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Survey Responses to the Baldrige Quality Model and Implementing a College of Education Strategic Plan

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ABSTRACT

The process of ensuring that a College of Education is equipped to address the challenging requirements of educating students for the twenty-first century is one that connects leadership with student achievement and faculty development. All three must work together in order to invigorate education programs. A regional southeastern university collected data using a survey published by The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) for the Baldrige program titled "Are We Ready" and "Are We Ready as Leaders." The objectives of the Baldrige quality model are to identify and recognize role-model institutions, establish criteria for evaluating improvement efforts, and to disseminate and share best practices. This study analyzed the perceptions of faculty and administrators in the college on the following seven organizational factors: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer Focus, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management, Workforce Focus, Operations Focus and Results. The data provided a reference base for comparisons with responses from replicated future surveys, and would enable the institution to make necessary adjustments for improvement. In addition, information derived from the Baldrige survey would help the institution to revise and implement its strategic plans. This study provided relevant information that would enable the College of education to improve its overall operation and mission.

Keywords: survey responses, strategic plan, College of Education, Baldrige Quality Model, southeastern Kentucky

Introduction

Colleges of education are increasingly challenged to develop programs that support the educational needs of society. It is becoming more difficult to motivate faculty and staff to participate and lead the initiatives necessary to produce qualified classroom. The school population is composed of students from different cultures, socio-economic groups, and home environments. There is an increasing level of violence in schools, and legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) imposed some unfunded mandates.

The most recent challenge for teacher preparation programs is to incorporate the Common Core State Standards (2011) into programs that prepare pre-service teachers. The Common Core State Standards are intended to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students must learn so teachers and parents are aware of the expectations. More

standard-based training must be included in the teacher candidates' portfolio of training in Kentucky. Senate Bill 1 is an education legislation act that improves performance in schools by enhancing the assessment and accountability for K-12 education. The Bill supports national and international benchmarks in K-12 education, and addresses college readiness and career readiness preparation.

Schools and school districts have developed various configurations of infrastructure to address these issues with varied success. These are due in part to funding, quality of planning and the ability of the current management to identify, diagnose, and implement a solution to the problems in the school or school district. Colleges of education have a responsibility to include these topics in the preparation of teachers and school administrators, to make their programs more relevant to the needs of the communities that employ their candidates. To incorporate these evolving

requirements every college of education should undergo a periodic review of its vision, mission, and objectives to insure that the relevant environmental factors that can make graduates more effective in the classroom are incorporated into their programs. These reviews are typically incorporated into the accreditation process of the college, which in ECU's case is the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008).

In 1999, the National Institute of Standards and Technology introduced a framework to assess the effectiveness of educational organizations, which is promoted as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program for the Education Sector. This framework has been shown to be a good assessment tool to identify educational organizations that outperform the majority of similar organizations, and provide a good indication of the areas that when improved could significantly raise the performance of the organization (Evans & Jack, 2003; Masood Badri, 2005). This paper describes parts of a systematic review using the Baldrige framework that was undertaken at Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) College of Education. The process was to update and communicate the strategic plan of the college and generate the participation and involvement necessary to develop a current, more effective vision, mission, and college objectives.

Organizational Structure

The College of Education at Eastern Kentucky University has the typical departments of a college that produces approximately 450 graduates (bachelor's level) per year. The concentrations include Communication Disorders, Counseling and Educational Psychology, Curriculum & Instruction, Special Education, Leadership

and Policy Studies, Field Services/Teacher Education Services, and a Department of American Sign Language and Interpreter Education. The college also operates a laboratory school with students from pre-k through 12th grade and hosts the Education Extension Agents program, which operates in the 22 counties in ECU's primary service region. In addition to this discipline oriented structure, ECU's College of Education supports "Professional Learning Communities" (PLCs) that were organized to share best practices between disciplines and address special problems. Examples of topics addressed by five of the 14 PLCs that existed in early 2010 include assessment, creative and critical thinking, differentiated instruction, clinical models for teacher education, and global education.

