THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AQIP ACCREDITATION MODEL FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS TO ADDRESS INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

by

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ABSTRACT

Community college leaders are often faced with addressing institutional issues that arise. Additionally, community college leaders are also expected to keep their institutions post-secondary degree-granting accreditation from their regional association of the Higher Learning Commission. In 1999, the North Central Association of the Higher Learning Commission created the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) as an alternative process through which an already accredited institution could maintain their accreditation. Infusing the principles and benefits of continuous quality improvement (CQI), the AQIP model uses structured goal-setting activities to improve institutional performance, while meeting the needs of their stakeholders and address institutional issues.

According to the Higher Learning Commission (2013), as of May 17th, 2013, 202 institutions of higher education are using the AQIP accreditation model to maintain their accreditation status, however little research has been done to study its effectiveness, value or institutional support. Additionally, there has been no substantive research of the embedded CQI activities in this model to determine if these activities or actions have significantly added value or been effective in this process.

This study was designed to provide first-hand knowledge of this model by applying a case-study participant-observer approach. Artifacts, field notes and interviews were used to research this topic and determine the effectiveness of the model. Participants

were able to reveal their perspectives and realizations were supported by the artifacts and field notes.

In summary, the increasing implementation of the AQIP model into higher education institutions suggested that this model would be an effective option for institutions to retain their accreditation. The initial finding maintained this theory; however it also unveiled challenges, barriers and cons if not implemented with the correct leadership, culture and support. These key findings add important value and insight for a topic that has not been significantly researched.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Higher education in the twenty first century has been placed under a microscope. It is being analyzed, evaluated, examined, investigated, and assessed at every level, spanning from the students who attend, to the tax-paying community, to state and federal government. Each of those parties are respectfully determined to justify that the value of education is worth the high price of tuition. As a result, institutions of higher education over the past two or three decades report that accountability has been on the rise, or at least bureaucratic forms of it have been (Metz, 2011), and institutions are being forced to explain themselves, defend their essential character, and demonstrate that their services are worth the cost (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005).

As a result of the mounting pressures in accountability, institutional leaders began to seek out best practices to meet these growing demands. Taking a lesson from American businesses, which began using total quality management practices in the early 1950s, the paradigm began to shift in the direction of higher education in the early 1980s (Boyd, 2011) and leaders began using some of these techniques to address accountability, quality and institutional functionality. Total quality management in higher education is defined by Hazzard (1993), as the philosophy for organizations to define quality and improve organizational performance and administrative systems. Furthermore, total quality management for higher education includes increased employee participation and

morale; better use of resources as a result of process analysis; increased cooperation across departments; enhanced solutions to problems; a common language applicable through an institution; and reducing isolation (p. 2). Using this model, institutions of higher education began to take a systematic approach toward providing quality, integrity and efficiency within their operation in an attempt to address these pressures.

Continuous Quality Improvement

A subset of total quality management is the component of continuous quality improvement. Continuous quality improvement, or CQI, as defined by Mosby (2013) places special emphasis on future results. "Like total quality management, CQI uses a set of statistical tools to understand subsystems and uncover problems, but its emphasis is on maintaining quality in the future, not just controlling a process." After problem identification, a team of individuals gather research and use a step by step approach to resolve the problem. Not only is problem resolution a goal, but measures are established in an effort to prevent future failures by setting goals, education and measurements of results. Additionally, Mosby (2013) concludes that, "If necessary, the plan may be revised on the basis of the results, so that the improvement is ongoing." This framework provides a full circle assessment plan to ensure that a problem can be resolved and the improvement theory sustained.

This definition captures the framework of the continuous quality improvement process because it defines the objectives and the unique features of quality assurance embedded in the process.

Accreditation

In the United States, there is no centralized or Federal system with the authoritative control over institutions of higher education. However, it has been recognized that a standard level of quality should be in place throughout institutions and thus, accrediting agencies were created to develop evaluation criteria to measure institutional quality. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), now referred to as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) was founded in 1895. As one of six regional associations, it accredits more than 1,000 institutions of higher education in the nineteen-state North Central region (Gatten, n.d.). According to Gatten (n.d.), an accrediting process in used for several purposes; first, to serve to establish and maintain institutional creditability with the public and to serve as the "stamp of approval" that an institution provides meaningful higher education experiences and graduates are knowledgeable and qualified individuals. Second, to satisfy public accountability that resources of the institution have been sufficiently aligned to meet the mission of the college with integrity. Third, accreditation helps to determine wither an institution is eligible to participate in federally funded programs, such as student financial aid (p. 113). The traditional accreditation process involves a ten-year cycle in which institutions are reviewed for accreditation purposes. This traditional ten-year cycle method obligates institutions to undertake an extensive self-study in order to meet established HLC criteria. A team of evaluators is appointed by the HLC and this team visits the institution reports suggestions for improvements and concludes with a recommendation for accreditation. In

1999, an alternative to this traditional accreditation model was introduced, the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP).

Accreditation and the AQIP Framework

Understanding that institutions of higher education were incorporating CQI techniques into the institutional objectives and direction, accreditation agencies also recognized the benefit. Developed and launched out of a Pew Charitable Trusts grant, the Higher Learning Commission created the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) model, which began in 1999 and grew steadily from its original 14 institutions in 2000-01 to over 200 in 2011. The AQIP model, as defined by the Higher Learning Commission, "…is an alternative process through which an organization can maintain its accreditation status with the Higher Learning Commission. AQIP's goal is to infuse the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education." (www.ncahlc.org, 2011). This model draws upon a variety of common principles, initiatives and programs, which includes Baldrige criteria. The Baldrige criteria became known in the mid-1980s, when U.S. leaders realized that in a global and competitive business market that quality was going to be the deciding factor in sustainability. In 1999, the business focus of Baldrige expanded to health care and educational organizations. In order to meet the Baldrige criteria, education organizations are empowered to; reach the goals they set out; improve results; and become more competitive by aligning plans, processes, decisions, people, actions and results (Blazey, Davison & Evans). In addition to Baldrige criteria other principles, initiatives and programs embedded in the AQIP

model include, Total Quality Management (TQM); Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI);Six Sigma, a data-driven approach and methodology traditionally used in industry for eliminating defects (Isixsigma, 2013); ISO 9000, a quality tool to ensure that products and services are consistently meeting customer requirements and that quality is consistently improved (International Organization for Standardization, 2013); and a variety of other quality tools.

The Commission Criteria

When an institution selects the AQIP accreditation model as their primary source of establishing and maintaining their accreditation, they agree to meet a variety of requirements that include, but are not limited to, meeting the commissions' five criteria. According to the Higher Learning Commission (2013), effective January 1, 2013, the commission's five criteria included

Table 1.1: *Commission Criteria*

TERM	DEFINITION
Mission	The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.
Integrity: *Ethical and Responsible Conduct*	The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible
Teaching and Learning: *Quality, Resource, and Support*	The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.
Teaching and Learning: *Evaluation and Improvement*	The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.
Resource, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness	The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

In order for an institution to meet the commission's criteria for higher education, AQIP categories can be used to help analyze and improve the systems essential to being an effective institution. In the document, Introduction to AQIP (2007), the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), metaphorically, explains that, "the Categories serve as 'buckets' that allow institution to sort their key institutional processes into analyzable groups, and as 'lenses' that permit in-depth examination of each group of processes" (p. 2). Thus, each category guides the institutions into structuring its Systems Portfolio and in crafting Action Projects. A detailed explanation of Systems Portfolios and Action Projects will be covered later in this chapter.

AQIP Categories

There are nine distinct AQIP categories that serve as a functional checklist for institutions to either develop, or maintain, a quality framework that fosters continuous quality improvement.

Contextually and depicted from left to right, this framework includes each category and visually represents a mapping of how institutions can methodically progress from identification, to analysis, to goal attainment; all while measuring the effectiveness of each category:

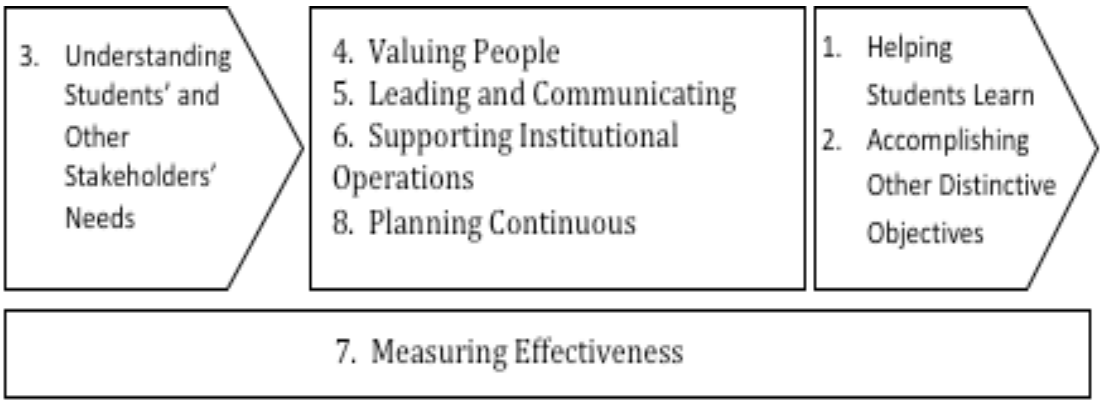

Figure 1.1 – AQIP Quality Framework

Drawing from the document, *Introduction to AQIP* (2007), the following is a condensed summation of each category as listed by the HLC:

Helping Students Learn

This category focuses on helping students learn and the student development.. In this category, the institution is asked to measure key processes and performance indicators to best describe the actions it will take to continuously improve the teaching and learning that takes place.

Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

Asking institutions to distinguish themselves from other colleges and universities, this category addresses the processes that contribute to achieving the institutional goals and objectives. Additionally, this category questions the tracking and evaluating methodologies that are used to ensure that the institution is directly contributing to the achievement of the institutional mission.

Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

This category examines what the institution does to understand the specific needs and requirements of the individuals and groups that they serve. This process includes the subcategorizing of students and other stakeholder groups. Furthermore, this category delves deeper into the continuous improvement processes that institutions use to improve operations and key process to meet the needs of these stakeholder groups.

Valuing People

This category observes the institutional commitment it has to develop the faculty, staff and administrators on campus. Special emphasis is placed on the coordinated efforts of all those employed with the understanding that they all lead to institutional success. It further examines institutional processes and systems related to work and job environment and focuses on measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Leading and Communicating

This category considers the leadership and communication structure that guides the institutional priorities, decision-making process, and communication of institutional visions and goals. Additionally, this category examines how measurement, analysis of results and efforts are made to continuously improve areas within the institution.

Supporting Institutional Operations

Examining a variety of key institutional support processes, this category provides insight into the environment in which learning can thrive; thus, the design, operation, and performance of institutional processes and systems relating to student support,

administrative support, identification of needs, contributions of student learning, and accomplishing institutional objectives are examined.

Measuring Effectiveness

This category is driven on performance improvements and the systems used to collect and analyze the information. Items in this category include the methodology for collecting, storing, managing, and using information and data that focus on performance. This categories fundamental principle is how an institution tracks overall performance in collecting the right data and distributing it to the right people at the right time.

Planning Continuous Improvement

In this category, the planning process is evaluated. Institutions are asked how strategies and action plans help achieve the mission and vision. Additionally, this category investigates how institutions evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of the planning system, performance targeting, forecasting resources, and undertaking regular effort for improvement for the planning process.

Building Collaborative Relationships

Feeding on the collaborative evaluation process for improvement, this category analyzes how the institution fosters a system for building key internal and external collaborative relationships. Special focus is placed on how these relationships relate and align to the institutional goals and directions.

Core Processes and Improvement Cycles

In addition to institutions meeting the nine AQIP categories, the AQIP accreditation model requires institutions to meet core processes that are evaluated

simultaneously on three distinct cycles. Each cycle has a specific duration and sequence of distinctive processes.

The first cycle, defined by the HLC as "action," is conducted annually. "Action," is the process of institutions committing to address three to four projects, traditionally named "action projects," and these projects are selected by the institution after a strategic forum. Although action projects fall in the annual cycle, they can be completed in a few months or even years, and institutions have the freedom of beginning new projects at any time. Since this timeline varies per action project, the HLC requires institutions to provide an Action Project Update to AQIP, which is in the form of a written report. This report defines the current status of the action project, progress that has been made and barriers that have been encountered; in return, AQIP will then provide written feedback. As improvements are achieved, institutions are recommended to incorporate these achievements into the published Systems Portfolio.

Systems Portfolios are evaluated under the four-year Systems Appraisals; however, institutions within the first four years of participating in AQIP are required to develop a Systems Portfolio. This portfolio is a public document not to exceed 125 pages that describes the fundamental institutional systems. Each of the nine AQIP categories are covered, and a description of the process, results, and improvements of each system must be documented. Defined in *Introduction to AQIP* (2007),

"The Systems Portfolio consists of an Organizational Overview and explicates each of the major systems employed to accomplish an organization's mission and objectives. The organization answers specific questions for each of the nine AQIP

Categories. For each system, the questions deal with context for analysis, processes, results, and improvements. The Organizational Overview presents a capsule picture that helps readers understand the organizations' key strengths and ambitions, as well as the challenges and conflicts it faces." (p. 8).

The second cycle, defined by the HLC as "Strategy," includes the Systems Appraisal and the Strategy Forum, which has a four-year cycle.

The Systems Appraisal is a process in which evidence related to the criteria for accreditation is evaluated. This is completed through a process of describing, analyzing, and measuring each criterion. Through in-depth descriptions, institutions provide the (P)Process, (R)Result, and (I)Improvement for each criterion. This document is then examined by AQIP peer reviewers, in which written and actionable feedback is provided in an effort to make institutions, "…create strategies and actions that will move them quickly toward achievements of their goals" (*Intro to AQIP*, 2007, p. 10).

In addition to the Systems Appraisal, institutions must host a Strategy Forum. Briefly described, Strategy Forums are, "…a supportive, facilitated peer review process to help an organization select, critically examine, and commit to a set of Strategies and Action Projects that will drive quality improvement, "The Strategy Forum helps the organization address the AQIP Categories that are most vital at the time" (*Intro to AQIP*, 2007, p. 8).

The third cycle, which is conducted every seven years, includes both a Quality Check Up and Reaffirmation of Accreditations. Imbedded in this cycle is quality

assurance and "evidence based" evaluations. Institutions in this cycle receive a mandatory site visit one to two years prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, with the goal of ensuring that institutions are demonstrating evidence of continuous improvement, continually complying with the HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and both action cycles and strategy cycles are taking place. During the Quality Check Up, AQIP officials provide insightful feedback and consultation on specific issues. Following the Quality Check Up, accreditation is either affirmed or denied.

Visually, the three embedded improvement cycles of continuous improvement can be displayed in Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2 – Action, Strategy and Accreditation Cycles

AQIP Model and CQI

The AQIP model provides a new process for institutions to maintain their accreditation; however, it does not prescribe the way institutions reach those accreditations standards. Institutions are provided with a set of analytic categories, activities, and procedures; however they are not directed on how to reach these outcomes. At this level, institutions can begin to use initiatives and/or programs, such as Total Quality Management, Continuous Quality Improvement, Baldrige Standards, Plan-Do-Check-Act, and many other quality tools to meet these standards.

For the purpose of this research, quality methods embedded in the AQIP model will be evaluated. The Primary method for evaluation in this study is the Deming Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), which also includes the 7-step CQI quality tool. This quality tool uses a systematic approach for applying quality principles that focuses on data-driven decision making, decentralizing control, measuring effectiveness, assessment of results, empowering stakeholders, and many other principles that yield continuous improvement.

The pioneer of quality management, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, developed the PDCA cycle (Brassard and Ritter, 2000). The PDCA cycle has its foundation in helping teams systematically identify and understand problems, generate ideas and develop effective plans, and ensure that the current problem stays fixed. Further explanation of the PDCA cycle will be covered in the literature review.

The PDCA cycle maps the approach for understanding and resolving problems, but many teams need additional details to guide them through the problem solving

efforts. Thus, the 7-step CQI quality tool provides 7 unique steps to process through the PDCA. The quality principles of the 7-Step CQI process include:

1. Identify areas for improvement.
2. Define current situation.
3. Analyze current situation.
4. Develop an improvement theory.
5. Implement best strategies.
6. Monitor results.
7. Adjust, standardize, or plan further.

Layering the 7-Step CQI tool on the PDCA quality method can be depicted in the following model:

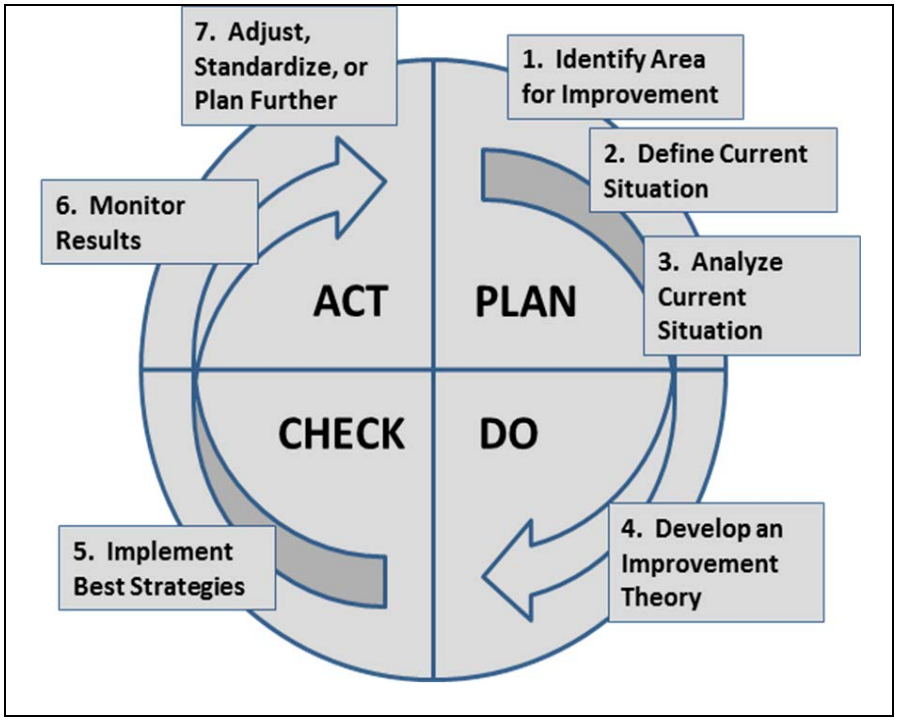

Figure 1.3 – PDCA and 7-Step CQI

When layered together, the PDCA quality method and 7-step quality tool crosswalks the AQIP accreditation process and assists institutions with meeting the standards and criteria for accreditation.

