the action project. It was determined that the overall goal of this project is to improve communication and decision-making processes among faculty, staff and administrators. Three more specific goals were identified. Following is a summary of strategies that were implemented from late spring of 2007 to summer of 2008:

GOAL 1: Increase information about how decisions are made at IHCC:

- Provided focus groups to exchange information and views across the campus related to decision making and improving communication processes (May 18, 2007 and August 24, 2007). These focus groups provided direction to the Committee for priority setting and action plans.
- Developed and continually update a schematic map to illustrate the decision-making bodies at IHCC. 3) Created and updated a chart to describe the purpose of each committee or initiative, the chair person and committee members.
- Informed College Community about outside directives that supersede autonomy of the College to make individual decisions (ex; MnSCU policy, union policy, state & national policy – see College Organization and Initiatives Guide).
- Created and distributed the College Organizations and Initiatives Guide to all employees and located on the Intranet under folder “Communication Action Project.”
- Established e-mail as the official means of campus communication.
- Created a common meeting minute form with columns for decisions/ who needs to know/who is responsible for action item, recommended that meeting agendas and minutes be published within 5 working days of meetings, and encouraged starting and finishing all meetings on-time, the timely distribution of meeting agendas prior to the meetings, the timely distribution of meeting minutes, and a centralized placement of minutes in the public folder.

GOAL #2: Inform the College community how to provide input and/or actively participate in the decision-making process at 07-08 professional days, the Operations Team Retreat, the President’s Advisory Council, and the Foundation Board.

- Promoted involvement in college initiatives at the new faculty orientation and convocation day in August that resulted in fourteen additional employees who volunteered to serve on committees.
- Met with Faculty Union and Administrative leadership to improve communication processes in EOV meetings.
- Met with Staff Development Committee to implement the concept of cross departmental meetings throughout the year. The Center for Professional and Workforce development “Get to Know Us” hosted an open house on Thursday, October 11, 2007 with approximately 60 staff and faculty in attendance.
- Formed an Administrative Professional Development Day Committee consisting of staff, faculty, and administration based on focus group recommendations. The Committee provided interesting and exciting presentations for January and May, 2008 days which were well received.

- Conducted a January, 2008 Professional Development Day survey to evaluate and improve presentations for May, 2008, based on survey feedback.
- Recommended management meetings focus on decision-making and problem-solving instead of reporting of information.
- Recommended changes in the structure of Operations Team meetings to include: a greater focus on decision-making and opportunity for other administrators to provide creative solutions for issues/problems that arise and on professional development. Changes were reflected in Operations Meeting of October 8, 2007 when the HR Director presented HR policies that administrators must be aware of.
- Provided training sessions for effective use of email, Outlook calendar, D2L, and conducting effective meetings.
- Developed and conducted a revised 2008 Employee Climate Survey. Responses were analyzed and summary results were reported to the college on May 15, 2008. Recommendations for improvements will be provided to administration regarding communication, decision-making, and valuing people by Fall of 2008.

GOAL 3: Information and marketing strategies to highlight IHCC as a good place to work are enhanced.

- Promoted IHCC as a good place to work. Developed and distributed a survey that explored primary reasons why IHCC is a good place to work. Results of the survey were shared at Employee Appreciation event and included in College Organization and Initiatives Employee Guide.
- Conducted an Employee Picnic with a “get-to-know-you” activity to facilitate introductions of new employees and learn more about the employees’ great work on campus.
- Established criteria, processes, and procedures, and awarded the Outstanding Administrator and Staff Awards for 2008. These awards were created and distributed based on the college community, focus groups, an IHCC alumni faculty member’s recommendations, and included a donated stipend.