When the time came to review and revise the college's strategic plan, the PLCs served as a sounding board to help the administration assess the acceptance of potential strategic changes. The PLCs also helped the College of Education to develop a comprehensive plan that would be more widely accepted and better implemented by the faculty and staff than what might have been developed without their input. Each of the PLCs was given a copy of the vision, mission and strategy of the college and the current and proposed mission and vision of the university. They were then contacted to provide their input/comments on the existing strategy for the college. A similar process was used with the college's departments.

After the comments were reviewed by the appropriate department leader and communicated back up the organizational structure, the strategy was revised by the administration to reflect these comments and insure a clear connection between the college's vision, mission and objectives and that of the university. After the departments and PLCs had the opportunity to discuss the college's strategy and their role in making

the plans of the college a reality, the employees of the college were surveyed to gauge their awareness of the process of which they were technically a part and their perception of their ability to contribute to the success of the organization. The survey used the Baldrige framework as the benchmark for evaluation and is reported here to initiate a discussion of the value of using Baldrige tools to aid in efficiently revising and implementing a strategic plan.

The Baldrige Quality Model

The Baldrige Quality Model has three objectives: 1) to identify and recognize role-model organizations, 2) to establish criteria for evaluating improvement efforts, and 3) to disseminate and share best practices (NIST, 2011.) To achieve the objectives a framework of seven factors was identified that included: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer Focus, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management, Workforce Focus, Operations Focus and Results. There is a rich history documenting the superior performance of Baldrige Quality Award Winners in the literature. Some of the performance changes realized by some of the past Baldrige Education Quality Award winners are listed below.

Richland College

- The employment rate for students taking technical training or workforce development classes reached nearly 100%.
- The number of students completing the core curriculum in preparation for transfer to four-year institutions grew from 500 in 2002 to 1,660 in 2005.
- For classes scheduled, class-time convenience, variety of courses, and intellectual growth—measures students rated as the most

important—student satisfaction surpassed the Noel Levitz national norm over four years.

- The college found innovative ways to keep tuition rates low and quality high when state funding dropped from 70% to 30% over three legislative sessions.

Monfort College of Business

- Student performance on nationally administered exit exams was well above the national mean and reached the top 10% in 2003-2004.
- The college ranked in the top 10% nationally on 10 of 16 student satisfaction measures in a 2004 survey by Educational Benchmarking, Inc.
- 90% or more of the organizations employing students rated the program good or excellent.
- The college is one of just five undergraduate-only business schools in the nation accredited in business and accounting by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

University of Wisconsin—Stout

- From 1996 to 2001, the job placement rate for graduates was at or above 98%.
- 99% of employers surveyed rated graduates as well prepared.
- Approximately 90% of alumni said they would attend the university again.

In addition, two chief executives made the following complementary comments: *Dr. Terry Holliday, Former Superintendent, Iredell-Statesville Schools* and now serving as Commissioner of Education in Kentucky stated, “Baldrige [offers] the only Education Criteria that actually [enable a school

system] to compare itself against other organizations ... that show you what world-class looks like ... When we improve, children are successful" (2008).

Bob Crumley, Superintendent, Chugach School District remarked that "Baldrige really gave us a framework to measure our entire system rather than just look at student test results on a couple of content areas" (2001).

The results obtained by these educational organizations, combined with the testimonials and the documented success of organizations in other sectors of the economy (health care, manufacturing, small business, service and non-profit) support the proposition that employing the Baldrige Model leads to significant positive results and, therefore, was incorporated into the methodology used at ECU's College of Education.

EKU Experience

The initial effort to gauge the faculty and staff's perception of the strategy of the college and the effectiveness of the college's implementation of the strategy was composed of a standard survey published by NIST for the Baldrige Program entitled "Are We Ready" and "Are We Ready as Leaders" which was administered to the faculty and staff of the college to establish a reference to compare future surveys and identify any area that is significantly different from a Baldrige Benchmark survey taken by examiners to test and validate the questionnaire.

For ECU's College of Education, results of factor scores generated from the survey were very good relative to the benchmark scores and results are presented in the Tables Below. There were 18 respondents that identified themselves as management (a 94.7% response rate) and 62

that responded to the standard employee survey (a 34% response rate).