CQI and Action Projects

According to the HLC, Action Projects serve important goals and they focus and highlight an institution's effort in undertaking specific improvement initiatives. Furthermore, Action Projects provide the HLC with evidence that AQIP institutions are seriously committed to a regimen of continuous improvement (Action Project Guide, 2008, p. 2). AQIP institutions typically follow a framework that includes events or activities, in which stakeholders are engaged to identify areas of improvement. For example, some institutions engage their stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, retreats or conversation days to gather input and identify areas of improvement. Institutional leaders then select a minimum of three action projects that include cross-functional and cross-departmental teams. Action Project teams then develops a project charter to identify the approach, scope and goals of the team, followed by a published declaration of the Action Project. Action Project teams then apply the CQI process to address the issues, and annually update the HLC to inform them of their, progress, timelines, goals, measures, delays, challenges, discoveries and any other updates deemed necessary by the institution (Action Project Guide, 2008, pp. 2-6).

Holistically, Action Projects serve as the conceptual framework for institutions to apply CQI measures to an identified stakeholder issue. This process garners a setting in which teams of individuals can identify an area for improvement, analyze the situation,

develop a strategy to address the issue, implement the strategy, and assess the results. Functionally, this process uses CQI principles to assure quality, stimulate institutional effectiveness, measure performance, and demonstrate accountability to the HLC and the stakeholders.

Project Sponsor

Action projects also require their own leadership and for that purpose, Project Sponsors are assigned to the action project. According to the Action Project Guide (2011), Project Sponsors are the person, people or groups of power, influence, resources, and interest to champion the project and clear away obstacles that may arise (p. 4). Throughout the action project, these project sponsors must support the goals and support the direction of the action project team. With such overarching guidance, project sponsors can influence and impact action project teams, but should remain cautious of "taking charge" in this role.

Institution History and Profile

The institution used for this study was founded in the early 1920s as a Junior College. As with many Junior Colleges at the time, it was charged with making higher education accessible to the local community. In 1973, the college was renamed after a community philanthropist that had long historical ties to the community, had made monetary and land donations, and helped shape the institutional vision and mission. Today, this college is considered to be a comprehensive college with strong ties to the surrounding community. In recent years, it has conscientiously placed student learning

and continuous quality improvement at the center of its policies and processes. With focus on university transfer, technical, applied science and lifelong learning, this college offers over 100 degrees and certificates in a wide range of programs, including Liberal Arts Transfer, Health Science, Business, Computer Science, Technology and many more. However, this college is not alone, as the local area includes numerous colleges and universities within a 50-mile radius, including both non-profit and for-profit. For this reason, this college operates with a strategic plan that incorporates principles including, but not limited to, key non-instructional services and programs; alignment of processes with the mission, policies and requirements; alignment of administrative support and mission; collection and distribution of data; identifying commitments, constraints, challenges and opportunities; and developing key partnerships and collaborations.

To understand the overarching perspective of this college, it is important to also understand the basic student profile and institutional model that is in place. The basic institutional profile is included in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: *Student, Administrative, and Faculty Profile*

CHARACTERISTIC	TOTALS	
Term Enrollment	12,000	
Student: Average Age	27	
Gender	61 %	Female
Ethnicity	39 %	Male
	72 %	White
	17 %	African American
	2 %	Hispanic
	9 %	Other
Administrative Positions	318	
Faculty: Full time	152	
Part Time	446	

With this information presented and for the purpose of this study and for inference, it is safe to classify this college as a medium scale institution, serving a traditional college population, which is located in a midsize urban community.

The AQIP Process and this College

Shortly after institutions began participating in the AQIP process in 2000, this college, under the direction of a new President, began to integrate the 9 AQIP Categories into the institutional strategic plan; this was all done prior to the college formal application and subsequent acceptance by the HLC. It wasn't until April of 2005, that the President formed a 24-member Accreditation Recommendation Committee (ARC) to research and make recommendation for either the AQIP accreditation model or the PEAQ accreditation model. The ACR team attended the AQIP Colloquium, and upon return, unanimously recommended that the college apply to become an AQIP institution and follow the AQIP accreditation model. In October of 2005, the college became a formal AQIP school. Beginning the first stages of AQIP accreditation, in 2005, 503 employees attended the first conversation day, in which 76 proposed AQIP Action Projects were identified. Following the AQIP rubric, three HLC reportable Action Projects were selected. Based on an identified need, in 2008, the Department of Planning, Research, & Quality was created in an effort to support the CQI efforts needed for successful Action Projects. In line with HLC and AQIP requirements, in 2009, this college submitted the first AQIP Systems Portfolio, completed the four Action Projects, and hosted the second AQIP Discussion Day modeled on the 2005 Conversation Day. In 2010, following the

AQIP cycles, the college again selected three reportable Action Projects, including the topic for this research; Student Readiness.

Bringing into scale the knowledge of the college's awareness of the AQIP model, in May of 2010, a survey was deployed to all employees. There were 909 employees at the institution, 257 employees took the AQIP awareness survey (represented roughly 28% of the employee population). The results are detailed in Figure 1.4.

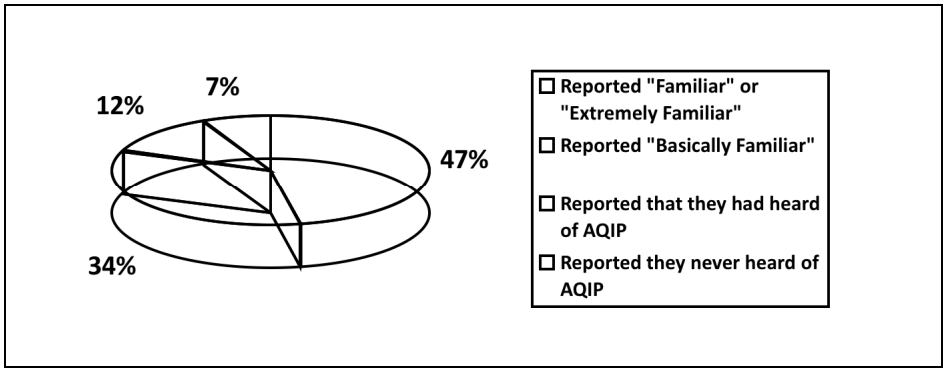

Figure 1.4 - Familiarity Study

This awareness report is included because it plays a key role in the overall awareness, support and institutional commitment to the AQIP model and the impact it has on its overall effectiveness.

Research Problem

Understanding the AQIP model and its use for accreditation, institutions have begun to use CQI models to maintain their accreditation status with the HLC. Institutions are using these quality models to attempt to advance their performance and reach new levels of effectiveness. Institutions are seeking to meet the needs of the stakeholders,

while holding themselves accountable to those that provide funding. In addition, institutions are using these quality tools to meet the mission they set out to achieve. However, some may ask, and thus the research question is; is the AQIP model an effective model for community college leaders to use for addressing institutional issues?

Before addressing the research problem, it is important to define some key terms in the research problem. The terms include; "effective," "addressing," and "institutional issues." For the purpose of this study, the researcher created Table 1.3 to define these key terms:

Table 1.3: *Research Term Definitions*

TERM	DEFINITION
Effectiveness	Institutional leaders agree that the AQIP model fosters a process that brings the institution from issue identification to issue resolution.
Addressing	The use of CQI principles to frame issue resolution.
Institutional issues	Issues identified by stakeholders during the conversation day.

Within this research problem, there are four supporting research questions posed by this study. The purpose of these supporting research questions is to add depth and importance to this research problem.

As such, the first supporting research question examines the needs and outcomes of community college leaders in today's educational climate. As institutional issues arise, many educational leaders use problem solving techniques to address these issues, whether that is basic problem troubleshooting and resolution or more complicated and holistic methodologies. For the purpose of this study, the AQIP model will be reviewed and

examined to determine if it meets the needs of community college leaders. Therefore, the first supporting research question is (1) Does the AQIP model meet the needs and desired?

By providing insight to this research question, a community college leader can determine if this model meets their needs and objectives and if they have the culture and attributes in place to implement this model.

The second supporting research question delves deeper into the attributes of the AQIP model that promote effectiveness. As the following study will examine, key attributes will be observed through the case study approach and effectiveness will be measured from a qualitative perspective. Thus, the second supporting research question is (2) What attributes of the AQIP model promote effectiveness?

When understanding the attributes that promote effectiveness, community college leaders can employ these attributes into the model to ensure that the intended results are met.

As with any research, and from a leadership perspective, reviewing a process for pros and cons should ensue. Without this review, a community college leader may put the college community into an environment that doesn't have the framework for success. In order to understand this framework, the third supporting research question is (3) What, if any, are the pros and cons of using the AQIP model and CQI to address institutional issues?

Once these pros and cons are reviewed and discussed, community college leaders should be able to assess their own institutional culture, institutional operations, leadership structure and other key designs and decide whether this model can be applied at their respective institutions.

Following the third research question, but closely aligned, a community college leader understands that all colleges are not alike; therefore, the basic question will be asked: 4) Can the AQIP model be applied to all types of institutions?

Understanding that there will be limitations to this study, this question will still be asked and supported by case study interviews. This qualitative approach will provide the basic backdrop from the participants' perspective to determine if this model can be applied at all types of institutions and what possible barriers or obstacles a college may face.

The sum of the primary research problem and supporting research design will provide a foundational framework for community college leaders to decide if the AQIP model is right for their colleges. It will also provide knowledge and insight into the applicability of this model on their respective college campuses. Lastly, it will reveal details and unique aspects of this model that have yet to be studied, while providing a genuine and unpretentious viewpoint from a participant observer and case study standpoint.

Methods

The methods for this research problem will be analyzed under a qualitative scope. Qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2009), is a process in which the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning people have structured, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (p. 13). The nature of qualitative research typically has four characteristics: the focus is on the process, understanding, and the meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collections and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). As a driving force for performing this research, these principles will be used to accomplish this research.

The first characteristic is focusing on process, understanding the purpose for the research, and discussing the meaningfulness of the research. In this form of research, special emphasis and concentration is placed on understanding "how" people are interpreting their experiences, the process of delineating the procedures and the way they describe their interpretation of the experience.

In an effort to gain a first-hand experience of the research, the researcher will be used as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The second characteristic allows the researcher to collect the data through interviews, observations and document analysis of artifacts. According to Merriam (2009), "What questions are asked, what is observed, and what documents are deemed relevant will depend on the disciplinary theoretical framework of the study" (p. 23). For this reason, significant importance will be placed on the participants' observation of behaviors, activities and interactions of team

members. These actions may seem to be natural for the team setting, but are of significance in the research framework for understanding key attributes that lead to success or failure of the teams' objectives.

A third characteristic of Merriam's model is that the research is inductive. Through this process, the qualitative researcher gathers data to build on concept, answer hypotheses, and develop theories. This data, collected through interviews, observation and artifact accumulation is used to build toward a theory and then, subsequently, to prove or disprove the research problems and questions.

The last characteristic is designed to convey what has been, or is being learned from the research study. Rather than using numbers that are traditionally provided in quantitative research, this research design incorporates narrative perspectives, pictures, quotes from the participants, and uses field notes to "tell" the story.

Specifically relating to this research problem, the research being conducted will also be researched and evaluated from a "case study" approach. The case study approach provides three unique features: it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The particularistic characteristic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon; the descriptive characteristic allows the researcher to provide a "thick" description, a term derived from Clifford Geertz (1973), an anthropologist who defined it as the complete and literal description of an investigation; and the heuristic characteristic means the researcher can illuminate the understanding of the phenomenon under study in an effort to bring discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known (Merriam, 2009, pp. 43-45). Using the

Merriam principles and embracing the characteristics of qualitative research, this study will reveal experiences and understanding of the AQIP model that have yet to be researched.

The case study being reviewed for this research was selected by the college and focuses on student readiness. The selection of this case study has been made for various reasons including; this researcher has been appointed by the President to serve on this Action Project team which will afford the opportunity to serve as a participant observer; this Action Project related directly to the leadership role that the researcher plays at the college; and lastly, as a participant observer, this researcher will have access to the artifacts produced during the case study. Merriam (2009) defines a participant observer by stating, "The researcher's observe activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant. The trade-off here is between the depth of the information revealed to the researcher and the level of confidentiality promised to the group in order to obtain this information." (p. 124). In this role, the researcher can continue to play an effective role as an Action Project team member, while also gleaning information about the effectiveness of AQIP through the evaluation of artifacts such as

- Meeting minutes.
- Agendas.
- Action Project Charter.
- Data Artifacts such as Infinity Mapping and Plus Delta results.

In addition to artifacts, and as described further in the methodology section, field notes can also be evaluated. Field notes to be collected and evaluated may include the

physical setting, the behaviors of other participants, the activities taking place, the interactions between team members, the conversations that take place, subtle factors that perhaps are less obvious but have high impact, and the researchers own behavior on this team. This information will allow for the "thick" description that qualitative research is supposed to yield.

Interviewing subjects is also a qualitative research tool that this researcher will use to collect and analyze data. Freeman, DeMarrais, et al., (2007) explains an interview as, "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 29). Through these interviews, effectiveness of AQIP, effectiveness of CQI techniques, personal reactions to AQIP and CQI, and insight into the effectiveness of addressing institutional issues can be collected, documented, and analyzed in an effort to answer the research problem.

Delimitations

In an effort to describe the effectiveness of the AQIP model and CQI techniques, this researcher has controlled the study to MCC and one Action Project case study. Interviews will be limited to Action Project team members, past Action Project team members and the community college leadership team at MCC. Only those artifacts that will be made public and published on the MCC website will be used in the evaluation; field notes and interview documents can be made available upon request and approval.

Limitations

Since the study participants were not selected at random and are place bound to MCC, the results of this study should not be used as a predictor of how other unique institutions should classify effectiveness. In addition, results of this study should not be applied universally to other populations, since the results of this study are limited to the population that was observed. Furthermore, outcomes of leaders, applicability of results and what is perceived as pros and cons may vary per institution. However, functionality and the results of this study can be applied generally and the analysis of the case study may be applied in various ways. Output of this comprehensive study could lend itself to additional research, research questions, or research methodology and applied to other unique settings. These recommendations will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Summary

Accountability in higher education has become a pressing issue, an expectation, and a demand from the general public; federal, state, and local governments; and other stakeholders. As a result, higher education institutions began to embrace some of the quality practices embedded in business since the early 1950s. Since then, institutions have used a multitude of quality tools to meet the accountability standards that have been set. However, very little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of these accountability standards and particularly the practice of continuous quality improvement measures to address institutional issues.

By focusing on a particular case study, within an institutional setting that matches parameters equivalent to a typical community college, this research could potentially bring to the surface the effectiveness of using CQI tools to address institutional issues.

To facilitate this study, a literature review was conducted to determine how quality tools, including Action Learning, Total Quality Management, Baldrige Criteria and various other tools have helped reengineer education with quality. The result of this literature review is presented in the next chapter, and the detailed methods for this study are presented in Chapter three. Chapter four will present a detailed account of the results of the qualitative study, and Chapter five contains a discussion of the results, their application for practice, a summary of the key findings, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are numerous examples of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in business and industry. In addition, there is momentum for the use of TQM and CQI models in higher education. There have been various methods, levels and approaches that organizations have used; some have had great success, while others faced unforeseen barriers that limited them from achieving their objectives. With this perspective, this chapter provides a review of the history of TQM and CQI, the transition of TQM and CQI to higher education, common examples of CQI methods that are used in higher education with specific examples, as well as barriers and obstacles that some institutions have faced during implementation. Lastly, a rationale for further study of CQI in higher education is discussed.

History of TQM and CQI

Throughout the literature, many believe that TQM began with the Japanese in the early 1950s. The Japanese were credited with using TQM and CQI to achieve and maintain a competitive edge in the world market. However, the principles of TQM can be dated as far back as the 1930s. In actuality, TQM arose initially through the work at Bell Laboratories and the U.S Bureau of the Census. The principles of TQM were focused on technical aspects and statistical process control (SPC) procedures that were heavily used

in precision manufacturing. U.S. munitions, weapons, and other war materiel manufacturers in World War II used SPC to great advantage and SPC training programs were developed to train an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 engineers. (Chafee & Sheer, 1992).

After WWII, where most of the literature on continuous improvement begins, the literature discusses the use of TQM in Japan, which was used in an effort to help Japan rebuild its economy. A pioneer and driving force in this movement was W. Edwards Deming, an American statistician, who took forward the TQM methodology. According to Marchese (1991), Deming criticized the Japanese for their cheap, shoddy goods; he told them that quality will reap lasting benefits in market share and profitability; he laid out fourteen principles for making quality a "strategic advantage." Shortly after, the Japanese turned their attention to quality principles that Joseph Juran wrote about in A History of Managing for Quality (1995), and later, they turned to the writings of Philip Crosby in Quality is Still Free (1995). Over the next 40 years, the Japanese culture fully embraced TQM and as Marchese (1991) stated, "They struggled, adapted, developed their own gurus (Ishikawa, Imai), pursued the quality ideal relentlessly…the rest, as they say, is history" (p. 3). As a result, Japan recognized Deming's contributions to their economy, instituted the annual Deming Prize for contributions to quality of product and/or service, and in 1960, Japan's Emperor awarded Deming the Second Order Medal of Sacred Treasure (Cornesky, McCool, Barnes, & Weber, 1992).

As noted, Japanese industries embraced TQM fully and developed concepts and applications over the past 40 years. The United States took notice of the success in Japan and had a major turning point in the 1980s. As noted by Chafee and Sheer (1992), a

major turning point for TQM in the United States happened after NBC featured a documentary of Deming called “If Japan Can, Why Can’t We?” that aired in 1980. This broadcast prompted U.S industries to embrace the concept of quality and TQM. National leaders from corporations such as Ford Motor Company, American Express, IBM, Xerox, Motorola, and many more, began to incorporate TQM and quality principles into their operations with an emphasis on increasing productivity.

