



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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COLLABORATION POWER: A RISING TIDE OF EXCELLENCE

American community and technical colleges have always been about people. Oh, the stories we could tell...and we do. This story is about people—dedicated educators who help students learn and design positive futures by focusing on our own learning. The faculty, staff, and administrative team at Hazard Community and Technical College (HCTC) are dedicated to continual improvement by designing our own bright future. Through strategic pooling of limited resources, HCTC remains steadfast in its pursuit of excellence—by continually learning how to leverage fully both internal and external *Collaboration Power*.

Throughout the 2007-08 year, HCTC created and enacted a multi-faceted and focused effort to coordinate, support, and improve professional development. This follows Kentucky Community and Technical College System's (KCTCS) strategy supporting professional development. In addition to the usual fall and spring semester kickoff events, the college strategically revitalized faculty and staff development activities prior to many breaks. For example, just prior to Thanksgiving, when many colleges tend to ramp down, HCTC used a scheduled "office" day to conduct a fun, day-long internal conference of workshops and collaborative activities. A social component was included, along with community outreach via an evening reception, blending college employees with K-12 invitees and community leaders. A staggered schedule allowed the reception to flow smoothly with continual networking opportunities throughout. Thus, college personnel had a collaborative day to recharge their collective batteries while taking invigorating ideas into the holiday break. Strong support from the College Foundation allowed HCTC to honor and acknowledge community and key K-12 leaders while simultaneously engaging and supporting faculty and staff.

Monthly professional development days further supported faculty and staff by involving them in a common-thread theme of improved communication and collaboration. When a mid-year budget rescission

of 3% was handed down from the state, followed by a cut totaling 6% for the following year, the Professional Development Committee responded by integrating a stress-relief theme into spring events. HCTC leadership had to ask the tough questions while crafting a budget that would move the college forward with strong student support amidst a devastating reduction. The team chose to create strategy first and then budget to the strategy, rather than just have a knee-jerk budget reduction response.

Approximately 80% of the senior leadership team's planning time was spent looking at the organization and its strengths. As Peter Drucker said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." The leadership team took those words to heart, reorganizing the college into streamlined Service Centers to expand *Collaboration Power* capabilities while improving convenience for students and employees alike. Since HCTC was at a "Recreation" point in its organizational life cycle anyway, the timing was excellent to make quick progress. Thus, the first 80% of the conversation focused on answering the following exciting questions:

- **Who** are we as an organization?
- **What** have we been that is excellent?
- **How** can we blend strong and successful traditions with positive innovations?
- **What if** we could become anything we wanted to be?

While these conversations were fun and exciting, the final 20% of the meetings included facing a budget reality that would trim approximately a million dollars out of a \$35 million budget (only \$21 million of which were recurring operating dollars that could be touched). To complicate things further, only 25% of the operational budget was made up of general operating costs, while 75% was personnel salary and benefits. Additionally, less than half the typical annual out-migration of employees leaving for other jobs or retirement had occurred. These factors, combined with previous state budget cuts in two of the past four years and no legal authority for local taxation, created quite a conundrum.

The senior leadership team responded with a progressive approach designed to maximize resources.



Unwanted but necessary workforce reductions were tough on morale. However, open and honest communication at each major step of the process kept everyone as informed as possible to help alleviate fear. Reorganization allowed the college to appoint several people into “right-fit” positions; some were lateral moves, and others were promotions. Some reappointments moved people to grant-funded positions, but saved jobs. Several reassignments moved people from non-revenue generating positions to revenue-generating (or revenue-generation support) positions. All strategies helped balance morale and helped everyone focus on positive college progress, particularly on improving student convenience and support.

The human resources director helped create a virtual no-cost, internal Leadership Institute to develop mid-career leadership skills. Plans are underway for an equally inexpensive Reciprocal Mentoring Program. The model being developed will include a triad reciprocity arrangement where new employees (or current employees wanting to get involved) will engage in a three-way reciprocal mentoring relationship with two other employees—one from the same campus and/or operational area and one from a different campus and/or operational area. This will fuel further improvement in collaboration, communication, and team-building. The model will be leveraged to develop a student mentoring version.

Throughout the year, various college personnel were supported to attend professional development events. As the spring semester rolled on, HCTC maintained commitment to professional development and team-building by stretching and coordinating available resources. Thinly budgeted professional development funds were combined with available Perkins dollars and unrestricted (though non-recurring) institutional fundraising dollars. Special effort was made to communicate that these dollars came from different “buckets” of money within the college’s budget than the recurring operational cuts from the state.

In a targeted and comprehensive fashion, HCTC sent more than 50 people to the KCTCS May 2008 New Horizons Conference at a nominal cost; 20 faculty, staff, and administrators to the May 2008 NISOD Conference; and a dozen to the League for Innovation’s June 2008 Learning College Summit. A baseline expectation was set in conference preparatory meetings that participants would “bring home the knowledge” by creating workshops, seminars, flyers, and handouts that showcased their experiences. These learning opportunities will be integrated into 2008-09 internal professional development events.

In the midst of spring and early summer conferences, we held a two-day HCTC President’s Leadership Retreat, focusing on the new college slogan—*Design Your Future*. Participant numbers at this year’s retreat increased from around 30 to nearly 70. Admittedly a large contingent to facilitate through a leadership retreat, but it broadened inclusion and flowed well.

So what is the return on investment of time and money? Monetary investment comes back five-fold in increased productivity, improved morale, and innovative progress, as best practices are scanned and incorporated. More specifically, lessons learned this year have begun to impact the college positively. Following his first-ever NISOD experience, a conference participant, invigorated with a good dose of old-fashioned fun, and offered an optional holiday to make up for having worked via NISOD conference participation on Memorial Day, replied, “Thanks for your offer, but I had so much fun that day...my conscience would hurt me claiming another day as my holiday.”

This fits well with our belief that if you are not having fun—what *are* you having? We are blessed in education to do a fun job that truly helps people, and we should take time to enjoy this most honorable profession while we are living the journey.

Leveraging the power of people by developing people, HCTC has embraced the rising tide of excellence in American community colleges. *Collaboration Power* will help us take time to learn and collaborate, and progressive lessons learned will be shared with other colleges to create higher education synergy.

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