Leadership Category

ECU Management scores were better than the benchmark in every category except Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management, and employee scores were slightly below the benchmark in all categories except Customer and Market Focus. These results indicate that the College has a focused and well-communicated strategy and is effectively implementing this strategy among its employees. The areas, which do not reach benchmark levels, are areas where there is opportunity for the college to improve its operating practices

Another key deduction from this data is there is a difference between the management scores and the employee scores in each category and, while not significant (with an alpha error of 0.05), suggest that there is opportunity to improve the understanding of and commitment to the organization's strategy by the non-management employees of the college. Note that the responses are built on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, so a higher value for a question is a more favorable response than a lower number. Table 1 shows a more detailed breakdown of the management responses compared to employee responses.

The question with the largest average difference in the leadership category was "Our leadership team creates a work environment that helps our employees to do their jobs" (Manager question #4 average response 4.17, standard deviation 0.79) and the complimentary employee question "My senior leaders create a work environment that helps me do my job" (Employee question #4, average response 3.37, standard deviation 1.15). The results show a difference of 0.8 with a substantial standard

Table 1: Leadership

Management Responses

	Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1	Our workforce knows our organization's mission (what we are trying to accomplish).	4.17	0.62
2	Our workforce knows our organization's vision (where it is trying to go in the future).	4.11	0.58
3	Our leadership team uses our organization's values to guide our organization and employees.	3.94	1.21
4	Our leadership team creates a work environment that helps our employees do their jobs.	4.17	0.79
5	Our leadership team shares information about the organization.	4.33	0.59
6	Our leadership team asks employees what they think.	3.89	1.13
	Category Average	4.10	0.64

Employee Responses

	Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1	I know my organization's mission (what it is trying to accomplish).	4.15	0.77
2	I know my organization's vision (where it is trying to go in the future).	3.80	0.85
3	My senior (top) leaders use our organization's values to guide us.	3.41	1.07
4	My senior leaders create a work environment that helps me do my job.	3.37	1.15
5	My organization's leaders share information about the organization.	3.65	1.09
6	My organization asks what I think.	3.20	1.28
	Category Average	3.60	0.78

deviation. An objective for the administrative management of the college should be established to reduce this difference and the standard deviation for each group.

The benefit of reducing the difference and the standard deviation will be to have more employees working with a better-defined understanding of how to perform their responsibilities and achieve the results that will best benefit the organization. It is noted that the differences in scores may be explained by the fact that during the time this survey was conducted, the leadership and faculty of the College of

Education were completing three major assessment reports: The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) reaccreditation report, Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) MAED Teacher Leader Redesign, and the Planned Program Instructional Leadership School Principal redesign preparation program.

Strategic Planning

In this category of questions the largest differences in scores were in questions 5, 1, 4 and 3 respectively, and this category had the largest difference between

Table 2: Strategic Planning

Management Responses			
	Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1	As our leadership team plans for the future, we ask our employees for their ideas.	4.17	0.62
2	Our organization encourages very new ideas (innovation).	4.11	0.58
3	Our employees know the parts of our organization's plans that will affect them and their work.	3.94	1.21
4	Our employees know how to tell if they are making progress on their work group's part of the plan.	4.17	0.79
5	Our organization is flexible and can make changes quickly when needed.	4.33	0.59
Category Average		3.89	1.13
Employee Responses			
	Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1	As it plans for the future, my organization asks for my ideas.	2.94	1.14
2	My organization encourages totally new ideas (innovation).	3.08	1.09
3	I know the parts of my organization's plans that will affect my work and me.	3.28	1.07
4	I know how to tell if we are making progress on my work group's part of the plan.	3.11	1.04
5	My organization is flexible and can make changes quickly when needed.	2.60	1.09
Category Average		3.00	0.81

the two groups. The question with the smallest difference is about the understanding an employee has about how the college's plans affect individuals and their work. The other questions indicate that the strategic planning process is the area that will benefit from more proactive actions from management, which given the college's current process of strategic review, makes this an opportune time to improve communication to all employees in the college to insure their role in achieving the college's mission and objectives.