Recognizing this fundamental change in quality, in 1987, the U.S. Congress created the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, similar to the Japan’s Deming Prize; its seven criteria becoming a consensus statement of TQM values (Marchese, 1991) (Chafee & Sheer, 1992). The seven criteria, derived from TQM, quickly became the accepted template for judging corporate quality improvement efforts. The seven Baldrige criteria include *Leadership; Information and analysis; Planning; Human Resource Utilization; Quality Assurance; Quality Results; Customer Satisfaction.*

Unrelated to the development of the Baldrige award, Chafee & Sheer (1992) indicate that, “The first campuses in the nation to use TQM began in 1985, and it began to spread rapidly in academic year 1989-90. This transition required redefining of some elements of TQM and re-emphasis of other parts. Chafee & Sheer (1992) discuss TQM as a well-equipped and well-stocked kitchen with ingredients and the mechanisms for good management, organization and process. Another reason they add, “It just looks right,” people in higher education recognized the quality of management tools in TQM and could easily relate them to the issues they were facing at their campuses. The last reason that Chafee & Sheer (1992) discussed was that two postsecondary accrediting bodies, the

American Association of Collegiate schools and the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology supported it (p. 9). Colleges included Delaware County Community College, Fox Valley Technical College, Hutchinson technical College, and approximately 11 other Universities began infusing TQM principles into the administrative side of education, leaving academic issues for later (p. 9). This TQM movement and use of CQI can be attributed to the search for quality in education that was a reaction to the increased consumerism of students and their critique of the educational "product" (Downey, 2000). Institutions, rooted in their rich history had their own members, codes, evaluations and methods of governing and hadn't realized they were out of touch, "Tradition was no longer relevant to students, they were much more practically driven. Students felt the universities were out of date and out of touch" (Downey, 2000, p. 4). To bring institutions back in touch with student expectations and the mounting pressures for accountability and quality, institutions over time began to use a variety of quality methods to meet these demands. Three quality methods used to meet these demands included, but were not limited to, the PDCA or often referred to as the "Deming Cycle; Benchmarking; and Action Learning.

As quality in higher education rose and quality efforts lead by Baldrige converged, the Malcolm Baldrige National Award added an educational category. First published in 1999, the Baldrige criteria for education provided a comprehensive structure for educational institutions to align their mission, vision, values, and goals with the resources essential for a long-term improvement effort (Sorensen, Furst-Bowe, & Moen, 2005). The criteria was built upon a set of core values and concepts, which are embedded in the beliefs and behaviors found in high performing organizations. These core values

and concepts include, *Visionary Leadership; Learning-Centered Education; Organizational and personal learning; Valuing Faculty, Staff, and Partners; Agility; Focus on the Future; and Creating Value and a Systems Perspective (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2011).* Since the educational criteria were established, nine schools have been recipients of the award, including three institutions of higher education: University of Wisconsin-Stout (2001); Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business (2004); and Richland College (2005).

Understanding that quality in higher education was an effective technique to meet stakeholder demands, accreditation bodies began infusing quality principles into the institutional accreditation process. In 1999 and the Higher Learning Commission, led by Steven Spangel, developed the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), which mirrors many of the Baldrige criteria and is structured around quality improvement principles and processes. Choosing this accreditation option allows institutions to use existing quality methods to satisfy the Commission's criteria. Currently, over 200 institutions are choosing this accreditation model and the pattern of growth shows an upward trend.

Quality Methods

Throughout the review of the literature, multiple quality methods were used in the higher education quality movement. These included the 7-step CQI quality principle, as part of the Plan, Do, Check, Act Cycle (PDCA) quality method; Benchmarking, which grew as an accountability quality principle from TQM methods; and Action Learning, a quality principle embedded in Human Resource Development quality methods, which

focuses on solving complex problems while also fostering employees development. A brief description and example of these uses are discussed below.

7-Step CQI

With the understanding that continuous quality improvement is never ending, the PDCA cycle was a fundamental component of Deming's work in quality management. The PDCA cycle is considered to be a powerful approach for problem solving and an excellent foundation to help teams systematically identify and understand problems or issues, generate ideas and develop an effective plan to solve the problem, and ensure that the current problem gets fixed and stays fixed (Bassard & Ritter, 2000, p. 11). This process is separated into four distinct phases (Bassard & Ritter, 2000) and can be viewed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: *Plan, Do, Check, Act*

TERM	DEFINITION
Plan	Plan a change or a test aimed at improvement, once the root cause of the problem is determined.
Do	Carry out the change or the test, preferably in a pilot or on a small scale.
Check	Check to see if the desired result was achieved, what or if anything went wrong and what was learned.
Act	Adopt the change if the desired result was achieved, if the results are not as desired, repeat the cycle using knowledge accumulated from the previous cycle.

In an effort to provide problem-solving teams additional guidelines, the 7-step CQI model was developed to provide these groups with a step-by-step approach to gaining the results described in the PDCA cycle. Through the use of the 7-step CQI model, Brassard (2000) indicates that teams will be able to

1. Systematically solve a problem
2. Understand and communicate the problem.
3. Identify when additional data are needed.
4. Synthesize data into a visual form that can be analyzed.
5. Use tools to interpret data and make conclusions.
6. Develop and implement solutions to the problem.
7. Monitor the problem for ongoing effectiveness.
8. Learn from the teams' problem-solving experience.

These goals can be achieved by following this basic outline as depicted in Figure 2.1:

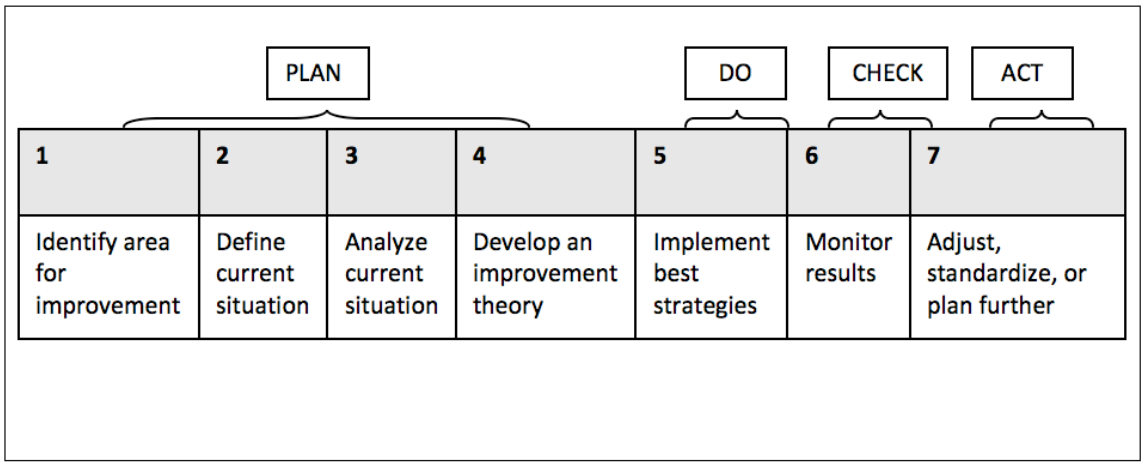

Figure 2.1 – Plan, Do, Check, Act – 7-Step CQI

Benchmarking

Throughout the literature, benchmarking was defined in various ways. Spendolini (1992) defined benchmarking as "…a continuous, systematic process for evaluating the precuts, series, and work processes of organizations that are recognized as representing best practices for the purpose of organizational improvement" (p. 9). Benchmarking in higher education is explained by Gaither et al. (1994) as performance indicators that are used for comparing performance and quality among peers over time and adapting techniques to align. Further definitions, within the context of higher education, Bender (2002) also indicates that analyzing the best practices of peer institutions, then adapting and developing programs on their own campuses, will lend itself to educational leaders

improving the quality of programs and services that they provide. Furthermore, Bender (2002) states that, "Benchmarking can be enormously useful to influence and shape institutional decisions" (p. 119).

Benchmarking follows four core quality principles, which are very similar to the PDCA quality model. Benchmarking, in higher education, means first selecting and defining the administrative or teaching process to be studied; second, is using steps to gather data through various techniques such as surveys, questionnaires, visits, etc; third, is analyzing the data gathered to calculate the research finding and developing recommendations; fourth and the final step, is to improve performance and adapt to the change. As with the PDCA philosophy, Alstete (1995) states, "For benchmarking to be truly effective, the process should be never ending. Organizational leaders should never believe that they can, or should, stop comparing their performance with others." (p. 8).

One of the most notable cases in business regarding the use of benchmarking was in the early 1980s with Xerox. Xerox was facing severe financial and competitive pressures, market shares had fallen from more than 80% to about 35%, and costs and quality were creating huge problems for the company (Pryor, 1989, as cited by Alstete 1995). Xerox had to study and compare the manufacturing costs with competitors and demonstrate that their competitors were selling the same products at an equal price. After setting up benchmarking throughout the company, Xerox regained market share, dramatically lowered costs, improved quality, and saved itself from financial disaster (Alstete, 1995).

Although there has not been a mainstream example of benchmarking in higher education, such as the Xerox case for business and industry, the use of benchmarking has been persistent and used in a variety of ways. Loomis-Hubbell, Massa, & Lapovsky (2002) used benchmarking quality principles to assist in making decisions about tuition and fees; Novak (2002) used benchmarking quality principles to benchmark the quality for distance education; and Mosier & Schwrzmueller (2002) use benchmarking principles in student affairs to demonstrate how benchmarking can be used in student housing.

Action Learning

Pioneered by Reginald "Reg" William Revans, Action Leaning grew out of a human resources development process/program in the mid twentieth century. Action Learning has been defined as, "…a powerful problem-solving tool that has the amazing capacity to simultaneously build successful leaders, teams, and organizations. It is a process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization while doing so." (Marquardt, 2004, p. 8). The core concept of Action Learning is to solve complex problems however, it is also used to develop an internal learning capacity, provide individuals with psychological ownership of the problem and "learn how to learn" (Marquardt, 2004).

Action Learning has six distinct components: problem, group, questions, action, learning, and coaching. Explanations of these components are detailed by Marquardt (2004, pp. 5-6) and discussed displayed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: *Action Learning Definitions*

TERM	DEFINITION
A Problem	Action Learning centers on a problem, a project, a challenge, an issue, or a task - the resolution of which is of high importance. The problem should provide an opportunity for the group to generate learning opportunities, build knowledge, and develop individual, team, and organizational skills.
An Action Learning Group Or Team	Ideally, an Action Learning group is composed of four to eight people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Those differences will enable the group to see the problem or task from a variety of perspectives and thus be able to offer fresh and innovative viewpoints.
A Process that Emphasizes Insightful Questioning and Reflective Listening	Action Learning emphasizes questions and reflection above statements and opinions. Action Learning focuses on what one doesn't know, as well as on what one does know.
Taking Action on the Problem	This component concerns the empowerment of the Action Learning group to take actions or be assured that their recommendations will be implemented. Reflecting on the action taken provides the best source for learning and organizational change.
A Commitment to Learning	Action Learning places equal emphasis on the learning and development of individuals and the team as it does on the solving of the problem; the smarter the group becomes, the quicker and better the quality of its decision making and action taking will be.

Action Learning has been widely accepted by many business and industry leaders both state side and abroad (Marsick & O'Neil, 2009, p. 3). Some of these leaders include General Electric, Volvo, Johnson and Johnson, Singapore Airlines and many others. Action Learning has also made its way into higher education. Marsick and O'Neil (2009) used the quality principles of Action Learning to build a peer mentoring system for adult learners. An additional Action Learning study was conducted by Stappenbelt (2010) in an

effort to integrate Action Learning quality principles with an explicit educational focus. Stappenbelt (2010) stated, "A deeper student approach to learning in a problem environment more closely resembling that encountered in engineering practice needs to be encouraged. Action Learning fundamentally supports such a deep approach to learning, and is designed to operate within the context of a real and complex project." (p. 1). It is likely that this quality tool will be used in higher education in the future and may serve as adequate tool for complex higher education issues.

Barriers and Obstacles

Although many TQM and CQI approaches are implemented successfully, they are not met without barriers and obstacles. A review of the literature, even those that documented the successful implementation of TQM and CQI methods, also revealed the barriers and obstacles (or sometimes referred to as weaknesses of TQM) that they faced. Through the review of the literature, four common themes emerged that added barriers and obstacles to successfully implementing TQM and CQI initiatives: culture, leadership, teamwork, and communication.

In this section, a review of these barriers and obstacles will be discussed. In addition, each barrier and obstacle will be accompanied by a few examples that were noted in the AQIP compilation document, *Reflections for Action 2010: Lessons Learned by Colleges and Universities Participating in AQIP* (The Higher Learning Commission, 2011). This compilation document asked AQIP institutions that have participated for four or more years to identify five lessons their experience has taught them about quality improvement. The lessons may be directives, warnings, advice regarding Action Projects,

System Portfolios, how to organize and maintain a quality initiative, culture change, and much more (The Higher Learning Commission, 2011).

Culture

Organizational culture is a key component of successful TQM because it is the framework of how each individual institution approaches and completes its projects. According to Schein (2004), "When one brings culture to the level of the organization and even down to groups within the organization, one can see clearly how culture is created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated, and , at the same time, how culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the group members" (p. 1). An organizational culture can be the threshold of whether an organization can be successful or whether that organizational culture will be the barrier or obstacle.

While examining TQM though the academia perspective, Spanbauer (1996), points out, "Professors, instructors, and administrators have, in the past, looked at excellence in education as based on things such as degrees, professional experience, research activities and writing and publishing expertise. They may even look at some of the principles and practices of TQM as alien to education" (p. 4). Furthermore, in a review of the literature conducted by Cameron (1997), a large percentage of total quality initiatives fail, either quality does not improve, or the initiatives are abandoned after a short time. Two of the major reasons for this failure are partial deployment and failure to integrate TQM and culture change.

So how do institutions of higher education accept TQM into their organizational culture and integrate TQM principles into their projects? Cameron and Quinn (2006),

describe, through the use of the Competing Values Framework, that when four organizational cultural types (Clan, Adhocracy, Hierarchy, Market) are present, then TQM projects have a significant increase in their success rates. This framework is depicted in Figure 2.2.

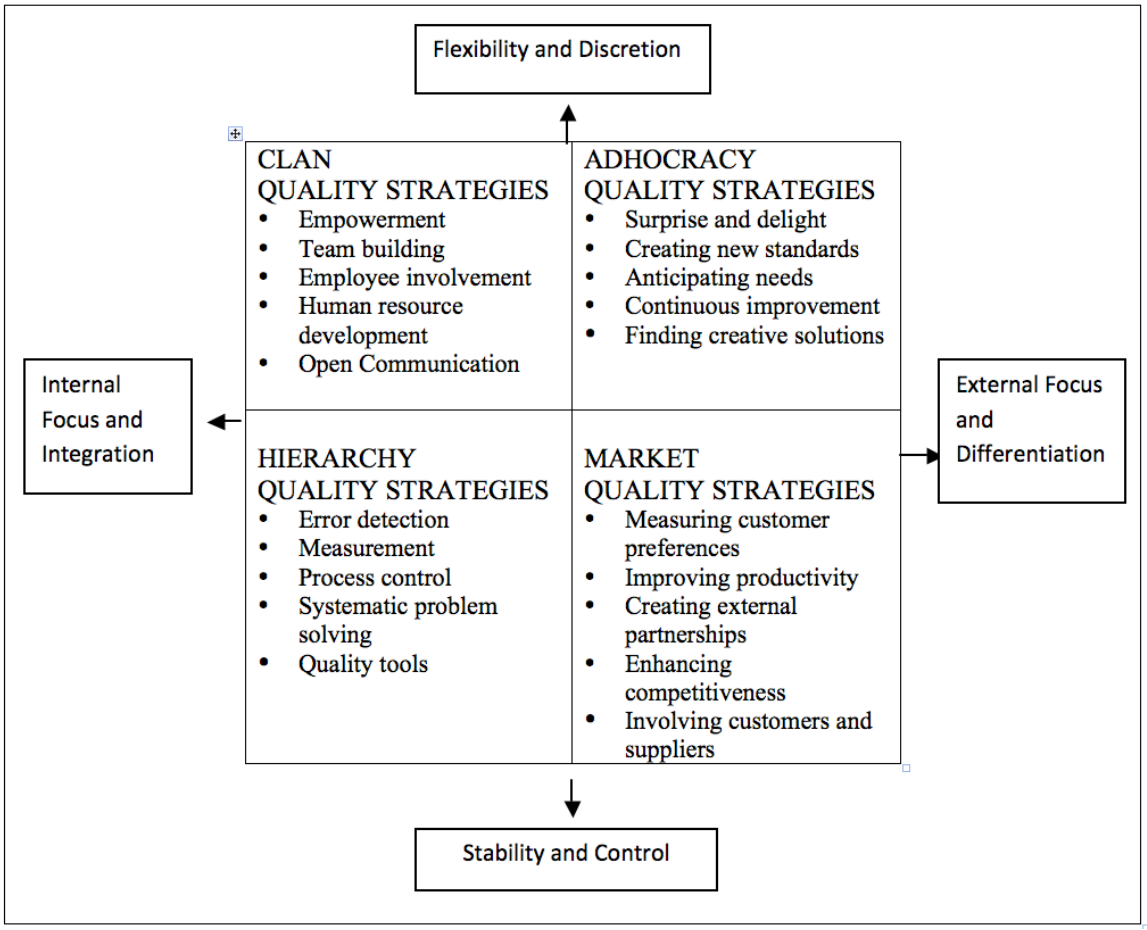

Figure 2.2 – Competing Values Framework.

This framework provides institutions of higher education with a set of cultures that drive many organizations. When there is a comprehensive approach, that uses elements from each culture, TQM projects can be successful. However, according to

Cameron and Quinn (2006), "In most failed TQM attempts, the elements of each of the four quadrants are not implemented; only a partial approach is tried." (p. 146)

Organizational culture, being one of the driving forces in TQM success, is a barrier or obstacle that many institutions face. Organizational cultures are not always clear, can be extremely difficult to change and can lead to success or cause constraint; the barrier then, is to identify the current culture and either use it to fulfill the TQM project or transform it to meet the needs of TQM.

Two examples, as cited in the *Reflections for Action 2010*, of institutions that indicated a lesson learned regarding culture are described by the following two institutions.

Creating culture does not come easy for institutions; it takes time, collectiveness and commitment. It can not be led from the top down without the support of the entire college community. Everyone involved must commit to quality, pursue excellence, and embrace the process.

> *Creating a culture does not occur overnight and must be cultivated by everyone involved in helping students learn. The staff and faculty who helped draft the university system portfolio regularly commented on the need to maintain our commitment to quality improvement and the need to involve all students, staff, and faculty in this process. –* ***Concordia University.***

As learned from Concordia University, involving staff and faculty to draft the university system portfolio established the drive for quality improvement. Through a

sustained effort, they were able to cultivate an environment to maintain their efforts. Similar to Concordia University, Fort Scott found institutional culture to be one of the largest challenges that they had to overcome.

> *One of the biggest challenges has been the ability to transform the institutional culture. Creating an atmosphere that embraces change is requiring more time and focus than originally anticipated. –* ***Fort Scott Community College.***

Time, focus, commitment, and involvement are the lessons learned from these two institutions. It would be difficult to dive straight in to the AQIP model without first examining the institutional culture. If the culture does not exist, then time, effort and focus must be provided to cultivate support for this new model.

Clearly, organizational culture is a barrier or obstacle that many institutions have faced and will continue to face in light of the quality movement. As Heverly & Cornskey stated (2006), "…because it [TQM] takes years to implement, in addition to being an ongoing process, TQM requires patience to accomplish cultural change" (p. 110).

