

“Loras College: Bringing a Business Perspective to Performance Management”
Sponsored by a
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Final Report

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE:

Nestled atop the scenic bluffs of the Mississippi River in Dubuque, Iowa, Loras College is a private, non-profit, four-year, Catholic, baccalaureate, primarily residential, Liberal Arts College. Founded in 1839, by Archbishop Matthias Loras, Loras College is the 2nd oldest college west of the Mississippi River. Our mission is to create a community of active learners, reflective thinkers, ethical decision-makers, and responsible contributors in diverse professional, social, and religious roles. In 2010-11 enrollment was 1659. There are 229 full-time Staff, 122 full-time Faculty, and 21 Adjunct Faculty. Loras has been ranked #11 out of 319 liberal arts colleges in the Midwest for academic quality and in the top 5 for graduation rates by *US News and World Report*. Loras was also ranked #13 in the country among baccalaureate colleges & universities for students committed to service by *Washington Monthly*. We have also been listed with Distinction on both the 2009 and 2010 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

RATIONALE:

The idea for this project was initially prompted by the observation, by the incoming Director of Human and Organizational Development, that the Human Resources department lacked a significant number of well-defined, effective and efficient processes. Coming from 27 years in Organizational Development functions within large American and global corporations, the new Director felt the most obvious issue was the lack of timely performance assessment. In addition, the existing 2008-2013 Strategic Plan was faltering and remaining objectives were not being implemented or tracked. It seemed difficult to assess performance against a backdrop of negligible objective-setting.

After submitting the proposal for the Challenge 2010 grant and attending the introductory session overviewing the Excellence in Higher Education/Baldrige overview, it became clear that the scope of the project should expand to include and focus on the introduction of a performance management process, from institutional strategic planning and objective-setting to performance assessment and individual professional development planning.

The project rapidly took on speed as the Administration Team, led by President Jim Collins, and the Board of Regents, became convinced of the significance of this initiative for the College. As the project progressed, the Director was first added to the Administration Team of the college and then promoted to Vice President of Organizational Development. This is perhaps the first time that there has been a VP-level position with primary focus on strategic planning and responsibility for overall organizational development. The Organizational Development Division now has responsibility, not only for strategic planning and OD, but also for auxiliary revenue generation (new business development), institutional marketing, community and media relations, human and organizational development, and information technology. This re-positioning is clear evidence of the College’s desire to focus on planning, institutional alignment and the implementation of strategy.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Purpose:

The purpose of this project has been to create a demonstration project of process and performance improvement in Human and Organizational Development. The project focus is the development of a Performance Management System. This is a logical starting point because it will also serve the purpose of clarifying the mission, vision of strategy of the College at large and of its separate departments and divisions.

Major Project Phases:

Originally we had planned 8 phases to the entire project:

1. Needs Assessment
2. Design
3. Review & Revise
4. Plan Implementation
5. Develop Support Materials
6. Identify and Orient Champions
7. Monitor Implementation
8. Develop New Hire Orientation process

However as the project progressed, we realized that the Development of Support Materials and the process of Review & Revision were integral to the design phase and was too interdependent to be separated. Consequently, the number of Phases was reduced to 5:

1. Needs Assessment
2. Design
3. Plan Implementation
4. Monitor Implementation
5. Develop New Hire Orientation process

However the amount of time required in order to implement each stage has been heavily skewed to the front-end of the project. We believe that investing time in ensuring that stakeholders are involved in the needs assessment and design stages will enable later stages to be completed much more quickly. As a result, we will have completed Phases 1-3 by the close of this project year. Consequently this report covers Phases 1-3.

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

Goal: To determine the elements of Performance Management Systems and the “Critical Success Factors that would best meet the needs of the college community and best align with our culture.

Success Looks Like: The output of this process was a list of “Critical Success Factors” relative to this college’s culture and values designed by a set of “opinion leaders” from across the campus who could help market the process once developed.