MEASURED RESULTS: There were four general areas where we did quantify measurable results. These included use of email as the official means of communication, use of a common minute format for documenting decisions at meetings, increased participation of employees in college initiatives/committees, and establishment of an Outstanding administrator and staff Award. Following is a summary of these results:

- **OFFICIAL EMAIL:** 26 “Official” email were sent—14 by administration, 11 by HR, and 1 by IT. Emails were sent to college employees marked “Official” and were easily identifiable and searchable which significantly improved communication of decisions made.
- **USE OF FORM FOR MEETING MINUTES:** 36 committees actually took minutes.
 - Of them, 47% use the new form;
 - 53% plan to use the form.
 Development and use of the new Minute Form by Campus Committees was very successful. Nearly half of the Committees used the form and found it helpful and functional. The other half of the Committees plan to use the form in the future.
- **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:** 31 Committees exist with ample opportunity for employees to be involved and have input into decisions that are made related to key initiatives. Participation from the 3 employee groups is as follows:
 - 46.4% of membership came from administration;
 - 29.7% from faculty;
 - 23.9% from staff.
- Comparison of the Committee Membership from 2007 to 2008 demonstrates a significant increase in employee participation:
 - 23 new individuals joined committees in 2008– unduplicated;
 - 57 new individuals joined all committees in 2008– duplicated;

- 39 individuals withdrew or changed committees in 2008 – duplicated;
- No students were counted.

Development and promotion of the Campus Committee diagram, membership rosters, purpose, and function has increased awareness, communication, and information about Campus Committees and their decision-making authority.

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE:** In response to identified complaints about how Professional Development days were structured, The Professional Development Day Committee was formed in the fall of 2007 to plan faculty professional development seminars for administrative contractual days. Previously, administration planned the agenda and the format of the sessions without a formalized structure for faculty and staff involvement. In January of 2008, the PD Day Committee conducted an evaluation survey of the professional development days. The favorable results were reviewed, analyzed and discussed. Attendees found the program very engaging, helpful and educational which improved communication.
- **OUTSTANDING ADMINISTRATOR AND STAFF AWARDS:** A process was established to nominate and honor as well as to acknowledge the contributions and accomplishments of an outstanding administrator and a staff person with a \$250 stipend. These awards are in addition to the Outstanding Faculty Award that was already in place. This process will be on-going and is possible through the generous financial contribution of a previous counselor. Although this award was not directly related to improving decision-making and communication, it does contribute to the overall goal of valuing our employees and promoting IHCC as a good place to work.
- **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF SURVEY RESULTS FROM 2006 TO 2008:** In addition to these measured results, the Committee redistributed a version of the 2006 Employee Climate Survey in order to help quantify if improvements had been made in communication and decision making processes. Thirteen items from the previous survey were used and five new items were added. Because the two surveys were not exactly the same we must be cautious in concluding a strong relationship between the two surveys. The AQIP Committee's recommendation is to use this new survey and distribute it to employees every 2-3 years. The April 2008 survey would then become the baseline for which we could quantify changes in employee's perception related to communication, decision-making and valuing one another. The following are some general findings:
 - The areas of communication and decision making that we appear to be doing satisfactorily or well (as defined by more than 50% of employees indicating that they were satisfied on a specific item) are: freedom to openly express my view point, opportunities are available for me to communicate with my supervisor, IHCC does a good job communicating budget resource decisions, I feel well informed, I am encouraged to participate in departmental decision making, new ideas for improving the quality of my work are encouraged, job performance expectations have been clearly communicated to me and I receive regular performance review on how I do my job.
 - The areas of communication and decision making that we appear to not be doing as well (as defined by less than 50% of employees indicating that they were satisfied on a specific item) are: Institutional policies and procedures have been clearly communicated, communication and collaboration among departments and managers maximizes program effectiveness, decisions are made in an informed manner, I understand how IHCC develops policies and procedures, and employee input is utilized in decision making.
 - Of the first 12 items on this survey (the wording on item #6 was changed so it is not included), statistical analysis was done on 36 distinct categories; 12 categories were administrative responses, 12 were student affairs, and 12 were academic affairs. As compared to the Employee Satisfaction Survey of 2006,
 - Eight out of 36 categories showed improvement and can be looked upon as strengths of the College.
 - Twenty out of 36 categories showed no change and are considered neutral.
 - Eight out of 36 categories did not improve and can be considered as a challenge and opportunity for improvement at IHCC.

- Of the first 12 possible items on this survey,
 - For administration there were 10 items that improved (strengths) and 2 showed no change,
 - For student services all comparisons to the earlier survey produced no change in satisfaction (neutral), and
 - For academic affairs there were 7 items that decreased in satisfaction (challenges), 4 areas that were unchanged (neutral) and 1 item that improved (strength).