Leadership

Leadership was another common barrier or obstacle that arose in the literature. Varying from improper leadership, leadership styles, or lack of leadership; one trend that spanned each type of leadership was the commitment from leaders to TQM. Without commitment from leaders of the organizations, TQM projects failed, change was resisted by employees' and leaders did not dedicate the funding necessary for the successful implementation of TQM.

Leaders have to be fully vested, both fundamentally through their institutional design and financially by allocating the resources necessary before they can expect an institution to support the TQM movement. Brigham (1993) alludes to this when he explains, "…having heard the TQM commotion and excitement, they [leaders] leap in with little understanding of what total quality entails and of the ways it differs from the traditional management paradigm. The troubles intensify when the leaders of these organizations offer only passive commitment to quality, delegating the fundamental duties to lower levels of management" (p. 42). Furthermore, Venkatraman (2007) indicates that leaders should set a viable vision and be willing to initiate change and provide the resources needed for team efforts directed towards achieving the vision.

Leaders must completely commit to TQM, both fundamentally and financially. Through fundamental support, Marchese (1991), explains that the TQM leader is a vision-giver, listener, team-worker, committed to quality, avid but patient for long-term ends, orchestrator and enabler of people-driven improvements (p. 6). Through this leadership style, it could be possible to eliminate the barrier of employee resistance and the thought that TQM belongs in industry and not in education.

Financially, a commitment by leaders to support TQM must be present. TQM requires a paradigm shift in the mindset of the organization and the organization must be willing to pay the high cost, effort and time to train the employees on the systematic and strategic nature of TQM. Spanbauer (1996), discusses the cost by stating, "School administrators must examine their roles and the ways that they use resources to bring about the changes necessary for continuous improvement of the educational processes.

This requires more funds for the professional development of faculty and staff and better equipment to support and continually improve the learning processes" (p. 5).

With this emphasis on leadership both fundamentally and financially, the AQIP model embeds, and in some cases, eliminates, levels of leadership throughout its structures. Institutional leadership requires full support, financially; through professional development of staff; and through fundamental principles, such as commitment, team-work, long-term and short-term goal setting, and the like. Additionally, project sponsors are added in to the action project teams; in a role not to lead or take charge of the team, but to eliminate barriers, champion the project and clear away obstacles.

Two examples, as cited in the *Reflections for Action 2010*, of institutions that indicated a lesson learned regarding leadership discussed the need for enthusiastic support from the leadership core. This support from the leadership drives the decision-making process and embeds itself into the daily operations of the institutions. As Dunwoody College of Technology and Northern New Mexico College describe:

> *The Presidents and the senior leadership of the college need to be enthusiastic supporters and drivers of continuous quality improvement. –* ***Dunwoody College of Technology.***
>
> *Northern New Mexico College leadership have committed to being leaders in AQIP. Changing the institutional culture from top-down decision-making to decision-making based on the collective wisdom of the College has proven a worthy goal. The support of the college's leadership has led to an increase in the*

use of institutional quality improvement tools in decision making and in daily institutional operations. – ***Northern New Mexico College.***

As described by these colleges, not only is continuous quality improvement part of the AQIP model, but it is also considered to be a tool in the leaderships tool bag for decision-making and driving institutional direction and vision. This will also lend itself to committing the resources to faculty and staff to equip themselves to support and continually improve.

Teamwork

Since cross-functional, cross-departmental, and diverse teams are a key component to TQM and the AQIP model, it is apparent that many of the barriers and obstacles that were faced revolved around teamwork. Seymour (1991) (as cited by Hazzard, 1993), asserts that "…teamwork can be accompanied by a great deal of frustration. As reported, colleges and universities are often decentralized into isolated departments whereby faculty and staff members have little or no experience with working teams" (p. 11). Most of this frustration, which leads to barriers and obstacles in performance, is the characteristics of the team and roadblocks they encounter during the process.

Characteristics of a team and appropriate structure are critical to team success. Bolman and Deal (2003) provide five team designs that are commonly used in organizations: One Boss, Dual Authority, Simple Hierarchy, Circle, and the All-Channel Network. In a review of literature on TQM and the AQIP model, the Circle and All-Channel Network design is most commonly used, since they both yield an environment

where information and decisions flow sequentially from one group member to another and information flows freely, while decisions require touching multiple bases. (pp. 97-98). Just as important as team design and structure, high performing teams also have characteristics that define them. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) (as cited by Bolman and Deal, 2003) highlight six distinguishing characteristics of high-performing teams. The chart below is a summary of these characteristics, with Katzenbach and Smith's characteristics on the left and the researcher's inverse characteristics that can lead to barriers and obstacles:

Table 2.3: *High-Performing and Low-Performing Characteristics*

HIGH-PERFORMING	LOW-PERFORMING
High–performing teams shape purpose in response to a demand or an opportunity placed in their path, usually by higher management.	Low-performing teams are given a direction and are not allowed to deviate from this direction.
High-performing teams translate common purpose into specific, measureable performance goals.	Low-performing teams do not set performance goals and therefore are not able to measure success or clearly define what went wrong.
High-performing teams are of manageable size.	Low-performing teams have too small or too large of a group.
High-performing teams develop the right mix of expertise.	Low-performing teams are not diverse and thus do not have a wide enough expertise to solve a problem creatively.
High-performing teams develop a common commitment to working relationships.	Low-performing teams are dysfunctional and cannot agree on duties, purpose, times, and management.
Members of high-performing teams hold themselves collectively accountable.	Members of low-performing teams place blame on others, processes and issues. These members are not accountable for their actions.

Even if teams are structured correctly and have the high-performing characteristics, teams may still face roadblocks, issues and adversity. Tierney (2011) conducted over two hundred interviews with faculty members, deans, and administrators to determine why initiatives at their campuses failed. There were five barriers that Tierney (2011) identified: people could not agree on the problem to be solved, time frames and structures were not clear, there were no evaluation criteria, change was not communicated, and the system froze. To overcome these barriers, Tierney argues that it is the decision-making structure and team development that produces creative, flexible, and responsive solutions.

Two examples, as cited in the *Reflections for Action 2010*, discussed the complexity, and sometime contention, of teamwork, team membership and team dynamics. As you will read, The Ohio State University of Agricultural Technical Institute described the negative attitude of team members after being assigned to the action project. This resulted in lack of attendance, the absence of clarity on the overall objective and the uninspiring participation from team members.

> *Many people did not appreciate being "assigned" to a team and were less than diligent about attending meetings. Thus, team members were sometimes not clear as to the overall objectives of the action projects, and time had to be set aside each meeting to educate new members or re-educate those who did not attend regularly. –* ***The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute.***

It can be inferred that this team dynamic did not provide a positive environment and as a result, the effectiveness of this action project had a high likelihood of failing.

Yet, Southwestern Illinois College suggested that special attention should be made when constructing these teams. More importantly, communication of structure should be developed and explained to the action project team members.

> *We suggest that institutions take great care to be as inclusive as possible in designing all aspects of AQIP. Different campuses, employee groups, disciplines, and even shifts need to be recognized and balanced as committees are formed, action projects are selected, and communication structures are developed. –* ***Southwestern Illinois College.***

When reviewing the lessons learned from these institutions, it is clear that communication and team development is important. In one case, this communication was unclear, resulting in disapproval which led to lack of participation. In the other institutions case, this communication was developed and special attention was paid to designing the teams and communicating its structure. This communication leads into the next topic from the lessons learned.

Communication

Communication can be attributed to much of the success, as well as barriers and obstacles that many projects face. Throughout the literature, communication, or lack thereof, spanned many different areas. For example, Achtemeier and Simspon (2005) indicated for benchmarking purposes that, "…it was critical to communicate with all stakeholders at the beginning of a benchmarking project in order to identify their expectations" (p. 122); Gardner (1990), from a leadership perspective, indicated that "…supported both by research and experience is that effective two-way communication

is essential to proper functioning of the leader-follower relationship" (p. 26); while from a TQM perspective, communication is the cornerstone for pursuing a strong customer focus, continually improving processes, and involving employees (Bassard et.al., 2010).

From the examples above, it is clear to see that communication can easily impact any type of process. Since TQM is rooted in systematic and strategic processes, it is straightforward that communication plays a critical role in the success of TQM processes; if communication is not in place, it can be detrimental. With this understanding, communication from all aspects should be evaluated when applying them to the TQM method.

Although it was cited in nearly half of college and universities as a lesson learned, below are two examples, cited in the *Reflections for Action 2010*. In these two instances, the lack of communication can derail the importance, perspective and commitment to the AQIP model. As described below, communication needs to be constant, engaging and continuous. When it is not, the college community begins to question the validity, the importance, and better yet, the overall commitment that the institution has toward this process.

As described by the University of Saint Francis, the lack of feedback caused an extreme reaction – the feedback that indicated the college employees no longer knew if they were an AQIP school or not.

> *We could do better in communicating our Action Projects and quality improvement goals to the campus. When we were first approved for AQIP in*

2004, we made great effort to communicate this initiative to the campus community through several Town Hall meetings. As we have become more experienced with AQIP, we have communicated less about it. Recent feedback indicates that some of our employees have concluded that we are no longer in AQIP. – ***University of Saint Francis***

This may seem to be extreme, but is of great significance. This example demonstrates how much communication and commitment are needed to successfully use the AQIP model and consequently, what happens when communication and commitment are unsatisfactory. Additionally, it may not always be the lack of commitment, but rather the competitive forces that institutions face on a daily basis. As noted by Benedictine University, new institutional endeavors and initiative may consequently divert the time and attention needed to sustain the AQIP model.

There cannot be enough communicating. Communicate an understanding of AQIP to garner commitment and engagement or it will remain an "unknown." Involve many people – faculty and staff together from across the University to create cross-functional teams – sharing the workload and collaborating on initiatives, especially since new institutional endeavors may divert time, attention, and energy from AQIP Action Projects. – ***Benedictine University***

The above statements are a true testament as to why communication is a critical component of AQIP and the TQM processes. However, it is also important to note that the importance of communication spans further than just the communication of AQIP

Action Projects; it is a critical component that is tied to the other three barriers and obstacles (culture, leadership and teamwork).

Rationale for Further Study

The literature review has shown that TQM, CQI and quality methods have transitioned from business into higher education in many forms, be it PDCA, Benchmarking or Action Learning. Each method has provided businesses and institutions with models that can systematically address issues, engage stakeholders, assess and evaluate results, and provide a level of accountability. Although met with some resistance, TQM has risen to national popularity with acceptance of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award as a quality standard, and with acceptance of TQM principles (AQIP model) for institutional accreditation.

Although TQM has proven that it has been effective in higher education through completions of projects, initiatives, action projects, throughout the literature, there was limited mention on its true effectiveness as sought out by community college leaders. There was a lack of information regarding the community college leaders' perspective, an institutional perspective, or those who served on the TQM, CQI, or action project teams.

This dissertation seeks to evaluate those perspectives and seeks to answer whether the AQIP model is an effective and efficient model to address institutional issues. It strives to determine if the AQIP model is equipped to it address the issues facing institutions. Just as important, are team members satisfied with the results of their efforts? How much do team dynamics impact the process as a whole? And is it a valid option for

community college leaders to address institutional issues? When the results are tied in with the past research of TQM, one may be able to answer these questions, or perhaps they can begin to ask other questions.

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review provides an introduction to TQM, CQI, quality methods, and the transition into higher education. It also intended to provide an overview of the multiple types of TQM models, methods and principles that have existed over the years. There have been examples of the successful uses of TQM, as well as discussion regarding the barriers and obstacles that many have faced during implementation. However, in spite of the problems, factors such as accountability, demands and external pressures have forced higher education to seek out untraditional methods of serving the stakeholders that support them.

The intent of this research study is to fill the existing gap in the current literature regarding the effectiveness of these accountability standards, and particularly, the practice of continuous quality improvement measures to address institutional issues. It is intended to provide answers to community college leaders who are reviewing the AQIP model as a viable and valuable tool for maintaining their accreditation while continuously improving their college environment. Lastly, it is intended to unveil the pros and cons, challenges and barriers, and benefits and potentials of the model, with a particular focus on the applicability to all types of institutions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The manner in which a topic is researched, tells much about the topic itself. That is, in order to achieve discovery and understanding of a process, the research must be inductive, comprehensive and richly descriptive. In order to examine the effectiveness of the AQIP model, the research design will include a qualitative approach with interviews, field notes and artifacts to describe the process. The research will be conducted from a participant observer perspective to provide insight and expressive understanding of the conditions in which the research takes place. Therefore, the methodology section of this dissertation documents the process in which the research question was studied. In this chapter, an overview of the research design will be covered, including the justification for the qualitative study and the important characteristics of qualitative studies. The case study instrument is also discussed, including a brief description of artifacts evaluated, a discussion of the reflective notes taken, and the reasoning for the inclusion of interviews into this study. To add a thick description to this case study model, the participant's background is discussed, including their roles, unique perspectives they brought to the team and their interactions during the action project. Additionally, a section on the collection and analysis of data will be included, followed by a chapter summary.

Research Design

Overview

This dissertation was designed to research the effectiveness of the AQIP model for community college leaders to address institutional issues. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to examine the outcomes of the AQIP model and if these outcomes meet the needs of institutional leaders. To measure the perceived success, the participants of this case study were interviewed in order for conclusions to be drawn. Additionally, participants were asked a series of questions to determine if the action project that they served on has successfully transitioned from issue identification to issue resolution as defined by the action project charter.

In addition to this overall objective of examining the effectiveness, through the examination of the case study, an assessment of the CQI methods (embedded in the AQIP model) was completed. An analysis of the pro's and con's of the AQIP model is reviewed and an applicability assessment is discussed. This applicability assessment will be used in chapter five to determine if the AQIP model can be appropriately applied to all types of institutions.

Qualitative Measure

The method for this research problem was analyzed under a qualitative scope. Qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2009), is a process in which the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning people have structured, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (p. 13). Since the basis behind this study is to gain insight into perceptions, a qualitative study is appropriate. Furthermore, according to Creswell (2008), "In qualitative research, the

purpose is much more open-ended than in quantitative research, You ask general, broad questions so that you can best learn from participants," which is why this study is being conducted as a case study. That is, to research more open-ended [effectiveness] studies and base the research on the participants involved in the action project.

Instrumentation

Case Study

Specifically relating to this study, the research being conducted will also be examined and evaluated from a "case study" approach. As discussed prior, the case study approach provides three unique features: it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The particularistic characteristic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon; the descriptive characteristic allows the researcher to provide a "thick" description, a term derived from Clifford Geertz (1973), an anthropologist who defined it as the complete and literal description of an investigation; and the heuristic characteristic means the researcher can illuminate the understanding of the phenomenon under study in an effort to bring discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known (Merriam, 2009, pp. 43-45). Through the case study approach, the phenomenon under study will confirm what is already known, while revealing new meaning and extending a unique experience for the reader to better understand the AQIP model. Well known authors such as James Clifford have used this style of research in anthropology and Clifford (1986) indicates, "A work is deemed evocative or artfully composed in addition to being factual; expressive, rhetoric functions are conceived as decorative or merely as ways to present an

object analysis or description more effectively" (p. 4). Using this descriptive style, this case study descriptively describes the AQIP model and provides depth, further understanding and seeks to answer the effectiveness of the process.

Using the action project Student Readiness as the case study, I was able to garner the research information necessary, while still actively participating with the action project team. As defined by Merriam (2009) in this role, I was able to, "…observe activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researchers [sic] role as a participant. The trade-off here is between the depth of the information revealed to the researcher and the level of confidentiality promised to the group in order to obtain this information" (p. 124). As a participant observer in the case study, I was able to make sure that true and purposeful observation will take place and a descriptive assessment of the effectiveness will be made. Additionally, interviews will play a key role in responding to the primary research problem and answering the supporting research questions. While described later in this chapter, informed consent forms will be signed and opt out options will be discussed with participants. This step, recommended by Merriam (2009) validates the "confidentiality promised" while in the role of participant observer.

Documents and Artifacts

In this role and while continuing to play an effective part on an action project team, I was able to glean information about the effectiveness of AQIP through the collection and evaluation of documents and artifacts. These documents and artifacts included, but were not limited to

- Meeting minutes
- Agendas

- Action Project Charter
- Data artifacts such as Infinity Mapping and Plus Delta results
- Physical artifacts

Using these documents during this study contributed to answering the research questions. According to Merriam (2009), "...because they have not been produced for the research purpose, they often contain much that is irrelevant to the study; by the same token, they can contain clues, even startling insights, into the phenomenon under study. Most researchers find them well worth the effort to locate and examine" (p. 149). For that reason, the documents produced throughout the case study action project were evaluated as needed.

In addition to documents, artifacts will also be examined. Artifacts are unique for researchers because they differ from documents. Artifacts are physical objects found within the study setting and on the surface may not have meaning, but can yield some evidence about the people, the setting and the activities that take place during this case study.

Field Notes

Field notes were also used during the research study. Field notes are generally used in ethnographic and anthropological research studies. According to the American Anthropological Association (2006), field notes are, "…a hybrid of research ideas, research observation, general thoughts, and even a diary. They are works in progress and are often incomplete notations meant not only to clarify thoughts on situations but also to provide mental stimulation to help recall peripheral aspects of a situation." (p. 1) The field notes collected and evaluated for this study yielded information about the physical

setting, the behaviors of other participants, the activities taking place, the interactions between team members, the conversations that took place, and the subtle factors that perhaps were less obvious but had high impact when discussing team dynamics. This information allowed the application of a "thick" description that qualitative research is supposed to reveal.

Interviews

Interviewing subjects is also a qualitative research tool that was used to collect and analyze data. Freeman, DeMarrais, et al., (2007) explains an interview as, "A process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 55). Through these interviews, effectiveness of AQIP, effectiveness of CQI techniques, personal reactions to AQIP and CQI, and insight into the effectiveness of addressing institutional issues were collected, documented, and analyzed in an effort to answer the research problem.

Interview Plan

The interview plan for this research was designed to assess the effectiveness of the AQIP model process, to conclude the success of problem identification to resolution, and to further examine the effectiveness of the CQI steps embedded in the AQIP model. In order to allow participants to open up about their experiences serving on the AQIP action project team and their feelings toward the overall effectiveness of the AQIP model, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured continuum. This structure, as described by Merriam (2009) includes the five characteristics:

- Interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions.
- All questions use flexibility.

- Usually specific data is required from all respondents.
- The largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored.
- No predetermined wording or order is identified.

Merriam (2009) furthers discusses that semi-structured interviews assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways and allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (p. 90). Using this interview design, I was able to delve deeply into the perspective of the participants with flexible questions and probing follow up questions.

