The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Williston State College

Project Details

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1: Project Goal

A: The college continues to be proactive in what assessments have identified as a morale problem. A team, lead by the Human Resource Manager has been identified, and all levels of staff are working together to implement and improve college morale.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In the 2008 Campus Quality Survey, the College not only declined in eight of eight categories, but scored below the norm in eight of eight categories. The ten largest performance gap items identified by Williston State College employees (2008 Campus Quality Survey) are listed below in descending priority order. The performance gaps address the functional areas perceived by employees as needing the greatest improvement effort:

1. Processes for selecting, orienting, training, empowering, and recognizing employees are carefully planned.
2. Employees are rewarded for outstanding job performance.
3. Administrators recognize faculty and staff when they do a good job.
4. There are effective lines of communication between departments.
5. Administrators set examples of quality services in their day-to-day performance.
6. There is a spirit of teamwork and cooperation in this organization.
7. This institution analyzes complaints to determine appropriate remedial actions.
8. This institution plans carefully.
9. Job responsibilities are communicated clearly to employees.
10. Administrators pay attention to what I have to say.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All college employees are affected by and are involved in this Action Project.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Cabinet has identified a cross functional team to solicit from employees ideas and recommendations in regard to processes like: communication between administrators and staff; communication within divisions; process for training employees; job responsibilities of employees; and staff complaints. Recommendations will be made to executive cabinet. Cabinet will take action and provide quarterly all campus progress reports.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Assessments related to employee morale have taken place over the past eight years. The assessments have identified a steady decline in overall morale. It is anticipated that correcting this trend will take a minimum of one year or more.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The Campus Quality Survey was administered in September, 2010. How the college performs in regard to the 10 largest gaps will be identified, documented, and reviewed in order to make improvements. Results will be provided in spring, 2011. As stated earlier,
Quarterly updates will be provided at all campus meetings on progress in regard to this project.

### Project Outcome Measures

The overall measure for improvement will be the increase in staff perception related to the ten largest performance gaps.

### Project Update

#### Project Accomplishments and Status

- Although employee morale is definitely improving throughout Williston State College, there is still room to continue improving upon it. Below are the past year’s accomplishments:
  - Ten gaps were identified as a result of the 2008 Campus Quality Survey. WSC’s scores were very low in 2008. However, the Campus Quality Survey was administered again in September, 2010 with the results returned in December. Performance gaps decreased in all eight quality categories.
  - A salary matrix was created to reflect employees’ salaries with their job description.
  - Divisions were placed together and offices were moved. For example, a $35,000 renovation faculty suite on the main floor has been completed where students will have more access to their instructors.
  - Guidelines were determined through the Office of Human Resources along with the president of Staff Senate to create a process in which professional development dollars are distributed.
  - Staff are encouraged to apply for positions within the college to further advance their professional careers.
  - The Director of Instructional and Institutional Effectiveness was created after the chairs of the AQIP categories identified a need for this position through the budgeting process.
  - A new environment was created for the annual holiday party which follows WSC’s strategic planning process.
  - Our Campus Connection newsletter was resurrected through the strategic planning process. This is a college newsletter updating on where our employees may be traveling to, meetings scheduled, “kudos”, birthdays, etc.

#### Institution Involvement

- All faculty/staff of Williston State College are involved in this Action Project. Communication and feedback are crucial when improving employee morale within the institution. Identifying a cross-functional communication team gave employees an opportunity to be involved in focus groups where they were able to voice their concerns regarding communication within the institution. The Valuing People group has been identified to continue to improve on employee morale.

  Our strategic planning process involved every employee on campus. Goals for each category are discussed through the AQIP groups.

  Transparency has been established by placing all documents on the college’s web site. This includes the college’s current fiscal year budget, results from surveys, etc. The president provides a quarterly update to all faculty and staff during our monthly Pizza Palooza luncheon.

#### Next Steps

- Next steps are to work with the Valuing People group as well as Executive Cabinet to receive feedback on more ways to improve morale.