Actions Taken: Presented project overview to Administrative Team and got permission to proceed, including permission to create a representative Task Force to help ensure a design that aligned with cultural values and met perceived needs.

Projected Timetable: Group was formed in March of 2010 and is still functional. Individual members will continue in the process acting as “Key Leaders” to help educate, coach and

support others through implementation. By May the group had produced the desired list of critical success factors and a list of questions to be answered before implementation could begin

Challenges, Obstacles & Key Insights: The most significant insight from this phase was that most of the obstacles and challenges I expected didn't occur. I anticipated difficulty in defining the purpose and need for a Performance Management Process by the Administrative Team, but was met with immediate understanding, expressions of anticipated value such a system would bring to the college, and enthusiastic engagement in selecting "Key Leaders" for participation in the needs assessment and design process. The one obstacle I anticipated that did have some basis in reality was resistance on the part of Faculty. This was much milder than I supposed. I was concerned that they would fear interference with the existing assessment, promotion, and rank & tenure process. The Task Force made it clear that the system would move from Strategic Planning and Objective-Setting, to Performance Feedback, Performance Appraisal, and to Individual Development Discussions. There is a natural "point of bifurcation" where the Faculty and Staff use the same systems for Strategic Planning and Objective-Setting, but then split into two different processes for the rest of the system, leaving the current Faculty Assessment and Evaluation systems in-tact. That reassurance helped to move the project forward more quickly and easily.

Phase 2: Design

Goal: To create a process flow and the accompanying documentation that will anchor the new process and to ensure that the process conformed to the Critical Success Factors Generated in Phase 1.

Success Looks Like: The output of this process was a workflow process map and the forms generated at various steps in the process.

Actions Taken: Using the Critical Success Factors as a backdrop, the Task Force mapped a series of process steps and discussed the way each step should be implemented to align with cultural values. For each step that required a document, the Task Force determined the elements that needed to be included in each form. As the project leader, I summarized the steps in the process, drafted documents for review and approval. The Task Force Reviewed and revised the documents and the process design. Once a complete draft design was produced, the group determined that we should develop the implementation plan before the package was sent to the Administrative Team.

Projected Timetable: A draft Design was completed by the end of July. We then moved to the next phase, the Implementation plan.

Challenges, Obstacles & Key Insights: The primary obstacle to this phase was securing time to meet. As with most colleges, the faculty members of the Task Force were unavailable from May to August. I was able to spend that time refining the process flow created by the Task Force and developing draft documents.

Phase 3: Plan Implementation

Goal: To take the steps necessary to introduce, gain adherence, train users, and implement the first elements of the Performance Management Process.

Success Looks Like: Objectives-setting by individual planning units and implementation of the performance assessment process.

Actions Taken: After the Task Force had fully approved of the design of the process and of the accompanying documents, they turned to the task of developing implementation steps designed to conform to the critical success factors. This included decision-making regarding the language used at each step, the individuals who should be involved, the method of community-wide roll-out, the training that needed to be provided, and the provision of support and coaching during implementation. This full implementation plan and the Performance Management Process's package of materials was presented to the Administrative Team for review and approval. That approval was secured with the recommendation that we simultaneously launch the objective-setting and performance assessment aspects of the process in the first year. An overview of this package and plan is scheduled to be reviewed at the upcoming meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Regents.

Projected Timetable: The plan was discussed and designed in the first Academic Semester of the 2010-2011 school year. It was approved by the Administrative Team in December. At the same time, strategic planning projects were begun in several areas of the college:

- Information Technology: completed their strategic plan in October and had it approved by the Administrative Team. This strategic plan has moved through objective-setting to project management and budget resource allocation based on objectives.
- The Library (completed the external constituents' portion of the strategic plan in May of 2010 and began the internal aspects with library staff in September. This is still in process.)
- Campus Spiritual Life: Began strategic planning in November of 2010 and are now in the process of objective-setting.

