Action Project

Title: Develop and Implement Customer Service Approach that Surpasses Customer Expectations
Version: 2

Institution: Illinois Central College  Status: Completed
Submitted: 2009-11-24  Category: 3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2006-08-01
Target completion date: 2007-08-31
Actual completion date:

Project Detail

Project Goal
Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

Service is important to the success of those we serve (both students and fellow colleagues). The college wants to develop a culture that is more fully committed to customer service. The principal goal for this project is to increase student satisfaction with customer service. The goal is to reach the national benchmark for student satisfaction by 2008 (SSI & CCSSE). Output: Student and Employee Satisfaction Process: Meeting customer needs
Input: Improvement of answering phones, responding to emails, face-to-face- encounters in halls, etc.*

Reasons For Project
Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities

There are many reasons for doing this project. (1.) The college is below the national norm for both employee and student satisfaction; (2.) With low satisfaction scores, we have the potential of losing students and employees; (3.) Low satisfaction leads to decreased morale, decreased enrollment, and loss of employment; (4.) These losses can lead to loss of marketing position, state funding, reputation, and college image; (5.) Consumers today expect more; (6.) Increases in satisfaction will mitigate all of the negative factors the college is experiencing; (7.) If we attract more students, the community will be a better educated one; (8.) The project can have an impact on the positive attitudes of students and staff; (9.) The project could have an impact on budgets, staffing patterns, performance expectations, and how work is done.
Organizational Areas Affected
List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project

The service areas are leading the way on this project, but virtually all departments will be affected. Those who are key contributors are: Marketing, College Communications, & Customer Relations Facilities Student Services Bookstore Food Services Financial Assistance Technology Services All academic departments

Key Organizational Process(es)
Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve

This project will change; Orientation of employees (will include a customer service component) Rewards and recognition procedures Hiring Evaluation Measurement of outcomes(satisfaction)

Project Time Frame Rationale
Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion)

The timeframe mirrors a typical Six Sigma project. The first phase of the project will be to define customer service requirements and what universal (all-campus) approaches should be. Additional phases will be scheduled as appropriate.

Project Success Monitoring
Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing

The college will monitor progress using the DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control) structure of a Six Sigma team.

Project Outcome Measures
Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals

Current outcome measures include: SSI, CCSSE, individual department areas, adjunct and full-time faculty student surveys (aggregate results): the new IC internal climate survey; national benchmarks for the SSI, CCSSE, and the culture survey. It is likely that other "satisfaction" indicators (leading or predicting indicators) will emerge as the project progresses. The success of the team will be measured in improvements in the satisfaction scores of the above measures and possibly on particular elements of each. Our goal is to achieve the national benchmark in satisfaction in the next three years

Annual Update

Project Accomplishments and Status
Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project

The original Blueprint charter had these goals: • Develop the case and definitions for an organizational orientation toward customer service. • Develop the behavioral and attitudinal expectations to support the case. • Develop the overall performance expectations for the college. • Develop the training program and show departments how to develop departmental
service standards for incorporation into program plans. Goals 1-3 were assigned to the Customer Service Action Team. Goal 4 was assigned to an existing ICC planning (Blueprint) team. To meet the first three goals, a team of front line staff, managers, and administrators convened as a team. The team gathered this data:

- Typical questions students ask staff during the first week of class.
- Typical source of information for staff when they don’t know the answer to student questions.
- Degree to which the staff felt they had been trained on customer service.
- Type of media staff would use in finding essential information.
- Key requirements of students for customer service satisfaction (used Student Satisfaction Inventory results and limited one-on-one student interviews and values conversations)
- Data on student valid requirements was incorporated into a Hoshin Planning (Quality Function Deployment) House of Quality Matrix. Specific means to meet those needs were developed (design elements). Design elements that met a large number of student valid requirements were recommended as key training opportunities. The team was officially “commissioned” in October 2006. After the first two meetings, the team members reported that across the organization, management had different understandings of customer service. Team meetings were suspended and the team leader worked directly with a subset of Cabinet to develop what Noel Tichy called a “Teachable Point of View” or what the Cabinet believed and would support regarding customer service. This Cabinet activity was completed and communicated to college managers in February 2007.

The AQIP Action Team resumed meeting and held twenty hour-long meetings between February 2007 and May 2008, usually spaced about two weeks apart. Outside of meetings, the team often gathered data and solicited input. As a result of the direction from this team, the following was accomplished between February 2007 and May 2008:

- Generated the teachable point of view or the Executive Cabinet’s consensus view on customer service at ICC.
- Catalyst for the Strategy Forum retreat, which led to the Core Values being defined behaviorally (Fall 2007).
- Collection of voicing data from internal and external stakeholders to identify what information was important to students.
- Collection of voicing data from internal stakeholders on what media should be used to convey key information.
- Creation of the ICC QuickGuide (to launch in July-August 2008). This is a compendium of key information that students need. It is a quick read, portable guide.
- Identification and verification of customer valid requirements regarding service.
- Development of the CougarCARE service expectations.
- Recommendations of key topics/modules for ICC staff customer service training.

For all intents and purposes, the team completed its work at the end of May 2008. The ICC AQIP Steering Committee Team Chair was notified. The remainder of the work, the development of specific ICC customer service training based on CougarCARE principles, has been turned over to the Blueprint team mentioned previously.