#### Resulting Effective Practices

- Effective practices that resulted from the work accomplished on this Action Project are:
  - Results from the 2010 Campus Quality Survey measured staffs perception which demonstrated that employee morale is improving.
  - Positive feedback from faculty and staff indicates an improvement in overall morale.
5: Project Challenges

A: Improving employee morale is a continuous action, however, in the last year, successful strides have been made. Feedback from employees has been instrumental in improving morale. Any challenges they may arise will be brought to the Valuing People group and Executive Cabinet.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: By developing an Action Project that addresses low employee morale, Williston State College has demonstrated that administrators really do care that employees are not satisfied with the environment in which they work. This is the first step in Respecting People, a Principle of High Performing Organizations (PHPO), and Valuing People (AQIP Category 4). This may be part of the reason for the decrease in the performance gaps in eight quality categories. One way the College is further addressing employee dissatisfaction as related to their specific job duties and reflects the College's Focus on Stakeholders, a Principle of High Performing Institutions. By congregating divisions and creating a new workspace, Williston is not only Promoting Collaboration (PHPO) and Building Collaborative Relations (AQIP Category 9) but also Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs (AQIP Category 3). Formalizing a process by which professional development dollars are distributed and encouraging staff to apply for in-house positions are additional ways that the College is showing Integrity in Words and Deeds (PHPO). The creation of a new position, Director of Instructional and Institutional Effectiveness, is proof that the College wants to both Measure Effectiveness (AQIP Category 7) and Plan Continuous Improvement (AQIP Category 8). Finally, resurrecting the Campus Connection Newsletter, in which information is shared and employees are recognized for the good work that they do as well as changing the venue for the holiday party demonstrate that Leadership Support (PHPO) for increasing transparency, employee recognition, and employee morale exists.

2: Institution Involvement

A: This update claims that all faculty and staff are involved but does not define the specific manner by which employees were selected other than the mention of a cross-functional communication team and a Valuing People group. How were the cross-functional communication team members selected? Were they appointed by administrators, or did they volunteer to serve? While it is very important to ensure Broad-based Involvement (PHPO), it is equally imperative that the composition of the teams reflects the make-up of the college community at large. Establishing diverse working teams composed of employees from all levels of work at the institution (maintenance personnel, cafeteria workers, high-level administrators, faculty members, etc.) proves that ALL People are Valued (AQIP Category 4) and reflects the understanding that each job is just as important as the next in creating an atmosphere that not only supports the Mission and Integrity of the institution but also increases employee morale. A diverse team composition also helps all employees Understand Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs (AQIP Category 3) and believe that their individual, unique contributions are genuinely valued.

3: Next Steps
While several of the original areas of employee concern in the 2008 survey have been addressed, the College needs to articulate more clearly the next steps that will address proper employee training for positions, create additional ways to reward outstanding employee performance; develop a means by which employee complaints will be handled; and plan more carefully methods of selecting, training, and empowering employees. Perhaps a "home-grown" instrument could be developed, and this tool could identify more specific changes that employees would like the administration to implement.

### Resulting Effective Practices

Results from the 2010 Campus Quality Survey reflect an increase in employee morale since 2008, when the same instrument was last administered. This demonstrates that the Project may well be making a difference. Making changes such as creating a new position, Director of Instructional and Institutional Effectives, show Williston’s commitment to effectiveness in teaching to support and advance the mission of the College. However, determining a way to better assess which of the Project initiatives has positively impacted employee morale the most will help clarify the resulting best practices.

### Project Challenges

Again, because it appears that the Project is now being driven primarily by the Valuing People Group and the Executive Cabinet, it is not clearly evident that there is Broad-based Involvement (PHPO) that Respects People (PHPO) and Promotes Collaboration (PHPO). Unless all levels of employees at the College have a voice in identifying ways to improve morale, this "revised" Project may actually lower employee morale in the long run. Unfortunately, it appears that the original intent of the Project is "losing steam," and progress has stopped.