In addition, Visioning and Strategy sessions were also held with the National Alumni Board and the Dubuque Area Alumni Association.

Challenges, Obstacles & Key Insights: We currently face two significant challenges to progress. The first was presented when the key project manager (myself) was promoted from Director of Human and Organizational Development to Vice President of Organizational Design. Although this evidences significant success for the overall project—a recognition that strategic planning, alignment and assessment are essential functions for the college requiring full time direction and attention, it has significantly slowed the process by limiting the time available to continue to move the project forward. One of the “critical path” elements of the implementation of the plan is the provision of training to Key Leaders and participants. The VP of OD is also the only instructional design resource available to the college at present. (There is no one in the Academic Education Division who is skilled in instructional technology and there are no classes offered. There is, consequently, no opportunity to secure student help.) The alternative path is to use the members of the task force to help design and implement the training required.

The second, anticipated, obstacle will be the attitude of the Faculty and their resistance to participating in anything that is perceived as adding to their already over-extended workload. Although I believe that this is not a widespread belief at Loras, an aspect of this culture, in some divisions, is that Academic/Faculty leaders do not perceive themselves to be “managers” or to

have much responsibility to the over-arching goals of the College. Brent Ruben, our assigned consultant to visited the college in March and met with the Administrative Team to discuss best practices for overcoming these barriers and with selected Faculty to discuss the need for continued engagement with the vision, mission and strategy of the college.

In addition, the Faculty wished to discuss the idea of post-promotion review with Dr. Ruben. He was very helpful in describing the system in use at Rutgers. The connection of this topic to the Challenge grant was somewhat loose; however, the Performance Management Process does incorporate individual development planning in its final stages. The Task Force had purposely designed a “bifurcated” process, where all departments and divisions, faculty and staff would engage in Team objective-setting, but the Academic Divisions and Departments would then focus on existing assessment processes in place for faculty. The desire to implement a Post-promotion review system introduces the possibility of bringing the two, parallel processes back into the same stream at the point of professional development planning.

PROGRESS REPORT

Specific accomplishments attained to date, tasks/activities yet to be completed with projected timetable

Completed:

- List of key success factors
- Performance management workflow process design
- Anchoring documents designed
- Implementation strategy developed
- Full performance management package approved and endorsed by the administrative team of the college
- A new position, vice president of organizational development, created in order to ensure continued progress and monitoring
- By employing a representative task force to design and develop the process, we have also gained a cadre of opinion-leaders and change-agents who are enthusiastic about its implementation

Remaining Tasks:

- Identification of Planning Units and Key Leaders—by end of March 2011
- Training of Key Leaders—Target by end of May 2011
- Administrative Team’s setting of Key objectives for 2011-2012—Completed at the June Retreat
- Objective-Setting with Divisions & Departments—In progress through August 2011.
- Performance Assessment—Already being used on a case-by-case basis—Full implementation by November of 2011
- Phases 4 & 5—2011-2012 Academic year.

Ways in which the Baldrige/EHE framework was used in planning, assessment and leadership

In essence, this project directly mirrors the Baldrige/EHE framework. The Performance Management Process, as designed, will take the college through the three key phases of assessment as described by Brent Ruben: “Establishing Goals; 2. Monitoring the extent to which

these goals are being met; and 3. Using the resulting information to plan and execute improvements.” (Ruben: “The Excellence in Higher Education Program” CSU 2008.)

The process of implementation also requires that we enhance our Leadership Skills and clarify the governance system of the organization as a whole, with respect to goal-setting and implementation. The use of Performance Management practices to align the institutions various departments and divisions around the Mission, Vision and Strategy fulfills the requirements of the “Plans and Purposes” category in the Baldrige/EHE framework.

Categories 3 and 4 of the framework (Beneficiaries & Constituents and Programs & Services) will be enhanced to the extent that the Administrative Team, Divisions & Departments set objectives within a constituency focused framework. Part of our Training will be around the concept of Quality as composed of Product, Service and Process Quality. We will also provide them with an understanding of “Performance Analysis” methodology, which should help them to identify issues with Product, Service and Process quality.

