Making Campus Meetings More Effective

A Case Study

► Process Improved:
Process for disseminating information and model practices for meetings on campus

► Unit(s):
UW-Madison Office of Quality Improvement (OQI) and Office of Human Resource Development (OHRD)

► Customers of the Process and Their Needs:
Those with the most need for meeting skills and tools would be academic leaders such as department chairs, directors of centers, Principal Investigators, and those who lead committees and teams.

► Problem/Opportunity Statement:
The problem is that many academic leaders have had few systematic opportunities to learn effective meetings skills. Most of us have learned our own meeting management techniques by attending meetings and often what we have experienced on campus are not the best exemplars. As more and more campus work is cross-functional, more collective time is being spent in meetings without a corresponding increase in learning opportunities for making meeting time as productive as possible. The Office of Quality Improvement continued to receive requests for workshops and training on effective meetings and was seeking a way to get the information to anyone who might need it, whenever they might need it, including weekends and evenings

► Changes Made:
OQI and OHRD jointly developed a web site http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/meetings/howto1.htm. The site is not just a repository of information, but was designed as an electronic performance support site. In contrast to traditional training systems, a performance support system (PSS) provides information about the tasks to be done at the time the task needs to be done. An EPSS is an electronic system that provides integrated, on-demand access to information, advice, learning experiences, and tools to enable a high level of job performance with a minimum of support from other people (Gery, 1991; Raybould, 1990)

A focus group was held mid-way through development to get faculty feedback and suggestions for improvement.

► Results to Date and Expected:
The first result OQI has noticed is that the requests for paper documents on meeting practices has disappeared. In the past, these requests were received on a monthly basis, if not more. Anecdotal responses to the site have been positive. One department chair referred to the site as, “An outstanding resource that I have recommended frequently for new chairs of committees and others who want to understand what makes an efficient meeting and what can interfere with getting business done.” A supervisor from a state agency outside of the university said, “In checking a number of website and resources for information, one of the best I found was the “How to Lead Effective Meetings” on the UW-Madison…web site.”

The software to track usage was not available, but is expected to be available in 2003 at which time; use of the site can be analyzed. OQI will be particularly interested in which domains are requesting which pages most frequently.
Lessons Learned:
The biggest challenge has been making the campus aware that this site exists. For those with whom OQI and OHRD interact regularly, this is not such a problem. Information on the site has been stuffed in professional development events folders and sent to OQI mailing lists throughout 2002. Yet key people on campus are still not aware that the site exists.

The second lesson learned is the difficulty of keeping the site fresh and up-to-date and the need to consider how this will be accomplished before the site is up and running.

Next Steps:
Track usage; consider removing pages that are used little; augment areas of the site that are being used heavily, update content as regularly as possible.

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