Customer and Market Focus

In this category of questions, the employee scores were higher than the management scores for all questions except being allowed to make decisions to solve problems for the customer; but even for this

question 71% of the respondents either strongly agreed (24%) or agreed (47%) that they could make these types of decisions. The largest difference in the responses to these questions was only 0.37, and all of the differences were less than half the value of the respective standard deviation, implying that there are not significant differences between these two groups. From a managerial perspective, the differences in scores may be explained by the employee being closer to these issues than management.

Analysis & Knowledge Management

The lowest scoring response by management in this category was to the question "I get all the important information I need to do my work," which was the

Table 3: Customer and Market Focus

Management Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 Our employees know who their most important customers are.	4.17	0.71
2 Our employees regularly ask their customers what they need and want.	4.11	0.68
3 Our employees ask if their customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with their work.	3.61	0.92
4 Our employees are allowed to make decisions to solve problems for their customers.	3.89	0.76
5 Our employees also know who our organization's most important customers are.	4.00	0.59
Category Average	3.96	0.59
Employee Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 I know who my most important customers are.	4.53	0.82
2 I regularly ask my customers what they need and want.	4.27	0.91
3 I ask if my customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with my work.	3.94	0.88
4 I am allowed to make decisions to solve problems for my customers.	3.71	1.14
5 I also know who my organization's most important customers are.	4.32	0.83
Category Average	4.15	0.65

Table 4: Analysis & Knowledge Management

Management Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 Our employees know how to measure the quality of their work.	3.61	0.70
2 Our employees use this information to make changes that will improve their work.	3.71	0.69
3 Our employees know how the measures they use in their work fit into our organization's overall measures of improvement.	3.78	0.65
4 Our employees get all the information they need to do their work.	3.29	1.10
5 Our employees know how our organization as a whole is doing.	3.72	0.75
Category Average	3.62	0.67

Table 4: Analysis & Knowledge Management (continued)

Employee Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 I know how to measure the quality of my work.	4.42	0.67
2 I can use this information to make changes that will improve my work.	4.35	0.58
3 I know how the measures I use in my work fit into the organization's overall measures of improvement.	3.58	1.09
4 I get all the important information I need to do my work.	3.26	1.14
5 I know how my organization as a whole is doing.	2.95	1.14
Category Average	3.71	0.63

second lowest scoring question among non-management employees. The standard deviation was large for this question also, making the difference statistically insignificant but still identifying an area where more attention would be a good use of resources. The two questions that had the largest response difference between the two groups responding were questions 1 and 5, which both relate to understanding how an individual's work can be assessed and how the college is performing.

Workforce Focus

The scores in this category are all relatively close to one another, and have similar standard deviations. The largest difference between the two segments of employees was on the question "My bosses and my organization care about me" (Q5) where the management's score was 0.88 more than that of the non-management responses. The standard deviation of the non-management employees was the largest standard deviation in the data collected in this effort, implying that there is a large variation of emotion and perception around this issue.

Process Management

In this category the question that had the largest difference between the two segments was question 1 "I can get everything I need to do my job," which had a difference of 0.74 but also had a large standard deviation of 1.22 (employee response average). Non-management responses had larger standard deviations in this category, with three of the four questions obtaining standard deviations in excess of 1.20; efforts should be made to reduce this deviation.

Results

In the results section, for the first two questions, employees scored higher than management, and both questions relate to evaluation of the work done. In all the other questions management scored higher than non-management.

Summary

The responses received from faculty interviews and from the survey indicate a management process that is organized with the support of the majority of the faculty and staff, and more importantly, that the faculty and staff of the College of Education are aware of the strategic management process and how it affects their day-to-day activities.