Institution Involvement

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

ICC personnel were involved and will be involved in this project in a number of ways:

- All three ICC campuses had representation on the team. Through viral or grapevine communication, the customer service initiative was informally communicated.
- Customer service is one of the college’s four strategic goals. Posters listing and explaining the four goals were placed around the campus.
- In January 2007, the ICC Strategy Forum, made up of all administrators, was introduced to the Teachable Point of View on Customer Service (TPOV). It was their responsibility to discuss the TPOV with their staff members.
- Later in
the year, the Strategy Forum chose customer service as the topic for their annual retreat. On November 19-20, 2007, the Strategy Forum met to discuss how to implement customer service across the college. • In January, the Strategy Forum held a follow-up meeting to begin implementation of service ideas and determined that the college’s Core Values needed greater definition. • During February and March, multiple “values conversations” were held with faculty, staff and students. More than 200 individuals participated in the sessions. Part of the discussion included how the values behaviors would be used to support customer service at ICC. • The launch of the QuickGuide and the CougarCARE principles will begin in July 2008. The launch includes plans for all employees to be engaged in activities that will reinforce good customer service behaviors. • A complete customer service plan was presented to Executive Cabinet in May and includes multiple communication vehicles, including special newsletters on customer service, incorporation of service behaviors into performance evaluations, and service training. Although the team sometimes became discouraged, once the team had completed the ICC QuickGuide a celebration including Wii bowling and holiday treats was held.

Next Steps
Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

The implementation plan includes four major steps: Develop a service culture at ICC. • Soft launch of the Core Values and associated behaviors in May-June, 2008. • Strong communications launch of Core Values and associated behaviors in August and October, 2008 for Celebration of Learning and Celebration of Service, respectively. • Launch of ICC Blue Book, which incorporates Core Values and CourgarCARE Principles in August. The Blue Book describes the guiding principles of ICC and will be distributed to every employee. • Incorporation of ICC Core Values (the basis for customer service) on all ICC staff computers as screen savers between June 2008-August 2008. • Incorporation of ICC service stories in ICC house communication vehicles, beginning in September 2008. • Incorporation of Core Values and CougarCARE principles in ICC environmental graphics. Implementation plan dependant on acceptance of master facilities plan. • Incorporation of ICC Core Values and CougarCARE principles into employee orientation and diversity training, beginning in October 2008. Listen more effectively to the voice of the customer. • Continue traditional ICC voicing surveys (PACE, SSI, CCSSE) • Establish one-on-one student voicing data (as completed in AQIP team) to be conducted in October and February annually. • Establish a service recovery/complaint resolution and management process by end of Fiscal Year 2009. • Implement assessment approach to all voicing data processes against AQIP and Baldrige Criteria by end of Fiscal Year 2009. Incorporate a vision of service excellence into performance expectations. • Introduce “I Am ICC” communications/awareness campaign in August 2008. • Hard launch of ICC QuickGuide beginning in August 2008. • Introduce mystery shoppers to identify effectiveness of ICC QuickGuide beginning in September 2008. • Introduce and establish ICC editorial and visual standards to support quality communication from ICC staff and faculty beginning in August 2008. • Establish and launch universal service scripts in all departments by end of Fiscal Year 2009. • Incorporate CougarCARE principles into appropriate employee training beginning in October 2008. • Complete and launch ICC “Traditions” video highlighting CougarCARE principles and Core Values by end of Fiscal Year 2009. Establish a means for celebrating and rewarding exemplary customer service. • Create CougarCARE awards by
end of Fiscal Year 2009. • Establish CougarPAUSE, a publication that highlights customer service stories by December 2008. Additionally, an ICC Blueprint Team will develop training for the college during Fiscal Year 2009 based on the AQIP Team’s recommendations.

Resulting Effective Practices
Describe any “effective practice(s)” that resulted from your work on this Action Project

The AQIP Team employed several techniques that may be helpful to others. These include:
• Using the Teachable Point of View to develop leadership consensus. This structure, created by Noel Tichy, provided a framework for senior management to “get on the same page” and speak with the same voice when it came to customer service. While the process was often long, ambiguous, and involved, the result was that senior management came to consensus about what ICC customer service would look like. Organizational literature recognizes that without senior management support, change efforts have a difficult time succeeding.
• Using the service blueprint, a Hoshin planning tool, to identify key interactions between staff and student and key fail points in the process. This process put a face to individual students and visually demonstrated what we put students through. This activity became a reference point for future work.
• Voicing interviews and surveys. The team used direct discussion with students and staff to identify what students were asking, what media would work in communicating with staff. Voicing interviews also identified unspoken or hidden needs of students.
• Visualizing student needs and ICC responses through Hoshin planning’s House of Quality. This matrix allowed the team to identify which service expectations were most important to satisfying customer valid requirements. While the team did not extensively employ the matrix, its limited use provided a very visual idea of what students want and what is most important for staff to do to meet their needs.

Project Challenges
What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project

The team faced several key challenges:
• Having the patience to collect and use data. For example, at one point, some team members felt that collecting information from one-on-one student telephone interviews was redundant. Although only four interviews were completed valuable insights from different generations and ethnic backgrounds were gained. The real voice of the student had much greater impact on senior leaders than simple survey data. The team leader, as well as several team members, had to insist on this exercise.
• Trivialization of the team’s work by some managers. When creating the service expectations, some managers trivialized the team member’s high expectations. The front line workers had much higher expectations and were much more willing to “go the distance” in setting high standards than some managers. Some managers even suggested that the service expectations crafted by the team be simply “guidelines” rather than real expectations.