Interview Participants and Process

The participants of these interviews included the two co-chairs and eight team members from the AQIP Action Project Team For the purpose of this study, the names of the participants have been masked. However, the role the participants played and areas they represented was essential to this process and were described briefly in this study. As Bolman & Deal (2003), state, "Every group evolves a structure as its members work together, but the design may help or hinder effectiveness. Conscious attention to structure and roles can make an enormous difference in group performance." (p. 108). For this reason, structure and roles were discussed, but diligence was taken to mask the identities.

The participants were all asked if they would like to participate in these interviews separately. Each member of the team was asked via email (Appendix A) to participate in this interview. After this step was complete and interviews were scheduled, each participant was asked to complete an interview consent form. This consent form discusses six primary agreements and understandings: agree to participate, understand that they can withdraw at any time, understand that they will not be identified by name,

understand that faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts, understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Ferris State University, and agree that they have read and understand what has been explained to them.

Time Period

All the interviews were completed over the course of three month: October, November and December of 2012. As included in the interview email request, the actual interviews were scheduled for one hour. This length of time was specifically chosen to allow for the participants to sign the appropriate forms; for me to review the dissertation subject and outline of the interview, and for time to ask questions at the end of the interview.

Interview Environment

All interviews were conducted in a neutral, off-campus location to allow for freedom of conversation and lack of interruption. As documented in the interview email request, three off campus sites were identified, with an additional option to select a location of their preference. This environment allowed the participant to feel open about discussing their opinions and perspective, and additionally, it provided a sense of freedom to communicate without fear. All interviews were scheduled to take place outside of normal business hours.

Interview Notes

These interviews were not electronically recorded, nor were full transcriptions of the interviews completed. Under the Merriam (2009) semi-structured interview process,

the tone of the interview is less structured, so only hand written notes were taken during the interview. Upon completion of the interview, time for reflection on the interview was built in. The participants and I reviewed the notes that were taken. Upon completion, the participants then signed the interview notes consenting on the interview notes that were taken. This step was taken in an effort to provide true and accurate data and this validation component was built into the process to authenticate the accuracy of the interview notes.

Data

As with any study, data is the backbone of the research. This data was derived from the documents and artifacts, reflective notes, and interviews. Because of the qualitative methods in this research, the data yielded the information necessary to assess the effectiveness of the AQIP model for community college leaders to address institutional issues.

For the purpose of this qualitative study, Creswell's (2008) collection and analysis techniques were used. These techniques can be viewed in the Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: *Data Collection and Analysis*

DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS
Collecting data using forms with general, emerging questions to permit the participant to generate responses.	Data analysis tends to consist of text analysis
Gathering word (text) or image (picture) data.	Data analysis tends to involve developing a description and themes.
Collecting information from a small number of individuals or sites.	Interpretation tends to consist of stating the larger meaning of the findings.

These techniques for data collection and data analysis were used as a guide in this phase of the research study.

Collection

The collection of data in a qualitative study is purposeful, meaning the information gathered is collected, analyzed and explained in order to "tell the story." Creswell (2008) discusses qualitative studies as a process of selecting people and sites to best help you understand the central phenomenon and can lead other individuals to "learn" about the phenomenon. To make sure others can learn about the phenomenon, data collection must be purposeful and used to provide a thick and rich description. Most of this "learning" took place in the interview sessions and subsequent data analysis.

Since documents play an important role in this study, the documents collected were used to draw information related to the research problem. This information was used to document how the meetings were managed, the detailed data that was used to study the institutional issue, and the presentation that were given to the college community and executive leadership. These documents include, but are not limited to, meeting agendas, notes, presentations, researched items, emails, and the like. These documents were made public by the college and were used extensively in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

Reflective notes were taken during many of meetings and shortly after the conclusion of each meeting. Reflective notes were taken for the purpose of being observational, introspective and descriptive. This was completed to examine how the people, setting, behaviors and roles of the people impacted the action project. These notes

were used to provide a thick description of the environment in which this action project was taking place and assisted in describing the emotional and structural framework of the study.

Analysis

Analyzing the collected data is one of the most critical components of the research process because it focuses on filtering through the overwhelming volume of the data to find relevant factors that assist in answering the research question. Since there will be a multitude of information being collected, there will be a process to manage the data in order to conduct a thorough analysis. As Merriam (2009) would describe "The overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions" (p. 176), so the first step to the data analysis will be filtering through the data and building the data sets. To achieve this, a coding system and a CQI activity called affinity mapping will be used to analyze the data.

Coding is defined by Creswell (2008) as a process to "…make sense out of the text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes" (p. 251). In the coding, there will be five distinct themes: project content, project progress, observed behaviors, interview outcomes and other. Each theme may include sub-categories in order to narrow the theme further.

An affinity mapping process was also used to delineate relevant data. Although this process is discussed in depth later, a brief overview of this CQI tool describes this process as a method to disparate related ideas into meaningful categories. Trends and

themes begin to emerge when developing these categories and possible solutions can be developed.

Summary of Methodology

The methodology used for this study is standard for most qualitative case studies. A thorough investigation will be completed in order to assess the effectiveness of the AQIP model for community college leaders to address institutional issues. The in-depth case study will be used to answer the research problem, and to also answer some of the research questions associated with the research problem.

This methodology and research project will provide an insider perspective of the action project design: the CQI methods used, the characteristics and behaviors of team members, the perceived effectiveness of the model, and many other aspects of the AQIP model.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Bringing into perspective the real-life experience of the AQIP model, this chapter is delivered from a narrative perspective. Through this experience, and as Creswell (2008) would describe, there will be an opportunity for "learning" about the phenomenon of action project teams as they address institutional issues, while being supported by the individuals who participated on this action team and my observational examination. Additionally, a evaluation of the research questions will once again be reviewed and drawing on these experiences and interview data, an assessment will be made in regards to the effectiveness of the action project team and their attempt to address the institutional issue. Following shortly after, a review of the research problem and supporting research questions will be discussed.

A Narrative Perspective

The beginning of the AQIP process for most employees at the institution of study begins with an electronic survey that is sent via college email. This AQIP survey begins to show the AQIP knowledge of the employees, because it asks questions regarding their knowledge of the AQIP model, the purpose of the model, and effectiveness of the model. It also serves as a prelude to the half-day conversation day and how the college is going to be able to identify some key areas to address. This survey is administered primarily for

three reasons: to gauge the current knowledge of the AQIP model by the college employee group, to introduce or reintroduce the AQIP accreditation model, and to provide the leadership with data necessary to design the platform for a useful and productive half-day conversation day.

When taking this survey personally, this beginning task provoked me to think, "What is AQIP" "How is this model going to move our college forward?" "Is the upcoming half-day conversation day really going to meet the needs of our college?" In the meantime, this survey prompted conversations between my colleagues and me about the upcoming conversation day. "What are we going to be talking about there?" "What is it going to look like?" "Is it a waste of time?" "How much work is this going to be?" Shortly thereafter, half-day conversation day emails came out with two separate sessions; it was mandatory to RSVP to one.

The college-wide half-day session was talked about around campus, with many people wondering, "which one are you going to?" "I hope there isn't mandatory seating." "What are we going to do for a half-day?" The tone of these messages was mixed with concern, excitement, and a little bit of confusion. Those who knew about the half-day or attended one in the past tried to explain the process, but mostly said, "You just sit at tables, talk and then make recommendations." For those employees who had never attended this type of session, they still were confused and, in some cases, looked to be disarrayed. This confusion was mainly due to the length of time for which the meeting was scheduled. Four-hour meetings are not common and many people wondered what we

would be doing for four straight hours and how it could take that long to point out some areas that the college should address.

As the conversation day arrived, the campus was filled with activity. Not often does it happen that you see 300 or 400 employees walking into the event center for a meeting. When approaching the event center, participants' begin to see people they knew, faces that were recognizable, and yet some that they had never seen before. As they enter the building, they were met by the staff from the Office of Planning, Research and Quality, who mark the names off their list and provided a number for a table. The number then makes senses and answers many people's question, "guess it is assigned seating."

When entering the main room of the event center, the chatter from the people provided a backdrop of constant ruffle. Many people sat engaged in conversation, people were laughing, but yet some people were impatiently waiting at their table, unaccompanied for the time being and ready for the event to start. As the tables of seven to eight people begin to fill, more conversations begin to take place; introductions were made; and people begin to share with one another their roles at the college.

The event center was filled to capacity and the morning meet and greet among staff had come to a close. The President and Vice Presidents formally opened the session with their introductions. These introductions begin to set the framework for the next four hours and "thank you's" were verbalized for the participation, the hard work that is continually taking place on campus, and the difficult four hour work ahead. Quickly following the introduction from the college leadership, the Executive Dean of Planning, Quality and Research kicked the event off by providing a framework for the next four

hours, which also included a brief introduction to the AQIP accreditation model (see Appendix B).

Over the course of the four hours, the tables were actively engaged in identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses. There was an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment as a college as the groups discussed the strengths, yet many recognized the room for improvement when discussing the weaknesses. To close this session, the groups were then asked to review our weaknesses and report out possible action project opportunities for improvement. These action item opportunities were then transcribed by department staff in order to provide a comprehensive list to the Executive Cabinet (EC). This report out closed the half-day conversation session and a sense of pride, motivation and relief filled the room as the participants exited. Everyone knew the next phase as it was covered in the presentation; the Executive Cabinet (EC) would review these comprehensive list, make sure that the selected action project items (a minimum of three per AQIP guidelines) met at least one or more of the commission criteria, and action items met the needs of the college community and stakeholder groups.

As the researcher indicated, when I interviewed the participants of this study, there were direct questions regarding the "conversation day," as well as follow-up questions asking the participants to reflect on the activities that were held on conversation day. Three categories emerged when discussing conversation day during these interviews: dealing with complex issues; AQIP being a reflective process; and collaboration.

Dealing with complex issues is one of the primary reasons that this topic is important to research. Community college leaders are continually faced with such issues, whether they are dealing with State or Federal regulations, or something as ambiguous as student trends and behaviors. It is also important to reflect on the half-day conversation day, which is a collective gathering of the college community. Topics for opportunities spanned a variety of issues, from professional development opportunities, technology improvements, or even day care options. When asked to reflect on the conversation day and how it shaped the action project, the participants shared multiple perspectives on dealing with complex issues. Two participant of the study addressed the chaotic nature of conversation day and how the team had to work from a broad and ambiguous topic, into a workable and achievable item.

"...we were able to identify the issue from a misleading topic. We translated the overall issue into something we could make recommendations for."

Dealing with a misleading topic can be difficult to manage. Through specific activities, like participating in the development of an action project charter, can translation of identification misleading topic be transformed into a workable issue. As the second participant references, that chaotic message came across to them with a sense of urgency that motivated and drove the team to work toward recommendations for improvement.

"...knowing there was a host of comments and sense of importance helped the team address the issue at hand. This topic [Student Readiness] *was ambiguous, but it guided the team"*

When reflecting on this interview, it was easy to interpret that this participant used the enthusiasm and passion from the college community during this half-day session to drive her own motivation to participate. It was also common for the co-chairs to remind the action project team of the importance of this issue and how it was "the college as a whole" that was driving the need for improvement.

Understanding that the topics brought up at conversation day were complex in nature, it was the process of identifying these areas of opportunity that also motivated EC to select this topic as an action project. This can be seen as the college community reflecting upon itself to find areas to improve. As noted by a few participants, the AQIP model is a reflective process and makes an institution analyze itself. In the words of one participant, "*It makes you look in the mirror at your own institution….*" In this reflective state of the AQIP process, the college community, as well as EC, gains a true and accurate insight into how the college community perceives itself and its own issues. It is only through this avenue that such a large body of people can share their perspectives about their own college and know that something is going to be done to correct or address the issues. These feelings tie back to the relief that is felt at the end of the half-day conversation session.

Collaboration was the other category that emerged. Much of this is credited to the framework and activities as described in half-day session agenda, which framed the process for opportunities for improvement. When participants were asked to reflect on the collaboration during conversation day, the reactions were positive.

One participant clearly appreciated the attempt of the college to bring together the entire college community to discuss issues as a collective group.

"The process gets everyone together. Everybody attends and it provides an opportunity to bring issues as a collective group"

As that participant discussed this in more detail, I observed the gratitude they had for our EC to be open enough to conduct such a session. Often times, reflective process can be intimidating because it opens itself to harsh criticism. This participant acknowledged through this discussion and credited our EC for having the leadership and strength to do this.

Appreciation was also expressed by one participant as she reflected on the history of the college and the lack of involvement of faculty in what is seemed to be viewed as an administrative process.

"Knowing the old way, there was no real faculty input, it was just the administration. This process pulls faculty in. It is campus wide and the model is effective in my opinion"

This comment proved to be important because, as indicated in a later section, faculty representation is built into the diversity of the action project team; therefore, it is only appropriate that they [faculty] play a role in the half-day sessions. It also proved later that this comprehensive approach was reinforced by other participants.

"I felt it was a good way to identify issues. It makes sure that everyone has input"

"...It makes you feel that you're not alone in the problem"

The collaborative nature is a staple of the AQIP model and embedded in the framework throughout the process. Through both the interviews and field notes, collaboration was a key concept that continued to emerge and shape the way the processed worked. The participants recognized and discussed this as a positive strength of this model and were thankful for the opportunity to participate both in the half-day conversation session and subsequent action project team.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, a few months had passed while EC discussed the topics identified by the college community in the half-day session and a final determined of the three issues was selected. Announcements were made via email to college employees and three areas had been selected. Shortly thereafter, letters from the President began to arrive in employees offices asking them to participate on an action project team. I was excited when my letter arrived and I was asked to participate on the Student Readiness action project. Until our first meeting, there was not much to do other than to prepare to review this topic as an action team.

May 21, 2010, had arrived and our first meeting was upon us. Similar to the half-day conversation day, I was eager to see who would be serving on this committee with me. As I waited anxiously, people from around the college began to trickle in. Most of the individuals I knew, and as I greeted them, I began to make small talk. For those that I didn't recognize, I introduced myself by name, title, and department. I started to take notice of the diversity of the group and once again, I thought to myself, "this can not be coincidence, but there is a great mix of faculty and staff." I wondered whether or not a representative of the study body would be included on the committee; however, I was

still excited about this diversity and knew that it was going to play a major role throughout this process.

As the research indicated, during the interview process and analyzing the field notes, it became apparent that the composition of the action project team members was going to be a critical component because of the multiple perspectives that were going to be brought to this team. As described by Bolman & Deal (2003), "Every group evolves a structure as its members work together, but the design may help or hinder effectiveness. Conscious attention to structure and roles can make an enormous difference in group performance." (p. 108). Therefore, it was apparent that there had been specific attention given to create a diverse team, specifically as it related to basic human demographics, the role they played on the team, and the role they represented at the institution.

The composition of the team was representative of genders, seniority, levels of responsibility and type of institutional work or roles. Representation of the committee can is referenced in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Years at Institution	Gender	Representing Area	Academic or Administrative	Team Role
A	13	Male	Faculty	Academic / Admin.	Co-Chair
B	15	Male	Supervisory	Administrative	Co-Chair
C	7.5	Male	Faculty	Academic	Member
D	3.5	Female	Faculty	Academic	Member
E	6	Male	Professional / Technical	Administrative	Member
F	5.5	Female	Administrative Support	Administrative	Member
G	14.5	Female	Faculty	Academic	Member
H	10.5	Female	Faculty	Academic	Member

However, I found that I should discuss with the participants other areas that they felt could have added value to the team. When asked, "What area where missing or not represented?" the data concluded that students, Public Safety, and representation for the middle college, which is a high school located on the college campus.

The data did demonstrate though, that of the 11 responses that said another area should be represented, over half of the responses indicated that a student should have been on the committee. Some recognized the difficulty but stressed that at a minimum, a student should have been asked to participate as a guest.

As with any interview, often times there are key reactions that should be noted and when discussing this question, reactions were clear. The primary reaction was forthrightness, as well as a feeling that common sense should have dictated the inclusion of a student representative.

"If this was a three legged stool, students would represent the third leg. I don't know how we stood upright without that leg"

This point was in alignment with other participant and logical in this analogy. It was clear that this participant understood that if this committee was going to address the topic of student readiness, then it made sense to have students represented. Further comments on this topic were just as straightforward.

"Put a student on the committee, plain and simple"

Although the overwhelming consensus of the group would have preferred to have students represented, one individual pointed out a potential obstacle with adding a student to the committee.

"This process could be a 12- to 24-month long process and it would be much to ask of that time commitment for one of our students." Whether or not a student on the committee would have added value, been beneficial, or would not have been feasible because of the meeting structure, but it does bring to question the importance of diversity and representation of the action project team.

This diversity proved to be of great value when I reviewed my field notes during one of the early stages of the action project charge. When defining the current situation, which is step one of the 7-step CQI process and will be discussed further in another section, the faculty members brought to the team an in-depth classroom perspective, while other team members brought the administrative perspective. Additionally, since age and gender was playing a role in environment, I noted in my field notes that these perspectives brought a holistic view and tuned in the way we were perceiving behaviors.

Field notes indicated that it was the consensus of the group that student behavior emerged more when female instructors were in a leadership role. These roles included females as faculty and females as administrators. Further, it was discussed by team members that age played a factor in the environment. It was noted that the group felt that dominance was perceived to be in the students while being around younger leaders, but as the leaders matured and got older, this dominance shifted to the leader. It was additionally noted that male faculty had a better handle on "policing" the classroom and

managing behaviors. Just as important, and because of the diversity on the team, the conversations also spanned the readiness outside of the classroom and during administrative functions. As such, my notes included the group discussing student demands for services, the perceived sense of entitlement to services, and the general lack of appreciation for staff and space.

These multiple perspectives continued throughout the entire process of collecting the data, analyzing the data, creating an improvement theory and making the teams recommendations. Reflecting on field notes, it was the diverse demographics and multiple perspectives that made this action team's work rich, expressive and descriptive.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, after our informal meet and greet the two co-chairs formally began the meeting by welcoming the team members to this action project. Unlike typical committee meetings and because of the diversity of the group, an untraditional route was taken when we were asked to introduce ourselves. We were asked by the co-chairs to not only give our name and title, but to also answer our first of many informal check-in questions.

They began the meeting with, "*Share one activity or goal from your 'bucket list'."* I immediately noted to myself in field notes, what an interesting way that was to begin a meeting. As we went around the room, laughter filled the room at each other's answers. Through this untraditional and informal check-in the team began to get a glimpse of each other's personality and unique backgrounds. Over the course of this action project, we participated in many informal check-ins. I continued to note

throughout this study how this informal process seemed to bring the group closer and create a sense of unity.

As the research indicated and for this reason, I asked the co-chairs during the interviews, "Why did you choose to do the informal check-ins?" The co-chairs, stated, "This was a good way for people to get to know each other. Plus, it allowed for people who were arriving late, to not miss much. Once we did this for ten minutes, we got started on the main topic." I had written in my field notes several times that the group laughed with each other and people's characters and personalities began to reveal themselves. It also provided a sense of unity and a closeness that was not felt while participating on other committees. Not only did this activity prompt participation, but it also demonstrated the leadership quality of the chairs.