Again, I believe that the process of introducing and implementing performance management will also have positive effects on C category 5: Faculty/Staff and Workplace. The goal of the process is to align every individual in the organization around the Mission, Vision and Strategy of the organizations. Identifying with the goals of the organization has a significant effect on individual’s recognition of his/her role in the overall success of the college and places emphasis on collaboration and cooperation across traditional silos.

Phase 3 of this project will address Category 6-Assessment and Information use. The key output of the Performance Management System is the operational definition of objectives and the ability to clearly determine whether individuals and teams have achieved their objectives. As such, assessment of its primary goal is built into the system itself. This will not cover assessing the degree to which the system is accepted and effectively used or the effects on the culture. We will have to devise a method for doing that. The most effective way to do that on this campus in the past has been to hold a series of meetings to gather anecdotal feedback (e.g. Plus?, Minus?, Change?) This feedback can be content-analyzed and developed into an action-plan.

Value the Baldrige/EHE framework

The Baldrige/EHE framework was the catalyst for the project. When first proposed, this was couched as a project to map and improve the processes associated with the Human and Organizational Function of the College. After attending the session in Orlando, it seemed best to narrow our focus to the Performance Management Process because it best mirrored the Baldrige/EHE framework categories.

Summary of the findings and “lessons learned”

All in all, this has been easier to accomplish than I anticipated in terms of cultural resistance. In terms of actually getting the work done, it has taken much longer than I anticipated. This is likely because I had come to the college directly from business and industry and am used to much more aggressive timelines. I’ve come to learn that there is clear benefit in making use of the “shared governance” approach native to Higher Education. It produces adherents and advocates. If the tasks in the project are clearly defined and there is an individual that can continuously drive toward task completion, a project can be completed in months rather than years (or a few years instead of 10).

VALUE/USE OF EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION/BALDRIGE METHODOLOGY

- Leadership
The enthusiastic support of the Administrative Team was key to moving the project along.
- Strategic Planning
Having a well-articulated and defined approach to the design and development of the system was critical in keeping the Task Force moving forward. There was a lot of pent of demand for performance feedback, so it became important to manage Task Force meetings to ensure that the tasks we'd set to accomplish were completed. Having a clear plan also allowed for work to be done outside the face-to-face meetings of the task force, since all members knew what the goals of each step were and could review work and apply mutually developed success criteria (Key Success Factors) to decision-making.
- Beneficiaries and Constituents
From the beginning of the formation of the Task Force, the Administrative Team was emphatic that there needed to be representation from all areas of the college. This was extremely helpful in generating success criteria that incorporated the anticipated needs of multiple constituencies.
- Programs and Services
The Performance Management System encompasses Mission, Vision, Strategic Planning, Team & Individual Objective-Setting, Performance Feedback, Performance Assessment and Individual Development Planning. It also effects budget planning in that resource allocation and re-allocation will be based on key objectives.
- Faculty/Staff and Workplace
The culture had been suffering from a lack of performance feedback. Performance assessment was sporadic at best—totally absent at worst. (We had an individual retire after 32 years of employment who had received only two performance assessments in that period of time.) As we continue to implement this process, individuals will both be more accountable and more aware of the tasks they need to complete in order to be successful in their work. This is a win/win for the culture. The processes requirement for continuous performance feedback will also help to increase communication about performance within and across division and department boundaries as objectives often highlight the interdependency of divisions and departments.
- Assessment and Information Use
At each step of the process, so far, we've set specific deliverable targets, e.g. the development of a list of Key Success Factors, a workflow map of the process, documents to anchor the process, a list of Key Leaders and Planning units. So we are measuring to date in an either/or way—we produced the document or not. As we begin to implement the system, we will have the bigger challenge of operationally defining things like degree of adoption and overall success. I suspect that even those will be defined as discrete variables: objectives were set or not; objectives were achieved or not. At some point we can also begin to calculate “percent of objectives” achieved, etc.
- Outcomes and Achievements
Again, the key output of the Performance Management System will be the achievement of specific objectives. Quantitatively, we should be able to measure “percent of objectives attained”. In addition, we will be pursuing qualitative feedback which we will content analyze to development an “Action Agenda” to use as a guide for correction and revision.