Table 5: Workforce Focus

Management Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 Our employees cooperate and work as a team. Our leadership team encourages and enables our employees	3.72	1.18
2 to develop their job skills so they can advance in their careers.	3.72	1.02
3 Our employees are recognized for their work.	3.39	1.20
4 Our organization has a safe workplace.	4.39	0.50
5 Our managers and our organization care about our workforce.	4.33	0.97
Category Average	3.97	0.70
Employee Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 The people I work with cooperate and work as a team.	3.57	1.24
2 My bosses encourage me to develop my job skills so I can advance in my career.	3.56	1.35
3 I am recognized for my work.	3.11	1.32
4 I have a safe workplace.	3.98	1.23
5 My bosses and my organization care about me.	3.45	1.34
Category Average	3.72	0.97

Table 6: Process Management

Management Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 Our employees can get everything needed for their jobs.	3.61	0.85
2 Our organization has good processes for doing its work.	3.56	0.70
3 Our employees have control over their personal work processes.	4.00	0.77
4 Our prepared to organization is handle an emergency.	3.53	0.72
Category Average	3.73	0.61
Employee Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 I can get everything I need to do my job.	2.87	1.22
2 We have good processes for doing our work.	3.20	1.26
3 I have control over my work processes.	3.63	0.98
4 We are prepared to handle an emergency.	3.05	1.25
Category Average	3.29	0.89

Table 7: Results

Management Responses		
Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1 Our employees' work products meet all requirements.	3.44	0.92
2 Our employees' customers are satisfied with their work.	3.67	0.84

3	Our workforce knows how well our organization is doing financially.	3.50	1.04
4	Our organization has the right people and skills to do its work.	3.47	0.94
5	Our organization removes things that get in the way of progress.	2.83	0.92
6	Our organization obeys laws and regulations.	4.12	0.93
7	Our organization practices high standards and ethics.	4.11	0.90
8	Our organization helps our employees help their community.	4.17	0.62
9	Our employees believe our organization is a good place to work.	4.17	0.62
Category Average		3.81	0.67

Employee Responses			
	Questions	Score	Std. Dev.
1	My work products meet all requirements.	4.08	0.80
2	My customers are satisfied with my work.	4.18	0.70
3	I know how well my organization is doing financially.	2.98	1.06
4	My organization has the right people and skills to do its work.	3.05	1.20
5	My organization removes things that get in the way of progress.	2.43	0.94
6	My organization obeys laws and regulations.	3.93	1.06
7	My organization practices high standards and ethics.	3.72	1.14
8	My organization helps me help my community.	3.43	1.09
9	My organization is a good place to work.	3.87	1.07
Category Average		3.40	0.87

The opportunities to improve should be focused on the quantity and quality of communication, ensuring that non-management employees not only receive the message of the mission and goals of the college, but they understand them as well. It can also be inferred that the College of Education is an organization that performs at its optimum levels when management, faculty, and staff are working in harmony as a team. This was revealed during the NCATE reaccreditation cycle, which required an assertive effort, by all departments and select faculty to develop teams for completing the NCATE application process. The College pulled together a dedicated team that fulfilled the responsibility of completing the NCATE

requirements and the College was successfully reaccredited. As the only College of Education in Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky University's College of Education recently was awarded the Level I—Interest Award based on using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. This is another indication of how teamwork—combined with excellent leadership can produce positive results.

In using the Baldrige Process to assess the quality practices of an organization, a survey like the one conducted at ECU's College of Education is one of the early steps in the journey to improve the quality of an organization's practices. Once a formal application to the quality process is made (either at the state

level or the national level), the application is reviewed by experts in process quality, trained to assess and provide feedback to the applying organization describing which processes can be improved. This feedback report is the most valuable part of the application process because it is based on using the best practices in the industry such as the survey taken by the College of Education at ECU but with additional detail and recommendations.

As colleges of education evolve to include additional standards and human variance—more diverse student populations and more demanding graduation standards, it is important that the colleges have strategic plans in place that can respond to the environment, provide realistic

performance measures of student performance, comply with state and national educational standards, learn from the best practices of other institutions, and incorporate those practices as appropriate into their programs and operations. According to Wesley Null (2009), “We must begin by fighting to make teacher education the highest priority within our universities. This is not an easy task, but with political skill and strong moral and intellectual foundations, it can be done” (p. 447). The Baldrige Framework helps to facilitate this evolution and has helped keep ECU’s College of Education ahead of the demands placed on it by regulatory agencies and community stakeholders.

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