When discussing the collaboration aspect of this process during the interviews, many of the participants commented on the beginning activity of the meetings. Other topics for the informal check-ins included;

- If you could go back in time to any point in history and see it in person, what would it be?
- If you could be any wild animal, what would you be, and why?
- Choose a word that best describes your life up to this moment?

Although this was an informal and amusing way to start the meetings, during the process of reviewing the artifacts, it became evident that the agendas were very prescriptive and a methodical approach was taken to guide the group from an informal check-in toward a purposeful meeting. When reviewing the agendas and meeting note artifacts, it was evident that a very prescribed and methodical approach was taken. Before

every meeting an agenda was sent to the committee members. A uniform approach was taken when organizing the agendas and can be reviewed in (Appendix C-F). Each agenda included six headings:

1. Check-in
2. "What are you hearing around campus?"
3. Notes / Communication
4. New Business
5. Goals for Next Meeting
6. Adjournment

Included with the agenda, meeting packets were developed to keep the meeting organized. These packets included meeting notes, emails from committee and college members, reference material, data, etc. Each document was labeled for quick reference when moving through the agenda.

As the research indicated, committee members had many positive words to say when discussing the meeting organization and structure.

Specifically related to the uniform agendas provided at each meeting, the participants valued the consistency and familiarity.

"It helped because of the familiar agenda, it started and stopped on time, the agenda was directive, and participation was both social, but efficient."

Because of its familiarity, the team members discussed the effectiveness and efficiency of the meetings. Using the agenda as a guide, it supported a well-organized approach focusing on the tasks at hand.

"We always had an agenda, it was task oriented and well organized."

Both of these comments illustrate that effectiveness is built upon organization and task management. When reflecting on the beginning of each meeting, the agenda's set the tone for the meetings and often times focused the group from external forces to the task at hand.

Meeting structure was also a topic that was included in this research. During the interviews, participants continually discussed their perceived effectiveness as a team and attributed this to the way the meetings were structured and led. These meetings drew most of their structure from the leadership traits that the co-chairs possessed.

Since this team was dealing with a complex and ambiguous topic, it wouldn't have taken much to trail off topic. To avoid this, the co-chairs indicated that in order to stay on task, they would need to stay committed to the 7-step CQI process. During the interview, I took time to ask both co-chairs about their commitment to the 7-step CQI process.

"I felt that we used the tools in the tool kit. These tools set the norms for the meeting and drove the process."

Understanding how these "tools" can assist in the process is important. As described earlier, the AQIP model is comprehensive, data-driven and holistic; therefore it is important that CQI tools are used to unveil the graphic data and facts of the issue at hand. Although this may seem overwhelming to many, one of the co-chairs had the following to say:

"It wasn't as difficult as you may have thought. The model walked us through the process. We just had to make sure we didn't deviate from that."

Whether or not the co-chairs found it difficult or they were just following a process, team members complimented them on their leadership style, poise and commitment to the assignment.

"They were prepared to lead this team and they took the assignment to heart. This process wouldn't have worked if they were not good chairs."

During the interviews, there was consensus among the member of the action project team that these two co-chairs were one of the major reasons the team was able to reach the recommendation stage. The co-chairs also admitted that it was the AQIP process and structure that helped them navigate this process.

Transitioning back to the AQIP model, the action project meetings were now fully underway and our first main objective was to complete our action project charter. The creation of the charter was important because it defined the goals of the committee and the problem statement as the action project team perceived it. It also served as a way to complete step one and two of the seven step CQI process; step one being *Identifying Areas for Improvement*, and step two being *Define the Current Situation.* This took several hours and several meetings because we took time to brainstorm, debate, collaborate and wordsmith during this process.

As stated throughout this research, collaboration, diversity, and multiple perspectives are embedded into this model. As such, it came out once again during the

interviews when we discussed the creation of an action project charter. One participant commented that, *"...it helped eliminate peoples individual perspectives,"* while others commented with, *"...it sought out the input of everyone in the room"* and *"...it provided everyone with an opportunity to bring issues as a collective group."* It was this collective work of everyone in the room that enabled us to clearly identify areas of improvement and clearly define the problem.

Transitioning back to the AQIP model, the action project team achieved a mini milestone when they all agreed upon a charter and problem statement.

Goal Statement from Team Charter:

> The goal of this project is to recommend policies and processes that address the behavioral, cultural, and socialization needs of students' readiness in ways that go beyond academic skill level. This project will study the behavior, cultural expectations, and personal management skills required of students in a college setting. The project will study ways to improve students' ability to meet college expectations such as how to respectfully deal with peers, faculty, and staff. Specifically, this team will make a recommendation on ways to integrate and/or expand our efforts to support non-academic college readiness for students.

Problem Statement:

> Many incoming students have not acquired or yet developed the behavior, cultural expectations, and interpersonal management skills required of students to successfully navigate the diverse college setting. This has resulted in an increase of incidents of negative behavior that has resulted in discipline, public safety involvement, student complaints, behavioral dismissals, etc. At times, college

systems, and strategies for dealing with these problems, can reinforce or contribute to these behaviors.

These two statements were considered mini milestones because in theory, they set the foundational framework for the team to complete step two – defining the current situation, and step 3 analyzing the current situation.

As the research indicates, the participants were asked to reflect on the action plan charter process and discuss its purpose and the impact it had on the team's direction and progress. All with a positive tone to them, the participants' comments ranged from adding clarity to the process, to defining the roots of the issue, to establishing boundaries to work within. Understanding that this model may be new to many participants, the step of defining the problem through a charter development provided clarity to many team members.

"I found it to be helpful. Eventually it makes everything clear. AQIP can be muddy at times, but the structure helps and so did the charter."

From a "muddy" process to clarity, the AQIP model strives to make sense of the issue. Additionally, it purposefully guides the action project team through multiple phases of CQI to achieve the intended outcome. In the insightful words of one participant, the process was "deliberative."

"The process of developing a charter makes everything deliberative. It made us find the root of the issue before we made recommendations."

As described by this participant, making purposeful recommendation can only be achieved if there is a clear and deliberative charter. In essence, it frames the process and guides the team toward it goals. Additionally, it sets the framework to work the issues at hand.

"That procedure was essential to the process. The charter gives the process structure and sets boundaries to work under"

The process of collectively working together to develop this statement made significant impact on the way the group moved into the third step of the 7 step process - analyzing the current situation. Before transitioning to the discussion of step three, it is important to note how this team used the 7-step CQI process, as well as CQI tools to study and research. As noted earlier, this team followed the 7-step CQI process to study this issue and was tasked to make recommendation for improvement. Additionally, the team used common CQI tools such as affinity mapping, plus-delta and process mapping to define and address this issue. When applying these CQI tools, the team was able to determine common trends and themes of student behaviors, identify strengths to enhance and weaknesses to improve on, while documenting the flow of students and when and where these behaviors exhibit themselves.

As the research indicated and to gain useful insight to the effectiveness of the CQI steps and tools, the participants were asked to discuss the CQI that was embedded throughout the AQIP model.

Framed by one of the co-chairs who discussed the use of the 7-step CQI model, the co-chairs were dedicated to using this design to achieve the goals.

"This group went through all of the seven CQI steps. We used the design of the AQIP model and the process to achieve our goals"

In doing so, the team members also embraced the 7-step process and CQI tools that were used. Through the interviews, many participants commented on the CQI tools and discussed these activities as being one of the highlights of this committee work.

"The chairs made us study each level of the 7-step process. Within those steps we used additional CQI tools, such as affinity mapping. That was one of the best processes I have ever used to gather data and make sense of it"

This tended to be a common theme that developed through the interview process. Many people recognized how these tools helped in the research design and how these tools made the data workable and practical.

"CQI tools led us step by step toward our outcomes. It is great for study and research"

"CQI takes problems down to an individual and workable level"

Using these CQI tools led in the research for this action project team. Understanding that the AQIP model requires this type of comprehensive study and research, the team supported these CQI activities to define the problem and knew that they would play an important role in collecting and analyzing data regarding this issue.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, the team discussed deploying a qualitative and quantitative survey to assess the perception of behavior frequency and behavior severity. This survey was designed to reach three distinct groups: faculty, staff, and students. The results of this study would then be cross-tabulated for the most frequently occurring behaviors and areas that the team should focus on for recommendation for improvements.

The team spent numerous meetings developing the survey questions and discussing the design. Although this survey was led by the Institutional Research department, everyone on the team participated because it was important to the team to achieve a true and accurate assessment. This process was accepted by the group in a very open manner and team members understood the importance of the research and how it would play a major role in guiding the improvement theory phases.

As the research indicated, and through the review of artifacts, the importance of using data was discussed. In fact, the action project team reviewed the Higher Learning Commission report on high preforming institutions. The Higher Learning Commission (2005) states,

> Data-enriched thinking nurtures evaluation and a results-orientation that maximizes the benefits and value produced for students and other stakeholders. The institution develops and refines systems for gathering and assessing valuable feedback and data, and continually seeks better methods for obtaining the most useful information on which to base decisions and improvements. (p. 3)

Electing to deploy this survey was the team's goal to complete step two – Defining the Current Situation as well as step three – Analyzing the Current situation. The survey, being led by the Office of Institutional Research (IR), was intended to collect significant and relevant data elements to study the issue.

During the interviews, participants repeatedly acknowledged the importance of having a strong IR department and would only recommend the AQIP model to other institutions on this condition.

"They [other institutions] *would need a strong IR department to make this successful"*
"I would recommend it [AQIP] *as long as they* [other institutions] *have a good research department"*

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, the action project team relied heavily on the resources, expertise and background of the IR department when it came to deploying the institutional survey. Using their unique skill set and providing valuable input, the IR department assisted in the design and deployment of the survey. It was then decided by the action project team that three separate surveys would be necessary to get the unique perspectives of three groups; faculty, staff and students. Upon approval, the surveys were deployed in December of 2010.

The surveys were distributed over the course of two months and had a response rate of 705 individuals; 110 responses from faculty, 397 responses from students, and 198 responses from staff. The average time spent taking this survey was 12 minutes. The full results of the complete study can be found in Appendix G-I.

After deploying the survey, the team received the survey results. Since the manner of this survey was both qualitative and quantitative, data was received as such. To address the qualitative data, the team had to design a system to manage a vast amount of data. It was the co-chairs suggestion to use a CQI process called affinity mapping.

Affinity mapping, according to businessdictionary.com (2012), is defined as a,

> Graphic tool designed to help organize loose, unstructured ideas generated in brainstorming or problem solving meetings. In this method, disparate but related ideas (collected in an idea generation session) are grouped (on cards or sheets of paper) into meaningful categories called affinity sets. These categories tie different concepts together with one underlying theme, clarify and provide a structure for a systematic search for one or more solutions. (p. 1).

This affinity mapping activity allowed the group to categorize this quantitative data into different concepts and categories that made sense. As seen in figure 3.1, the team actively participated in this process. To ensure the privacy of action project team members, the picture on the left has been purposely blurred.

Figure 4.1 – Affinity Mapping – Action Project Team

The results of this affinity mapping activity effectively categorized the quantitative data into two categories: classroom and outside classroom.

Table 4.2: *Classroom Behaviors*

MAIN CATEGORY	SUB CATEGORY	TOTAL
Technology usage	Cell phone use - texting	28
Language and interruptions		18
Late arrival/leaving early		16
Confronting faculty		13
Technology usage	Cell phone use - talking on phone	11
Unproductive behavior	Talking while teacher is teaching	10
Sense of entitlement		10
Faculty skills to deal with incivility		8
Unproductive behavior	Disruptive behavior	8
Unproductive behavior	Sleeping in class	5
Technology usage	Use of electronic devices	5
Unproductive behavior	Cheating	3

Table 4.3: *Outside Classroom Behavior*

MAIN CATEGORY	SUB CATEGORY	TOTAL
Hallway/stairway	Behavior/noise	64
Neutral		42
Hallway/stairway	Vulgar/offensive language	35
Lack of respect		26
Middle College High School	Other	25
Hallway/stairway	Commons	22
Litter/trash/care of property		13
Parking	Safety	11
Middle College High School	Hallway	11
Dress code	Men/baggy pants	10
Middle College High School	Commons	10
Sense of entitlement	General	9

In addition to using the qualitative data that emerged from the affinity mapping activity, quantitative data was also analyzed to study the issue. Garnered from the survey result, the quantitative data revealed four distinct categories that this team would analyze studying the issue:

Table 4.4: *Faculty Perspective*

FREQUENCY REPORTED	DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR
64%	Noisily arriving late or leaving early from class
55%	Text messaging in class
38%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls in class
34%	Talking out of turn

Table 4.5: *Student Perspective*

FREQUENCY REPORTED	DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR
48%	Noisily arriving late or leaving early from class
45%	Text messaging in class
40%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls in class
38%	Using vulgarity or profanity in class or on campus

Table 4.6: *Staff Perspective*

FREQUENCY REPORTED	DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR
56%	Blocking traffic flow with self or personal belongings
44%	Placing or receiving calls while receiving services from staff or student workers
42%	Not disposing of personal trash on campus
42%	Wearing clothes that are inappropriate for a college setting
40%	Text messaging while receiving services from staff or student workers

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, after analyzing the data, the team's next phase was to transition into step four – Developing an Improvement Theory. Before discussing this stage of the AQIP model and in an effort to provide additional

understanding of CQI tools, I would now like to take the opportunity to review how I, as the researcher, used CQI tools in categorizing the data results of my own research study. As previously described in the methodology section, the interview notes were taken by hand. As a result, the output of these interview notes needed to be coded in a way to analyze the research study. For that reason, as the same reason as the action project team, I used the affinity mapping activity to categorize emerging trends, developments and concepts. As depicted in the image below, and again blurred to mask the identity of this researcher, the same activity was applied to accomplish this.

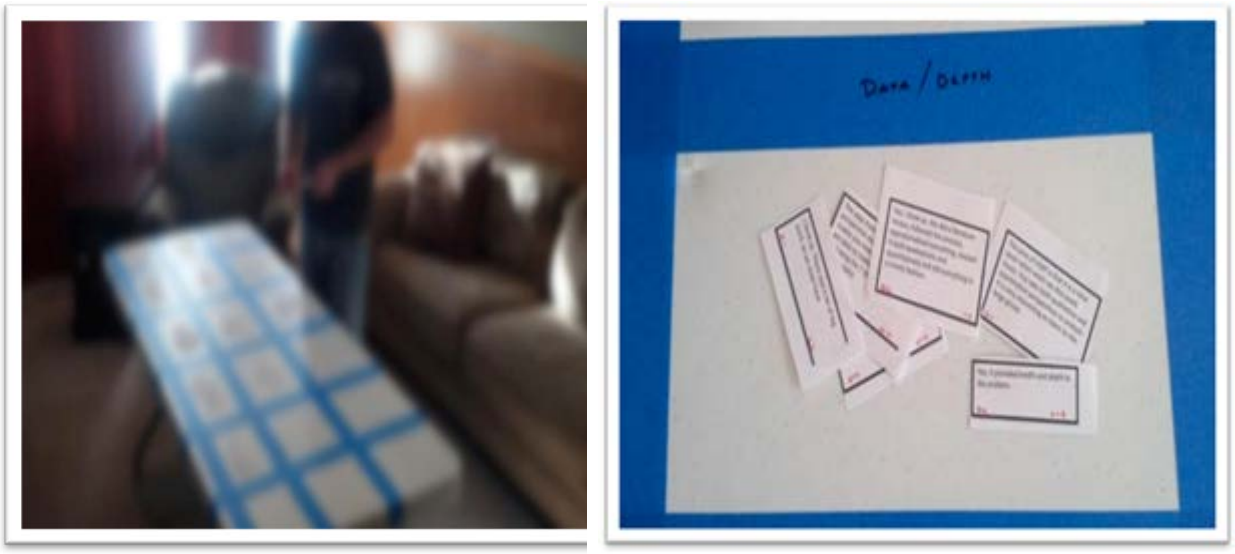

Figure 4.2 – Affinity Mapping – Researcher

Demonstrating that CQI can transcend the AQIP model and can be used in a variety of ways, the results of this activity yielded the following categories. Not in any particular order, and as some have already been addressed previously, the table below shows the output of the emergent categories.

Table 4.7: *Affinity Mapping – Researcher Categories*

CATEGORIES
Dealing with Complex Issues
Need for Other Representation
Lack of Feedback
Need for Data / Institutional Research
Being Reflective
Use of CQI
Length as a Con
Leadership and Culture
Collaboration
Meeting Structure
Team Leadership
Lack of Results
Other/Unrelated

Concluding on this CQI activity, this process reflects the variety of ways that CQI can be used and why it is ingrained so deeply in the AQIP model.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, the action project team had now exhaustively studied the research data and analyzed it until the picture of the issue was clear. The analogy that was written in my field notes described the data as puzzle pieces that were being put together to unveil the story. At this point, significant progress had been made and a transition to step 4 – Developing an Improvement Theory was upon us.

As the research indicated in the field notes, the momentum began to pick up and excitement of the team began to rise. When observing the behaviors of the team members, my notes indicated that the collective group felt that significant progress had been made and now it was time to act upon our research. Data was the focus point for a handful of meetings, and now the team was ready to make data-driven decisions when discussing our recommendations for improvement.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, the improvement theory step began to surface on April 6th , 2011(Appendix D). As expected, the development of an improvement theory began with an overview of the data collected and analysis documents. In order to make a data driven improvement theory, five summary reports were reviewed and a CQI activity ensued.

A. Activity – Begin to Develop an Improvement Theory

1. Review: Summary of artifacts, surveys, and input collected.
2. Review: Summary of quantitative data collected & key cross sections.
3. Review: Summary of qualitative analysis and categories of behavior.
4. Review: Current draft of "Summary of the Current Situation"
5. Review: *What is an Improvement Theory? This is the "doing" portion of the 7-step CQI process*
6. Brainstorm: Plus / Delta / Other activities toward improvement theory.

In this stage, teamwork, debate and activities took place as the team began to discuss improvement theories to correct or shift the campus climate. The team now became focused and attention was taken on narrowing in on the specific charter charge and problem statement. We had the data, we knew how the college community felt, and now it was time to act on the "doing" of the 7-step CQI process. As we addressed each area, the team feelings were mixed. We wanted to make sure that since there was a thorough study that we conducted, that the same amount of effort was put into developing

our improvement theories. There were times when confidence levels were up, but yet we questioned whether or not the executive leadership would accept them. However, the team had to press on and in the end of our improvement theory meetings; the team developed four primary recommendations and a fifth recommendation of other recommendations to consider.