INSIGHTS/LESSONS LEARNED

The **three** most important lessons your institution learned from using the Excellence in Higher Education/Baldrige framework to design and implement this project that could make a difference for other institutions undertaking a similar project or change effort are:

1. Break the project (no matter how small you think it may already be) into small “bites”.
2. Engage the culture’s stakeholders in the project at the front-end. It delivers advocates when you get to implementation.
3. Be patient. Allowing stakeholders to have real control may take more time, but is well worth the enthusiasm and passion that results from implementing something they designed instead of something “the Administration” imposed on them.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS TO ADDRESS

- How were the Baldrige/EHE framework and change leadership concepts provided in Tampa last year used in the process and how did they influence the process and results:

While we did not follow the exact methodology laid out in the session, we did adhere to the spirit and intention of the Baldrige/EHE framework by focusing specifically on the way that the Performance Management mirrors the framework’s categories.

- How was consulting assistance used? In what was it beneficial? Are there ways in which this support might have been more beneficial?

Throughout the project, I have had feedback from Brent Ruben that primarily reinforced the steps we were already taking. The project has gone relatively well to date. I have invited Brent to visit campus before we embark on the full-blown implementation in order to gauge the amount of resistance we may encounter and to help prepare the way by getting guidance from him on best practices in the Higher Education setting.

FUTURE STEPS:

The Administrative Team revised the College’s vision and strategy at its June retreat. In addition, Objectives for 2011-12 were set. The new strategic plan has a planning horizon of 3 years, while the vision extends to five years. This output will be shared with the Executive Committee of the Board of Regents on July 21-22nd. At that point, they will have the opportunity to influence its overall direction and add their active and visible support.

As a result of this new approach, The Administrative Team also agreed to several changes. The first of these is to create a continuous communication mechanism with a broader base of leadership. Once a month, the Administrative Team will meet with an expanded “Administrative Council” of about twenty “Key Leaders”. These are individuals who have responsibility for significant functions across the college. They will be held responsible for implementation of the strategic plan and for objective setting. The Administrative Teams 2011-12 Objectives will be shared with that team at their first meeting on June 26th, 2011.

The second decision was to match the Administrative Teams weekly meeting agenda to the objectives for the year. Each owner of a team objective is to be held responsible for preparing an executive summary on the goals, issues, and decisions to be made with regard to each objective, to schedule a meeting time during the academic year and to update the entire Team. Since Administrative Team meetings last for 90 minutes to 2 hours. Two-thirds of the time will be

spend on Objectives and the last third on updating each Division's progress on other actions and objectives. This should help the Administrative Team to continuously assess progress toward accomplishment of its goals.

After the review by the Board of Regents, the 2011-2014 Strategy will be rolled out to each department and division for comment and feedback. Our hope is that they will have a corrective and innovative influence on the plan. We will share our expanded vision; if we can create alignment with that vision and understanding of our overall institutional goals, functional teams should be able to help us generate new strategies to move us toward implementation. As divisions and departments complete their respective strategies and set team objectives, the Administrative Team will be reviewing those for overlaps and potential economies of scale. We will also be using the vision to inform the work of Institutional Advancement and the re-positioning of Loras College's brand.

SUMMARY

This project has evolved and broadened since its inception. While the Task Force was able to contain the definition of the process and design anchoring documents to institutionalize the process, the processes itself has already begun to spin-off additional benefits and influence the restructuring of the organization and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the leadership of the college, especially the work of the Administrative Team and that of the Board of Regents. This was a hoped for, but unanticipated benefit of the work.