

**Annual Update: 2008-09-13**

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

This action project team spent last year defining/limiting its project to more manageable scope than originally conceived by adopting a two-tier change strategy of short-term bridge projects and long-term systems improvement projects. Short-term projects were: re-organizing the K-drive (a large collection of files selectively available on its own server to college staff) for improved access and efficiency, generating a glossary of terms for better understanding, and clarifying college governance, decision-making and policy generation. The K-drive was completely and successfully reorganized in summer 08. The glossary project team is currently generating definitions of selected terms common to policy and decision-making processes. Action project team members recommended and administration adopted a template for integrating new/changed college policies into existing policies. Informal stakeholder feedback about progress of all three bridge projects has been almost universally positive to date.

**Review (09-23-08):**

This is an important Action Project that connects directly with AQIP Category 5 – Leading and Communicating. NW Arkansas is also addressing Category 6 – Supporting Organizational Operations as a part of the current Project and may incorporate Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness as the project progresses. The college has taken the significant step of defining/limiting the scope of its project by adopting a two-tier change strategy. This change has allowed the college to make reasonable progress toward the completion of the Project over the past year. This was accomplished by identifying and addressing three short-term project: re-organizing the K-drive, creating a policy and decision-making glossary, and clarifying college governance. North West Arkansas adopted a template for integrating new or changed college policies into existing policies, which has the promise to standardize practices and reduce confusion about college processes. Informal feedback has been collected but the college may find that a more systematic process for feedback collection would yield better information and allow the Action Project to better meet the needs of the stakeholders.

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

The college president charged the AQIP Leadership Team to appoint project co-chairs representing faculty and cabinet. Through the president's office the co-chairs and the AQIP Leadership Team invited 7-8 staff members from faculty senate, advancement, and staff council to serve on this action project I team. Team met regularly and actively used senate, advancement and staff input. Project I co-chairs met informally each month during fall with co-chairs of the other two action projects to discuss common issues and seek effective organizational strategies. The project team reported project progress at the second all-college Conversation Day in March 2008; sent updates to the AQIP Leadership Team, including specific progress on bridge projects; reported progress in college newsletters; communicated progress to staff in their respective college divisions; and posted minutes, purpose, charge, and alignment with specific college strategic ends to the college's own AQIP website and to the new college Intranet site [\\*\\*https://inet.nwacc.edu/collegetcommittees.php\\*\\*](https://inet.nwacc.edu/collegetcommittees.php) designed to make all committee workings transparent to all staff.

**Review (09-23-08):**

North West Arkansas' decision to create co-chairs for this Action Project and involve a number of individuals from various areas of the college may have improved the chances that this Project would gain acceptance and buy-in from the various stakeholder groups across the college. It is commendable that the Action Project progress and meeting minutes are communicated to the stakeholders on a regular basis and through a variety of communication channels such as college newsletters, all-college Conversation Days, on the institution's AQIP website and through the new college intranet site. Ensuring that the Action Project's progress and activities are well-known and transparent will foster continuing acceptance and buy-in. Although the Project team includes membership from a variety of locations, it is unclear that all employee groups (administrators, faculty, support staff, etc.) are equitably represented or provided opportunities to offer input to the Project. Both the Project Declaration and the Annual Update mention organizational leadership as being involved but it is difficult to discern whether individuals in non-leadership positions are involved.

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

Next steps will concentrate on implementing long-term goals of improving systems and determining metrics for knowing when effective and open communication has occurred. Metrics will include comparing spring 2008 data with subsequent survey and other findings. Additional next steps will include implementing the glossary project with acknowledgement that it will never be complete as the limited number of terms for definition grows and ongoing documentation of college-wide dissemination, understanding and use of defined terms continues.

#### **Review (09-23-08):**

Having well-defined metrics for the long-term goals, prior to implementation, will increase the chance of success for the Project. It will be important to be sure to match the metrics with not only the Project goals but also with the processes involved. North West Arkansas' decision to acknowledge that the glossary is a living document as it is implemented is a good move. Updating on a regular basis and communicating that an update has occurred will support the Project's goal of improving communication and making decision-making processes more transparent.

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

Completion of two short-term bridge projects demonstrated how strategic project selection based on widespread stakeholder input and intensely focused effort can effect real change. Project team members experienced a new sense of empowerment as evidenced by numerous expressions of gratitude and appreciation extended to them, including specific citation during the all-college fall forum of August 2008. Another effective result from the work of this project is the greatly expanded availability and use of new web-based protocols with which college staff members can interact with and access their own personnel records, payroll information, purchasing, college-supported travel, college-wide committee assignments and reports, etc. A newly available single sign-on will simplify and speed up faculty/staff access to many more web applications.

#### **Review (09-23-08):**

The college has described some very important effective practices. Some Action Projects seem too large to accomplish but if the institution parses the Project into smaller achievable tasks the Project can be successful. North West Arkansas has done this by completing two short-term projects while keeping the long-term project in focus. The institution has also been effective in maintaining interest and motivation for the Project by publicly acknowledging the progress and

successes of the Action Project Team. The addition of technology-based process and employee support is laudable and may have a positive effect on productivity as well as employee satisfaction.

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

Challenges include a continuing need to focus on manageable projects and the need to seek stakeholder input. Institutional research may require additional resources and support in assessing and measuring the effectiveness of the project initiatives' results.

**Review (09-23-08):**

It appears that the college has identified three key issues which could affect the continuing success of this Action Project. Communication is an issue which is typically identified as a major concern of employees in any organization. Identifying concrete processes and small projects that support communication in a meaningful way will be important. Additionally, making sure that as many stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input will be equally important.

Implementing changes may not result in the improvements hoped for if the stakeholders do not feel sufficiently involved. Finally, involving institutional research in the project early may permit the Action Project team to move forward quicker by helping to identify the proper assessment tools and metrics. Since AQIP relies on the effective use of data it is prudent for the college to examine whether institutional research has the resources needed to support this and other Action Projects as well as other institutional needs.

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?

**Review (09-23-08):**

N/A