

Some reflections on lessons we have learned on our journey of
Keeping Learning at the Center
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Over the last six years, we have invested time and energy to investigate, test, and review various tools and processes that ultimately will help us to keep learning at the center of what we do. I'd like to share some of the lessons I think we have learned as a result of this investment.

AQIP

What is it? Our chosen accreditation format. AQIP is based on principles of continuous improvement, transparency, and highly effective organizations.

Lesson Learned

Organizational capacities in a number of key areas are lacking or insufficient. Data and evidence will become much more important. Cycles of improvement will need to become shorter.

Constellation Survey

What is it?

A survey of the entire campus that investigates organizational capacities and our abilities to deliver on them.

Lesson Learned

We have a highly committed workforce and, intuitively, we recognize there are areas of performance that need to be improved upon.

Hedgehog and Collins' Good to Great

What is it?

A treatise on what makes some organizations good and what makes others truly "great." The hedgehog principle is a lens through which to evaluate on what the organization should focus.

Lesson Learned

We cannot be, nor should we be, everything to all people. There are some areas that others can do better than we can. We must learn to be better at identifying and applying our strengths and partnering with others to meet the learning needs of our clients.

PSP

What is it?

Program and Services Prioritization. An internal method to evaluate and describe each unit in three areas: linkage to mission and strategic goals; demand for service; and resources required to operate.

Lesson Learned

We are not all equal. Organizational resources will be applied unequally across the college. We know much more about the entire organization and our component parts.

PSSA

What is it?

Program and Services Self Assessment. An assessment and planning tool at the unit level. PSSA is the way our units report on continuous improvement, based on measures and standards.

Lesson Learned

PSSA identifies unit strengths and areas for improvement.

Three-year plan

What is it?

A planning tool that identifies goals and needs of units for the following three years. Plans include PSP and PSSA data.

Lesson Learned

Three year plans are highly useful for units. However, we don't have a good ability to aggregate the data for the college as a whole and make "portfolio" decisions. This reinforces the need for clarifying certain decision-making processes.

OCAI

What is it?

A way to evaluate the organization's perception of itself through a "competing values framework." A view of the organization of today is compared to a view of the desired future organization.

Lesson Learned

Results of surveys completed to date (Cabinet, Strategic Planning Committee, President's Council, all faculty and staff) indicate we tend to be internally focused and we value that focus. We also see that it may inhibit our ability to focus on the environment in which we operate and to change rapidly. In the future state, people want to emphasize flexibility and individuality in the future state.

Environmental Scanning

What is it?

Methods of evaluating the environment in which the college operates segregated into nine distinct areas and supplemented by professional judgment and knowledge. The scanning process is ongoing and includes formal studies, evaluation of books and articles, and interviews with key individuals.

Lesson Learned

The formal scan(s) confirm that we know a lot about our environment and do a pretty good job of monitoring it. We've concluded the environment is not just changing, it's being redefined and undergoing radical reconfiguration. We will need to ask and answer fundamental and transformational questions about what we need to be to be "great" within that environment. We cannot run. We cannot hide. It is within our control to define how we interact with that environment.

Implications Wheel – Developed by Joel Barker

What is it?

A tool to help describe the implications of making certain decisions.

Lesson Learned

There are both positive and negative outcomes as a result of any action we take. Discussing them in a structured organized fashion helps but does not guarantee success. We have a tendency to jump to the "answer" or frame the question in terms of our preferred solution.

Some Big Lessons Learned

Learning takes time. Too often, we have expectations that a tool or a thought should be immediately useful. Not so. It may not be time to use it. It may take practice to become useful. We sometimes exhibit the worst habits and impatience regarding learning. These are all tools and lenses that will help us become more disciplined in our decision-making processes. They all do eventually weave together into an important fabric.

Keeping learning at the center does not mean focusing on preserving what we have today. It means constantly searching for ways to assure that effective learning takes place, regardless of the impact on us as an individual or on our current structures. We have the ability to choose and to craft our own future.