Prior to step five - implementing best strategies, the team was tasked to present our recommendations to the EC. For this, the team developed a portfolio which included the problem and goal statement, a summary of our current situation, a timetable of events, our recommendations for improvement, and artifacts used to conduct our research. The team decided that it would be best if we submitted both a portfolio and a verbal presentation of our recommendation. Presenting our findings and recommendation was exciting for the group, and most of the team members wanted to be present during this meeting. This meeting was, in essence, the climax of our action project team and was perceived as being one of the team's final steps in a long and exhausting process. The team was proud of the hard work that we had accomplished and practice sessions were held to rehearse our presentation and anticipate questions from EC. The excitement built up to our September 19th, 2011 meeting.

The meeting was held in one of the college's large conference rooms. The atmosphere felt formal as many team members have never had direct interaction with EC in this capacity before. Many seemed nervous, while other felt confident and secure in our presentation. This was however, one of the biggest moments of this team's hard and

extensive work. Months of research, debate and development were culminating into this one presentation.

As the presentation was delivered, the EC was very engaged, open to our presentation and accepting of the work that was presented. Toward the close of our presentation, the following recommendations were made to address the institutional issue of student readiness:

- The formation of a committee to create a formal list of cultural values.
- Enhancing the new student orientation by adding a component of civility and cultural values.
- Institutional efforts to train and prepare faculty regarding how to manage such behaviors.
- Institutional efforts to train and prepare staff regarding how to manage such behaviors.
- Concluded with a list of additional recommendations to consider.

The presentation was closed by answering any questions that the EC had. Toward the end, a weight had begun to lift from the team members that were there. The group became more relaxed with the leadership team and shared with them our experiences while working on this project. The EC members thanked us for the depth of our study and acknowledged the hard work that went into addressing this topic. The team then ended the meeting by thanking them for their time and engagement, and we proceeded to leave the room.

Although the meeting was over, the group did convene outside of the room. Thank you's and handshakes were passed around by all. This team had spent over a year meeting on this topic and we built relationships with one another that we never had before. Both relief and sadness were felt by the group as emotions ran high. It was as if we had graduated from school and we were all going our separate ways. We all needed to get back into the normal routine of our daily jobs. Although we knew there could be more meetings further down the road to address step six – Monitor Results, and step seven – Adjust, Standardize, or Plan Further; we had achieved a major milestone.

As the research indicated, the reaction of EC and support showed during this presentation was discussed with the participants that were at the meeting. Even though it was a formal meeting, simple reactions such as asking questions, paying attention and following along was recognized as support:

"The leadership seemed interested in our presentation and was surprised at the amount of questions we were asked. I think they could tell we put a lot of hard work into it."

Although some participants responded with a positive undertone, others participants seemed hesitant to believe EC.

"The team will need to assess everything that gets implemented to see if they truly supported it. I think the first recommendation set the groundwork for our other recommendations, but we will have to see what happens"

Overall, a genuine sense of EC support was apparent. Many inferred that if EC was sticking to the AQIP model as a tool to solve institutional issues, then they surely would support the efforts of this action project.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, many months had passed since this milestone meeting and we were back into the routine of things, seeing each other occasionally and merely asking how the semester was going. More months had passed and it seemed as though our journey together had come to an official close. These months went by with no communication from the EC or the Office of Planning, Research and Quality. It wasn't until recently, ten months after our recommendations meeting, that movement was made on one of our recommendations. This communication did not come as a formal report, but rather because a staff member of mine was asked to serve on a sub-committee to take action on one of our recommendations.

As the research indicated, when discussing the recommendations that were made to leadership and the subsequent action that was taken, a lack of action on results was discussed. Participants didn't know during the interviews if any, one, or none of the recommendations were underway. As a result, the participants commented on the lack of results and if one area or topic was met with contention, displeasure and was emotionally charged, it was this topic. Observing the behaviors of the participants in the interviews, it was clear that the lack of results truly upset them emotionally and at some point, signs of annoyance and frustration filled the room. Emotions ran high as even one participant physically struck the table.

"There was a lot of work completed to produce such minimal results. We could have come up with a simple value statement in a matter of weeks! It took us almost two years to create those recommendations."

Although this was the most extreme display of frustration, other participants conceded to the fact that it is not the teams' role to solve the issue, but rather to make a recommendation.

"We did our job as a committee, which was to make recommendations, but they [leadership] *haven't done much with it yet."*

"I am not sure I knew what to expect, but I was certain that that they [leadership] *would have been more aggressive in accepting all or more of our recommendations; I guess I was wrong."*

The tone from these participants when discussing this question was littered with disappointment, discouragement and a sense of being cheated. I was able to observe many of them reflecting back on all of the work and effort they put into this study, to then feel as though little action was taken and little to no feedback was given.

On a similar topic, the participants were asked to discuss some of the con's that they experienced during this action project. Although lack of results was the primary con, length of time also was frequently discussed. As indicated by the time of this case study, nearly two years had passed between our first meeting as an action project team and the interviews. Without the emotional expressions as before, the length of time was perceived to be a challenge.

"The time was a hindrance, but I can't see how to avoid it; it is just a lengthy process."

"The time commitment can be discouraging, especially when you have other priorities."

In this type of model, there is no urgency placed on resolving the issue or meeting deadlines, it is just expected from the commission that the college is making progress and this progress is documented in the annual reports. Though these are general guidelines, some participants still thought that the team could have made quicker progress.

"I wish we could have met more often because it would have sped up the process"

Although length of time was discussed as a con, many participants understood that by following the AQIP model and using the CQI steps, the process may be drawn-out. However, when asked if they thought there was an area that could have been avoided or activities that we could have skipped, not one participant identified an area. Thus, they seemed to understand that the AQIP model and the action project structure was designed to take time, but still made note of it as a con.

Conversely, the pros of the process were then discussed in the interviews. As interview notes repeatedly expressed, the use of CQI and use of data to make decisions were the two primary pros discussed. Participants discussed the holistic approach, the collaboration and sincere appreciation of the CQI activities.

"The pros of AQIP is that it is holistic, participatory and breaks down barriers. The CQI activities were cool. These activities help to provide really learn the problem and gave us what we needed to make recommendations"

This appreciation for CQI was often because of the understanding that it provided. It provided the action project team with the data they needed to make informed recommendations. These recommendations only came after the data analysis and study of the issue.

"The pros are that they [CQI] keep you on task. It forces you to look at data and puts tasks before solutions."

Putting tasks before solutions is a staple of the AQIP model. Quite often leaders will see a problem and jump to a solution. Little to no examination is done and decisions are based on assumptions. Using the CQI methods, issues can be studied from the inside out and sustainable resolutions can be made.

"I think we could have eventually made it without CQI, but the tools and process made us look at the problem from the inside out. The CQI is team driven and brings the group together."

The findings in the interviews regarding the pros continually tied back the use of CQI methods, the team driven process and the use of data. Not surprisingly, these are the same attributes referenced by the HLC when discussing the benefits of using the AQIP model.

Transitioning back to the AQIP process, the end of this project seemed to be upon us. Since the team now had a full understanding of the 7-step CQI process, they were aware that two step remained; step six – Monitor Results and step seven – Adjust, Standardize, and Plan Further. Although these steps remained, it was our belief that we

would not be coming together anytime soon; we had essentially ended this journey. Consistent with that belief, the college has since moved on to three more AQIP projects, confirming our assumptions that this had come to a close.

As the research came to a close, the participants were asked whether or not the AQIP model can be applied to all institutions. Through conversations, there were two distinctions made. Overwhelmingly, the answer was yes, on the condition that: 1) The institution followed the process, and 2) The leadership and culture of the institution was committed to the model.

Following the AQIP process was a key factor to the participants if the model was to be applied at other institutions. It is a prescribed model, which provides guidelines and framework, but still allows freedom to achieve the goals in multiple ways and with multiple tools.

"Yes, I would recommend it, but I would require the institution to get someone to explain the importance of the process, talk about the thoroughness, and explain how the framework guides you through the process"

In addition to the thoroughness and the framework as a guide, other participants additionally stress the importance of the CQI tools.

"I would recommend this process to other institutions, but only if I could explain the importance of the steps and use of CQI tools"

In addition to supporting the process as a whole and the use of CQI tools, many of these discussions included the important role of supportive leadership and college culture.

These two areas were key because it takes a lot of trust on behalf of the college and leadership to empower employees at this level and instill the trust in them to make decisions on institutional priorities and opportunities.

"This process takes an open position on leadership and they must trust in their employees to research and make recommendations. I can see that being tough on some leaders because they are asked to justify everything and the buck stops with them. In this model, a leader must trust everyone to help make decisions"

In addition to trust, the college culture has much to do with the success of this model. The culture must begin with the executive leadership, or as one participant called it, "the top" and be trusted by the employees. Everyone must support the CQI methods and use them as guiding principles to drive the process.

"This will only work at institutions that have a culture or can develop a culture for CQI. It also takes good leadership; if it is not supported by the top, it well never work"

It was a general consensus of the participants that this model could be applied to all institutions because it is not restrictive and allows institutions to meet their goals in various ways. It was clear during the interviews though, that it takes leadership, culture and attention to process for this model to be effective.

Addressing the Research Problem

As documented in chapter 1, the research problem for this dissertation is intended to study the effectiveness of the AQIP model for community college leaders to address

institutional issues. Furthermore, there are supporting research questions, including the attributes of the AQIP model, that promotes effectiveness; what, if any, are the pros and cons of using the AQIP model and CQI tools to address institutional issues; and if the AQIP model could be applied at all types of institutions. Although chapter 5 will provide a thorough discussion of the findings, the remainder of this chapter will address the manner in which the AQIP process answered, or did not answer, the research questions.

1. Is the AQIP model an effective model for community college leaders to use for addressing institutional issues?

The research this far has confirmed that the value of the AQIP model has significantly contributed to community college leaders to address institutional issues; however it can be argued at least in this study, the final results of this action project and full implementation of the selected recommendation will determine the full effectiveness of the AQIP model. Suffice it to say, the underlying principles of the AQIP model and embedded CQI tools have provided a significant contribution to the institutional leaders to address the issue of student readiness.

2. What attributes of the AQIP model promote effectiveness?

The attributes of the AQIP model that have promoted effectiveness emerged through the CQI tools embedded throughout the AQIP model. As the affinity mapping process documented, the collaborative nature, research-based approach and ability to address complex issues promoted effectiveness in this process. As it was cited throughout the interviews, the use of CQI kept the action project team on track; it assisted in defining the current situation, required the team to research and analyze the issue at hand, and provided a framework for thorough and systematic improvement theories.

3. What, if any, are the pros and cons of using the AQIP model and CQI to address institutional issues?

As the research confirmed, there were numerous pros and cons of the AQIP model. To summarize the pros that were discussed above, the AQIP model and CQI tools forced the institution into a reflective phase in which they were forced to examine their strengths and weaknesses, and select opportunities for areas in which they felt they could improve. The design of this process framed a comprehensive review of the problem and methodically prepared the group to make data-driven and informed improvement theories to address this institutional issue at hand. Lastly, the pro of this model facilitated a team-oriented and collaborative approach to developing an improvement theory as it solicited feedback from multiple stakeholders and provided an opportunity to share multiple perspectives.

However, the lack of results, minimal communication received, and length of time proved to be the largest con that was cited. Not only was this recognized as a con, but proved to have significant impacts on the perceived commitment to the AQIP process; it disappointed the team members and consequently disengaged them from being true supporters of this process; and it created a trust issue between the action project team members and the EC leadership

4. Can the AQIP model be applied to all types of institutions?

As the research identified, many of the participants believed that the general principles of the AQIP model could be applied to all types of institutions, but only successfully under certain conditions. These conditions included: a willingness to follow the embedded steps and CQI tools; a culture that is supportive of collaborative change;

and the willingness to act on the recommendations and show the results of the action project team's work.

Summary

Through the narrative perspective that was supported by artifacts, field notes and interviews, there has been substantial evidence that the AQIP model was used to take an ambiguous topic that emerged as an important issue for the college community to address; and used CQI tools to identify the issue, analyze the issue, make recommendation to correct the issue, and assess the recommendations for effectiveness. It my opinion that this action project team was very regimented and followed recommended AQIP steps; the college organized the action projects team members as a cross-represented, cross-functional and diverse group that was able to bring multiple perspectives to this topic; and the team fulfilled the obligation for effectively researching and analyzing the topic before developing improvement theories.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this closing chapter, the significance of this study will be reviewed, the deeper meaning of the conclusions will be discussed, recommendations for future studies will be suggested, and a final reflection will be provided. It should be reiterated, however, that although there were significant and relatable findings of this study, the study used a relatively small sample size from a case study perspective; therefore, the research cannot necessarily extrapolate the findings to all higher education institutions or the Higher Learning Commission. Additionally, and in respect to full disclosure, it is important to restate that my role in this case study was that of a participant observer, but I also was expected to participate directly with the action project team as a team member. As discussed in chapter 3, in order to research freely, strategies were put in place to restrict bias and due diligence was used to authenticate the study and finding. With those factors stated, the intended purpose of this study was to add deeper knowledge to the phenomenon of the AQIP accreditation model and embedded CQI tools for community college leaders to address institutional issues. The study conclusions would therefore, add value to the use of this model and reveal the interesting results it had on the institution being studied.

Significance of Study

As a growing leader in the higher education field with specific experience in the community college environment, I am familiar with the unique challenges with which community college leaders are faced. In many cases, symptoms of the issue are anecdotal, which typically prompts the institutional leaders to address the perceived issue as defined by others. To complicate matters further, the symptoms of these issues are not easily remedied, as they include such challenging issues as basic college readiness, student civility, academic preparedness and other ambiguous, sociological and/or developmental issues. It is natural, at this point, for the college community as a whole to look at the executive leadership of the college and say "what are you doing about it?" For that reason, a system must be in place to address the institutional issue that was brought to light.

In addition to meeting the needs of students and addressing the college community's issues, leaders are also faced with staying in compliance with accreditation; two processes which on the service are unrelated, but can be achieved with one model - AQIP. The Higher Learning Commission understood that colleges and universities were using CQI tools to achieve other types of institutional objectives, initiatives and projects, and therefore, in 1999, they embedded the CQI tools into an accreditation model (AQIP). As the Higher Learning Commission (2007) states, the AQIP model, "…is an alternative process through which an organization can maintain its accreditation status with the Higher Learning Commission. AQIP's goal is to infuse the principles and benefits of

continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education." (p. 3).

The significance of this research study is that it provides a firsthand, participant observer perspective that is supported by artifacts, field notes and interviews in an effort to study the effectiveness at a micro case study level. When aligning the findings to the research questions, there were four distinct areas of importance: a) commitment to the AQIP process and CQI tools; b) team dynamics, meeting structure and leadership; c) being data driven and supported by Institutional Research; and d) communication and feedback from executive leadership.

Conclusions

Conclusion A: Commitment to the AQIP Process and CQI tools

***Initial Expectation*.** It was the initial expectation that with the understanding of the AQIP framework being, "…structured around quality improvement principles and processes and involves a structured set of goal-setting, networking, and accountability activities" (The Higher Learning Commission, 2007, p. 11), that the institution, as well as the action project team, would be following a structured guideline. The initial expectation of the commitment level was uncertain, but there was an underlying principle that since the institutional leadership elected the AQIP model, that their commitment was implied. It was also an expectation that the action project team members would use CQI tools to research, analyze and develop improvement theories, since that is embedded in the structure. However, the commitment to use these tools was unclear.

Outcomes. This structure was researched and the findings concluded that following the AQIP model and utilizing CQI tools to research, analyze and assess an institutional issue, was a critical component to the effectiveness and success of the AQIP action project. The participants indicated that with the guidelines of the AQIP model and the use of CQI tools, they achieved the depth, knowledge and understanding of the issue to make an informed and data driven improvement theory. Thus, they were able to accomplish the tasks that they were given – making recommendations for improvements. As the findings suggested, even when the participants talked negatively about the timeliness of the process, lack of feedback and lack of action, the CQI tools were always discussed in a positive manner. The CQI tools gave the action project team the tools to define the current situation and the analysis needed to drive the improvement theory process. The findings also revealed that the participants would recommend the AQIP model to other institutions as long as they were committed to the AQIP process to identify issues, understood the importance of CQI tools to study the issue, and if the institutional leaders would be willing to act on the recommendations.

Added Value. It can be inferred that the value added to this conclusion is that the AQIP model can be an effective model for other institutions as long as the institution is committed to the structure and framework of the model itself. It has been documented that when using the embedded CQI tools to research and study an issue, the action project team can make relevant and applicable improvement theories.

There is also additional value added as it was documented in the finding that CQI tools, specifically the CQI tool affinity mapping, can be transferrable to other forms of

research and study. If a community college leader is determining if the AQIP model would fit into the college setting and culture, addressing issues with CQI tools can provide insight into the projected support from the college community.

Conclusion B: The Importance of Team Dynamics, Meeting Structure and Leadership

Initial Expectation. As with any committee, workgroup or task force; team dynamics, meeting structure and leadership play an important role. For this reason, this study paid special attention to how the co-chairs managed this process, how the meetings were scheduled, the leadership qualities that they used to keep the action project team on task and the cross-functionality of the team. Knowing that the dynamics of this team would bring a certain perspective to this committee work, analysis was conducted to determine how two distinct groups (faculty and staff) would be able to use the CQI process for research and analysis. The initial expectation regarding the co-chair's role and responsibility would be to contribute, facilitate discussion, keep the team on task and provide structure to the meeting.

Outcomes. As the analysis demonstrated, the team dynamics were instrumental in bringing multiple perspectives and viewing this topic through the lenses of each committee member. As stated in the findings, the faculty brought a comprehensive perspective of classroom behavior and student culture to the conversation, while staff echoed similar behaviors and cultures that they witnessed through the services offered outside of the classroom.

With these multiple perspectives, the researcher concluded that the co-chairs led the action project team down a prescribed path, allowing these perspectives to be shared

throughout the duration of this project, while also bringing the groups together to configure and analyze the results of the data. This function allowed the groups to validate their perspectives, gain deeper understanding of the behaviors and cultures that our students possessed and in the meanwhile, drew the group closer together to create quality and comprehensive improvement theories and recommendations.

The research brought to light that the meeting structure, time and frequency was a pro to many of the action project team members. Resulting from the strong leadership, organization and systematic approach that the co-chairs took, the meetings were run at a steady pace with objectives being met and action items completed. This pace and sense of accomplishment by the action project team continued to motivate the team to analyze further, discuss improvement theories and develop the recommendations.

As discussed in the research, many participants discussed the leadership that the co-chairs possessed throughout the duration of this process. Using icebreaker techniques to bond the group together and then transitioning into a detailed and systematic plan to work through our objectives set a tone for the length of the meetings and the length of the project. When reflecting back on field notes and artifacts, it suffices to say, that this component was not only important to the completion of our action project goals, but the successfulness and effectiveness of our team.

