

## **Central Arizona College: Construct and Implement a Dynamic Institutional Planning Process AQIP feedback on Annual Update for 2002**

Clearly there has been lots of activity and movement related to this project, which is complex and multifaceted. It includes budgeting, researching, communicating agreed-upon plans to the college's many internal and external constituencies, managing data, programming, implementation, and other activities. The College is to be highly commended for the energy it has demonstrated in attacking this Project, and for the obvious progress it has made in constructing and implementing a dynamic approach to planning.

In fact, there is so much here that it is difficult to see the progress in all this energetic and obviously admirable activity. With experience, the college may decide that the entire project is too ambitious and fuzzy-edged to be tracked productively, and that it may be wise to consider focusing on chunks rather than trying to digest the whole.

For example, your report of holding meetings at places around Pinal County sounds promising, and clearly provides needed and valuable information. But the college undoubtedly could devise a more systematic and accurate means of collecting information about the needs, requirements, and preferences of the various stakeholders it serves. Have the different stakeholder groups served (students, employers, parents, etc.) been segmented and described? Have they been prioritized? Has the college assessed the reliability of its current process for staying in contact and learning about changes in the needs of each group? Without a robust system to stay in touch with the needs of those the college serves, the college may find future planning efforts seriously impaired.

It is less clear how you have used this project to stimulate employee involvement, or to promote collaboration across traditional lines, two important Principles of High Performance Organizations. The section in your update never explains who serves on the Action Project team, or what attempts are being made to directly involve a cross section of employees in planning in a role other than those from whom information is solicited. The project represents an opportunity to let a variety of employees understand quality tools and process improvement firsthand, an experience that could then radiate out into new and additional projects across the institution. It is suggested you consider whether you are fully exploiting the potential of this project for helping your employees learn-from-doing about quality improvement.

In times as uncertain as the ones in which we are living, spending much time identifying five-year strategic goals may turn out to be a poor investment. How do the planning processes, and the plan itself, envision dealing with unforeseen events: public crises (e.g., terrorist incidents that scare people away from public gatherings), interruption of mail or Internet services, fiscal cuts (now common in many states), etc.? Five-year planning is a challenge in stable time; in periods of instability, the assumptions underlying these plans may change dramatically overnight.

The Learning College is an exciting idea. However it is not clear from the Update how the "Learning College focused mission and vision" is being interpreted, and what concrete actions have followed from this goal. Is improved student learning the objective? If so, is there baseline assessment against which progress can be measured? Or is the transfer of institutional learning -- tacit knowledge of the faculty and staff derived from their own experience -- also a goal? If so, what is being done to encourage such transfer, and how do you plan to measure improvement?

Overall, CAC's burst of initial enthusiasm appears to continue, and you now need, perhaps, to take stock of all three projects, and perhaps consider reformulating them as well as the people you are involving in their accomplishment. A more focused approach, perhaps separating out three or four priority threads for immediate attention (e.g., the Learning College, the scorecard, a system for understanding stakeholder needs, a system for tracking the accomplishment of strategic objectives, a budgeting system tied directly to planning objectives, etc.-but not all of these, just a few) would make sense. If you continue the Projects as they are currently organized, you may find that the breadth and fuzziness of this one, in particular, stalls progress and diffuses accountability.

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