In conclusion, there are communication, decision-making, and valuing challenges that persist for the categories of academic affairs and student services while improvements were made within administration.

- Specific strategies that have been implemented during the last two years by the AQIP Committee to improve communication and decision making have been effective. The results of the survey on items #14-18 ranged from 68.3% to 81.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that these strategies were successful. In addition, on the open-ended question asking for suggestions for improvement, specific suggestions were given to improve these strategies.
- In terms of valuing, 74.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “Overall, I feel valued as an employee of IHCC.”

IN SUMMARY, from a macro perspective, it appears that while employees are generally satisfied with communication and decision making within their immediate department and are generally satisfied with opportunities to communicate with their supervisor; dissatisfaction persists with the broader areas of institutional policies, employee input in decision-making, and communication and collaboration among departments and managers.

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

The Committee members were very actively involved in all aspects of this project. At each meeting, responsible parties were identified for ensuring that action plans were implemented. An update was given at each meeting. Agenda items for each meeting were distributed before the meeting and meeting minutes are located on the Intranet so that all college employees have access to the minutes. Each semester, time was given to this Action Project during the Professional Development days in August, January, and May to either report or to have a planned activity to meet the action plan and project goals. In November of 2007, a progress report for this action project was emailed to the campus. In May of 2007, 34 employees attended focus group sessions to identify key communication issues and August of 2007, 22 employees attended focus group sessions to identify strategies to improve communication and decision making. The results of these focus group sessions, as well as surveys that we distributed, guided the AQIP Action Project Committee in prioritizing strategies for implementing the Action Plan during 2007-2008.

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

We will continue to work on strategies to improve communication and decision making, especially those areas identified in the latest survey that indicated that less than 50% of employees were satisfied. As an employee group, faculty appear to be the least satisfied as indicated by a decreased satisfaction in 7 items, 4 items had no change, and 1 item showed improvement compared to the Employee Satisfaction Survey of 2006. In addition, 1 out of 4 survey respondents provided open-ended narrative suggestions for continued improvements. These suggestions will further guide the Committee in identifying strategies for improving communication and decision making. On a very positive note, Specific strategies that have been implemented during by the AQIP Committee to improve communication and decision-making seem to have been effective. The results of the survey on items #14-18 ranged from 68.3% to 81.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that these strategies were successful. In terms of valuing, 74.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “Overall, I feel valued as an employee of IHCC.”

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

The AQIP Action Project to improve communication and decision-making processes has heightened awareness of areas where enhancements can be made to further develop communication efforts. These ideas are brought to the Committee and a recommendation is made by the Committee for who should champion the cause. Some examples of effective practices that have resulted during the last two years directly or indirectly as a result of the AQIP Project are:

- Enrollment Services developed a Guide to its services
- A new Faculty handbook and Paralegal Program handbook were created to assist faculty and students
- HR (in consultation with the academic deans) developed a new faculty letter of assignment that more clearly explains faculty compensation; a process and form was developed for special events and programming,
- Enrollment Services implemented a quality improvement process each semester to identify improvements that can be made in services for students, and the College has developed a new format for the web site.
- Changes in conducting meetings have occurred with recognition of the need for efficient use of time and consistent recording of minutes and decisions.
- Although it may seem inconsequential to recognize implementing email as the “official means of communication” at IHCC, this was a significant accomplishment that required support from the faculty union and leadership as well as other groups on campus. We believe this change has increased communication between and among employees and most significantly, increased communication between students and faculty (especially adjunct faculty).
- In terms of valuing employees and emphasizing IHCC as a good place to work, we believe progress has been made in this area. Special efforts have been made to ensure that staff are recognized and involved in College initiatives.

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

Improving communication and decision-making processes is a significant challenge. Despite the numerous strategies the Committee has implemented, we were disappointed by the survey results specifically related to institutional policies, decision making, and employee input into decision making. However, based on other measures of our success, we feel progress has been made. We think it is noteworthy that 74.9% of employees agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Overall, I feel valued as an employee of IHCC”. We will continue to work on areas identified as a challenge in the survey.