Added Value. The added value to this conclusion is that it validates the theory of John Gardner (1990), a prominent author in the field of leadership as he states,

> It was once believed that if leadership traits were truly present in an individual, they would manifest themselves almost without regard to the situation in which

> the person was functioning. No one believes that anymore. Acts of leadership take place in an unimaginable variety of settings, and the setting does much to determine the kinds of leaders that emerge and how they play their role. (p. 6).

As the findings documented, the leadership of the co-chairs played a significant role in the action project team. Furthermore, it is important to note that the co-chairs, although experts in their own fields, were just as new to the AQIP process and CQI steps as the rest of the team. Both of these individuals emerged as leaders of this action project team, which was tasked to address a very difficult, ambiguous and complex institutional issue. Therefore, the added value that this researcher discovered was the ability for a person to transition to a leadership role by being organized, task-oriented and committed to the process. Additionally, these same skill sets need to be used by any leader of a community college who is faced with similar issues.

Conclusion C: Being Data Driven and Supported by Institutional Research.

Initial Expectation. From my participant observer standpoint and serving on previous action project teams, I had the background to understand that the Institutional Research (IR) Department was going to be heavily involved with assisting us in gathering and analyzing our data. However, I knew that this would be the first time for many participants to work this closely with IR, so my initial expectation was that they would enjoy and value this research experience. As such, my initial expectation was that, in accordance with previous experiences, IR would provide us with the methodology and analysis needed and the action project team would use that data to make informed decisions.

Outcomes. The outcomes were as expected in this conclusion; the IR department was heavily involved in the CQI stages and assisted the action project team by providing research methodology and extensive analysis. This methodology and analysis included qualitative, quantitative, cross-tabulated, and matrix data sets. These data elements both confirmed the team's current situation definition, as well as provided the data analysis necessary to develop comprehensive improvement theories and recommendations.

As the participant observer and as the findings confirmed, a strong IR department is recommended if another institution is planning on using the AQIP accreditation model, as the data analysis is a core component of successful and effective action project team completion.

Added Value. The added value for this conclusion can be transferred into the daily leadership efforts of a community college leader. As with this issue that was brought forward, the surface issues that were emerging needed to be defined and further analysis conducted. For example, in conversation day, the comments revolved around students who didn't display the expected college level behaviors, the collegial environment seemed to be in jeopardy and students were disrupting the learning environment. Through data collection and analysis, the institution was able to prioritize behaviors by significance and frequency and get to the root concerns of the college community. Therefore, the action project team was able to create improvement theories to change behaviors, expectations and the college setting. Often, it is easy to see an issue arising and address that issues without finding the root cause; however, these issues are never fully addressed. In this AQIP model, which focuses on broader categories of

helping students learn, understanding stakeholders' needs, valuing people and other related categories; addressing surface issues may never make an impact on these categories. It is through the use of this model, which is exhaustive, extensive, and utilizes the CQI framework, that allows institutions to truly address the root issues and make recommendations that change the dynamic and platform of the institution. These are the very issues with which community college leaders are faced; when a leader is able to make informed decisions because they understand the current situation, they are able to assess if their improvement theory strategies are working.

Conclusion D: Need for Communication and Feedback from Executive Leadership.

Initial Expectation. The initial expectation was that communication and feedback would be readily flowing up and down the channels of the action project team, to the sponsors, to the executive levels and back down. In the AQIP model, the process is inclusive, for a successful outcome to ensure, EC needs to be supportive, informed and involved throughout the process. With that responsibility, feedback and communication is required for many reasons: to show support to the action project team, to provide direction and guidance, to provide a sense of acceptance, and to show continual support to the AQIP model and CQI steps. Furthermore, in an effort to prove that the completed work was worth the time and energy invested, feedback and communication regarding the project implementation decision should be communicated.

Outcomes. As the findings supported, in this case study, feedback and communication were lacking from the sponsors, and upon recommendation, from the executive leadership. As the research documented, communication and feedback were the

most displeasing outcome from the participants' perspective. During the interviews, many participants supported the AQIP model, the use of CQI to analyze the problem, and the improvement theory development; however once the interview transitioned into the action project team's results and recommendations, many participants became upset and began to second-guess the quality of this process. Upon closing the interview, the participants were asked if they would recommend this model to other institutions, and several of them indicated that they would only recommend it if the communication flowed after the recommendations were made.

Added Value. This conclusion was one of the most valuable aspects of this study as it demonstrated the necessary communication, actions and feedback required to satisfy the goals and wants of the action project team. The research documented the length of time and commitment of resources that it took to move this institutional issue through the AQIP model and CQI steps; therefore, it would be of the same expectation that the results or actions taken by the executive leadership would follow suit. Unfortunately, in this case study that was not the outcome and many participants were upset. To add additional value, this case study can serve as an example of the importance of feedback and communication when a leader assigns a team, committee, work group or taskforce to an issue; that the same commitment and action should be taken to support the recommendation or communicate why they were not being executed. It is my conclusion that this study documented that when there is a lack of communication, feedback, and action, the spirit of the AQIP model and CQI is lost.

Recommendations for Successful Implementation of the AQIP Model

In order to successfully implement an AQIP accreditation model, the following are recommendation based on this research and the research findings:

1. To successfully implement the AQIP accreditation model at an institution, the institution must be committed to the AQIP categories and follow the model's CQI principles to meet these categories. The Higher Learning Commission (Introduction to AQIP, 2007) cites, "AQIP believes it is essential for any institution that is considering participating to fully understand the benefits and challenges of pursuing continuous improvement, and how much honest and hard work the effort will require" (p. 5). Therefore, the institution must commit to these methodologies, embrace the principles and celebrate the accomplishments.

2. To be comprehensive and holistic, institutional cross-functionality, cross-discipline and inclusiveness of the entire community college are necessary. With diversity comes multiple perspectives, unique lenses and viewpoints of subjects, which allows deep and thick descriptions of issues. When diversity is present, the college community is represented and recommendations address the masses.

3. Expect that when this model is embraced, the data play a significant role in the definition of the problem and the analysis of the problem. Using this data allows the action project team the tools necessary to make informed decisions and recommendations. Without this data, actions will be taken based on assumptions and perspectives, which may result in the root issue not being addressed.

4. Team leadership and chairmanship is necessary in keeping the entire action project team on task, motivated, and committed to following the process. When a group is as diverse as what is expected in this process, conversations tend to drive directions, tangents are common and team dynamics may cause barriers. To address these issues, the team leaders must be organized, concise and aware of the CQI model that they are following.

5. Although taking action on recommendations is important, feedback and communication of any actions is just as critical. It should be an expectation of the executive leadership who are presented with the action project team recommendation, that they provide feedback and communication to the team. When this is lacking, the action project team may feel as though the work they did was wasteful, unappreciated or irrelevant. The action project team, as well as the college community, should receive regular updates on all action projects that the institution has adopted.

Recommendation for Future Study

I would be hard pressed to say that there is one methodology of research to answer all the questions about the effectiveness of the AQIP model for community college leaders to solve institutional issues or even that of the AQIP accreditation model. However, one can learn about the benefits and challenges of using this accreditation model from case studies such as this, assessments and/or examinations of the AQIP model.

In an effort to study and research the effectiveness of this model, this researcher would propose the following research studies:

1. Expand the research outside of the one case study to include multiple institutions with multiple action projects. This will further measure the applicability and transferability of conditions to other institutions reviewing the AQIP model.

2. A comparative analysis of the AQIP model to that of the PEAQ model of accreditation.

3. Given that the case study has only received attention to one recommendation that was submitted, further research may reveal additional recommendations being supported and the outcomes may change the participants' views on the AQIP model, use of CQI and the effectiveness.

Final Reflection

This research study materialized from questions the researcher had as an emerging leader and a student of the community college leadership program. As such, the researcher became aware and was exposed to the multiple issues facing our community colleges and the pressing forces of internal and external stakeholders on our community college leaders. The research then saw an opportunity to study a problem-solving technique, which additionally met accreditation criteria, in an effort to answer the

primary research question of the effectiveness of this model for community college leaders to address institutional issues.

The key findings of this research included the fact that within the case study, participants embraced the CQI tools embedded in the AQIP model; many bought into the holistic, diverse and cross-functional community college approach to issue identification and problem solving; many enjoyed the research and data results as this was one of the first times that they were exposed to such detail; and many indicated that they would recommend this process to other colleges. These findings alone show that the embedded CQI tools in the model can help institutions design improvement theories and provide leaders with a guideline to follow to address institutional issues.

In sum, this researcher found that although it may be too soon to determine the true effectiveness of the AQIP model in this case study, the influence of the CQI tools in the AQIP model served as an example of using quality tools to manage issues. As an emerging leader in the community college environment, this researcher's unique perspective is that the AQIP model does serve a unique purpose of maintaining accreditation, but perhaps it is more important that it proves that the CQI tools that are embedded in the process were extremely helpful to address the issue. The power of a diverse and cross-functional team was monumental to the success of this action project; the importance of feedback from an executive leadership role was apparent; and the role that data and data driven decisions can play was essential. The AQIP process and its success revolve around the commitment of our Community College President to the AQIP model and the commitment to student success.

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Appendix

A: Interview Request Email

Interview Request Email

Dear (Participant),

As you know, I participated on the action project – Campus Cultural/Behavioral Readiness, with you over the past two years. During this time, I have also been concurrently enrolled in a Doctoral program in Community College Leadership (DCCL). As our action project comes to a close, and I begin my dissertation, I have chosen to investigate the effectiveness of the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and examine the action project as a case study.

Briefly, my dissertation will examine the work that took place on the action project and how effective the AQIP model is for community college leaders. Your input and experiences will add great value to my study. Therefore, I would like to invite you to one of the below locations to discuss your perspective and experiences on the action project. If another location will better suit your liking, please let me know.

Starbucks – East Court St, Flint

Tim Hortons – East Court St, Flint

Flint Public Library – Chavez Dr., Flint

I look forward to meeting with you soon. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would like to complete these interviews in the month of October, so if you can RSVP, please respond back to this email with the location and time that works best for you.

Thank you,

Chris Engle

Ferris State University

Appendix

B: Half-Day Conversation – Agenda

HALF-DAY CONVERSATIONS

THIS MORNING'S AGENDA

9:30 –8:45 Orientation & Overview
8:45 –9:15 AQIP Status Report
9:15 –10:15 "STRENGTHS" Conversation
10:15 –10:30 Action Project Survey Results
10:30 –12:30 "OPPORTUNITY" Conversation
**** * LUNCH * ****
12:30 -1:00 Table Reports

Appendix

C: Agenda Sample – June 10, 2010

FOR FILE

Agenda

AQIP Meeting for [redacted]

June 10, 2010

1. **Check In – name, department, sharing:**

   2 people you would like to invite to dinner (living or not, famous or not) & why ....

2. **Review of May 21st meeting**

3. **Homework from May 21st** – review qualitative comments and AQIP table ideas

4. **Goals for Today:**

   A. Start Developing a proposed Project Charter

      1. Business Case
      2. Problem/Opportunity Statement and Goal Statement
      3. 2-3 Sentence Description of Project Scope, Constraints, Assumptions
      4. Team Guidelines / Expectations
      5. Team Membership
      6. Preliminary Project Plan (i.e., time table, steps to take)
      7. Identification of Important Stakeholders

   B. Immediate Next Steps

      1. Review / Polish Proposed Project
      2. Share Project Charter with Sponsors to Confirm Support
      3. Share Project Charter with Stakeholders

5. **Next Meeting Time and Date**

6. **Adjournment**

* * * * *

Appendix

D: Agenda Sample – April 6, 2011

AQIP Project Team on [redacted]

Agenda for ~~March 23~~ April 6, 2011

For Plus

1. **Check-in:** *"If you could only select one, what is your all-time favorite song (or piece of music)?"*
2. ***"What are you hearing around campus?"***
3. **Notes / Communications**
   a. Notes: AQIP Team Meeting on February 16, 2011
   b. Counselors Input Re: Civility Concerns – [redacted]
4. **New Business**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Identify area for improvement	Define current situation	Analyze current situation	**Develop an improvement theory**	Implement best strategies	Monitor results	Adjust, standardize, or plan further

   a. Activity: Begin to Develop an Improvement Theory (AQIP Step Four)
      1. Review: Appendix A: Summary of artifacts, surveys, input collected
      2. Review: Appendix B: Summary of quantitative data collected & key cross sections
      3. Review: Appendix C: Summary of qualitative analysis and categories of behaviors
      4. Review: Current Draft of a "Summary of the Current Situation"
      5. Review: *What is an Improvement Theory? This is the "doing" portion of the 7-step CQI Process. This is the real ACTIVE (doing) part of the process—stakeholders with various perspectives on the process use the information gathered in the previous steps to formulate a theory of what will make things better.* (source: [redacted] website)

   b. Brainstorm: *Plus / Delta / Other* Activity toward Improvement Theory

> The goal of this group writing is to begin to develop an improvement theory (Step 4) based on materials collected thus far (e.g., artifacts, surveys) and the Summary of the Current Situation. Toward this end, we would like to use the Plus / Delta activity format:
>
> - Plus – services, programs, actions already in place
> - Delta – existing services that could be enhanced / improved
> - Other – ideas for what will make the situation better

5. **Set Next Meeting Time and Date**
6. **Adjournment**

Appendix

E: Agenda Sample – June 15, 2011

AQIP Project Team on [redacted]
Agenda for June 15, 2011

FOR FILE

1. **Check-in:** *"If you could go back in time to any point in history (or historical event) and see it in person, what would it be."*

2. ***"What are you hearing around campus?"***

3. **Notes / Communications**

   A. Notes from May 11th Meeting

   B. Meeting notes re: May 18th meeting with "Achieve the Dream" representatives – *see Appendix A.*

   C. ATD Implementation re: Changes to Orientation in Proposal – *see Appendix B.*

4. **New Business**

   A. Review: Plus/Delta Activity notes / details from 5/11/2011 meeting re: Develop an Improvement Theory – *see Appendix C.*

   B. Step Four (continued): Further Develop an Improvement Theory

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Identify area for improvement	Define current situation	Analyze current situation	**Develop an improvement theory**	Implement best strategies	Monitor results	Adjust, standardize, or plan further

5. **Goals for Next Meeting**

6. **Set Next Meeting Time and Date**

7. **Adjournment**

* * * * *

Appendix

F: Agenda Sample – July 20, 2011

AQIP Project Team on [redacted]

FOR FILE

Agenda for July 20, 2011

1. **Check-in:** ***"If you could be any wild animal what would you be, and why?"***

2. ***"What are you hearing around campus?"***

3. **Notes / Communications**

   A. Notes from June 15th Meeting

   B. Email from [redacted] re: seeking speakers on classroom civility

   C. Email from [redacted] re: availability for July 20th meeting

4. **New Business**

   A. Review: current AQIP Team recommendations from 6/15/2011 meeting – *see Appendix A.*

   B. Review: AQIP Team recommendations *further developed* after 6/15/2011 meeting – *see Appendix B.*

   C. Step Four (continued): Further Develop an Improvement Theory

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Identify area for improvement	Define current situation	Analyze current situation	**Develop an improvement theory**	Implement best strategies	Monitor results	Adjust, standardize, or plan further

5. **Set Next Meeting Time and Date**

6. **Adjournment**

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Appendix

G: AQIP Survey

2010 Incivility Surveys Quantitative Review

AQIP [redacted] - 1/19/2011

- Remark Web Survey

- Deployment Groups
  - Faculty: 11/8/2010 – 11/12/2010
  - Students: 12/9/2010 – 12/20/2010
  - Staff: 12/9/2010 – 12/22/2010

- Design
  - Faculty: 2 question banks; 27 questions each
  - Students: 2 question banks; 31 questions each
  - Staff:* 2 question banks; 27 questions each

- Respondents (705)
  - Faculty: 110
  - Students: 397
  - Staff: 198

- Average time to complete
  - ~ 12 minutes

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* Faculty and Student surveys align across 87% of questions based on classroom interaction. Staff surveys are not in alignment with Faculty and Student surveys, with the exception of a few questions common across areas of campus.

Appendix

H: Survey Results

Cross-tabulation Results - Top Four
All Survey Groups

- Potential Areas of Focus
  - Behaviors moderately serious to very serious *and*
  - Behaviors moderately frequent to frequent

- Faculty

64%	Noisily arriving late or leaving early from class	1.4 x 2.4
55%	Text messaging in class	1.12 x 2.12
38%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls in class	1.13 x 2.13
34%	Talking out of turn in class	1.6 x 2.6

- Students

48%	Noisily arriving late or leaving early from class	2.4 x 1.4
45%	Text messaging in class	2.12 x 1.12
40%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls in class	2. 13 x1.13
38%	Using vulgarity or profanity in class or on campus	2.16 x 1.16

- Staff

56%	Blocking traffic flow (e.g. hallways or stairways) with self or personal belongings	2.4 x 1.4
44%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls while receiving service from staff or student workers	2.24 x 1.24
42%	Not disposing personal trash on campus	2.2 x 1.2
42%	Wearing clothing that is inappropriate for a college setting	2.7 x 1.7
40%	Text messaging while receiving service from staff or student workers	2.23 x 1.23

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Appendix

I: Survey Results – Cross-tabulated

Cross-tabulation Results
Major Intersection Points

- Intersection of behaviors indicated as moderately serious to very serious *and* occurring on a moderately frequent to frequent basis

%Respondents	Behavior	Faculty	Student	Staff
51%	Noisily arriving late or leaving early from class	●	O	N/A
45%	Text messaging in class or when receiving service from staff or student worker	●	●	●
42%	Wearing clothing that is inappropriate for a college setting	N/A	N/A	●
41%	Placing or receiving cell phone calls in class or while receiving service from staff or student workers	●	●	●
36%	Disapproving gestures, groans, or sighs in class	O	O	N/A
36%	Talking out of turn in class	●	●	N/A
33%	Not disposing personal trash on campus	O	O	●
32%	Using vulgarity or profanity in class or on campus	O	●	O
31%	Blocking traffic flow (e.g. hallways or stairways) with self or personal belongings	N/A	O	●
27%	Using a computer for tasks unrelated to course topic in class	O	O	N/A
23%	Treating college property without care or in a destructive manner	N/A	O	O
22%	Demanding special treatment or expedited service from staff or student workers	O	O	O
22%	Talking to other students about content unrelated to the course in class	O	O	N/A

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● - Subject group asked about behavior; "top 4" response in terms of severity and frequency
O - Subject group asked about behavior; responses not "top 4" in terms of severity and frequency
N/A - No respondents -subject group not asked about behavior

Appendix

J: IRB Approval Letter

(INSERT LETTER HERE)