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ABSTRACT
                This study attempted to identify the continuous quality
improvement (CQI) practices that leaders implement in the process of changing
cultures at institutions of higher education. Emphasis was on meeting the
challenge of balancing a respect for the institution's existing culture while
working to create a new culture. First, a survey was constructed and sent to
408 higher education institutions (273 responses) that have implemented CQI.
Second, a qualitative study based on in-depth site visits to 10 institutions
that had been implementing CQI principles and practices for at least three
years was conducted. Visited institutions included four-year public,
four-year independent, and two-year community colleges, as well as a mixture
of research- and teaching-focused institutions of various sizes. The primary
themes that emerged were grouped under the categories of (1) systems
developed, (2) main barriers encountered, (3) outcomes of quality principles
and practices, and (4) lessons learned. Major themes identified included the
need for effective communication systems; (2) the need for changes in
institutional culture; and (3) and the recognition that leadership is
critical in changing culture. (Contains 42 references.) (DB)

The Challenge of Change: Creating a Quality Culture

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The Challenge of Change: Creating a Quality Culture

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe how leaders are changing institutional cultures by practicing continuous improvement principles. A review of the continuous improvement literature (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1997) advocates an understanding of the role of organizational culture in improving management and institutional performance if institutions are going to be positioned to address the challenges facing higher education in the next century. Because an institution's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it, culture plays a central role in quality improvement (Atkinson, 1990; Crouch, 1992). When leaders understand the connection between culture and continuous improvement, leaders are better able to make decisions consistent with the values of the existing culture while working to create a new culture (Chaffee and Tierney, 1988).

This paper addresses this research question: What specific actions do leaders take in demonstrating commitment that leads to culture change? Specific examples are included about how leaders are developing and implementing systems for creating a quality culture by overcoming the challenge of change.

Literature Review

Sufficient evidence exists in the literature that business as usual is no longer an acceptable mode of operation while at the same time a number of books and articles have been severely critical of the educational process (Anderson, 1992; Smith, 1990; Sykes, 1988; Weinstein, 1993; Wilshire, 1990) and of cost issues (Levine, 1990). In the current environment in which institutions operate, the public is demanding a clear purpose for existence. How well

institutions weather the challenges for greater accountability will be based on how well they

clarify their purpose and how well people work together to clearly demonstrate that the programs

provided bring value to the people they serve (Bok, 1992).

The underlying premise of quality improvement principles and practices is that they are a

fundamental and philosophical culture that values scientific outcomes measurement, systematic

management techniques, and teamwork to achieve the mission of the organization (Freed,

Klugman, and Fife, 1997). Continuous improvement is often defined by principles of which nine

are most often mentioned by quality authorities (Chaffee and Sherr, 1992; Cornesky, et al., 1991;

Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986; Juran, 1989). (For a detailed explanation of these principles, see

Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1997.)

In a culture that supports quality improvement, vision and mission statements are

revisited regularly to anchor institutional outcomes. Involving stakeholders in developing these

statements ensures that their input is considered in defining and redefining the institution.

Leaders empower members by sharing information and involving them in decision making. This

involvement helps to align members to a shared vision and creates ownership for the processes

and outcomes.

Continuous improvement involves making continuous change in order to improve

institutions. A quality culture emphasizes that learning is a continuous process, a way of life. To

enable people to practice quality principles, members are trained and educated in the philosophy

of CQI and in tools and techniques that will enable them to improve systems and processes. In

higher education, culture has been referred to as the "invisible tapestry" that weaves together

all parts and members of the institution (Kuh and Whitt, 1988). Specifically, culture in higher

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education is:

> ...The collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus (Kuh and Whitt, 1988, pp. 12-13).

The major components of organizational culture emerge through the vision and principles of its leaders (Argyris, 1976; Bennis, 1983; Davis, 1984; Schein, 1983). Leaders need to understand and recognize the significance of culture because it affects how members think, feel, and act. The culture serves as an organizing framework for determining rewards, what is valued and what is not, and moral guidelines that bond individuals and groups and influence behaviors (Kuh and Whitt, 1988).

Members watch the top leaders for signals about what matters and what does not (Filipczak, 1996). Levinson and Rosenthal (1984) advocate that "strong leaders are necessary, particularly for organizations that must undergo significant change. Not good managers or executives, but strong leaders" (p. 289). Senge (1996) has been rethinking leadership and concludes that if the goal is to have less of an authoritarian culture, then the result should not be hierarchical authority. Rather, leaders need to create a culture where people trust one another and they share in the leadership responsibility. "A leader ... has to engage people in confronting the challenge, adjusting their values, changing perspectives, and learning new habits. ... One can lead with no more than a question in hand" (Heifetz and Laurie 1997, p. 134).

In an interview with Richard Teerlink, CEO of Harley Davidson, an organization widely recognized for their continuous improvement efforts, he stated, "Why don't we just create an environment where people can do great things? We do that by trying to have systems within the

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organization that support the efforts of people. So we make it easier for people to do business" (Http://www2pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/america/interviews/teerlink1.html, January 10, 1997).

"Without strong leadership from the top, no organizational change (be it process improvement or a major restructuring) has much chance of success" ("Legends." 1997, p. 16). A recent study indicates that top executives consistently rate themselves as more effective at leading change efforts than do their employees. The discrepancies in the ratings were explained by the fact that "employees tend to rate executives not by what they say, but rather by the actions they take" (p. 16).

But the thought of change raises anxieties because people fear many things such as economic loss or a change in social patterns. Deal and Kennedy (1982) emphasize that changes in an organization always threaten a culture:

> …people form strong attachments to heroes, legends, the rituals of daily life, the hoopla of extravaganza and ceremonies, and all the symbols of the workplace. Change strips relationships and leaves employees confused, insecure, and often angry. Unless something can be done to provide support for transitions from old to new, the force of a culture can neutralize and emasculate strategy changes (pp. 157-158).

Methods

Data Collection

Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase of this study, a questionnaire was constructed and sent to 408 institutions that have implemented continuous improvement (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1994). Institutions that were selected either were members of AAHE's Academic Quality Consortium, were identified in an ERIC publication as practicing continuous improvement, or were listed in the annual "Quality in Education" survey printed by *Quality*

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Progress. With a final response rate of 67 percent, this national survey provided baseline information on many institutions that are implementing continuous quality improvement (CQI) concepts. The results from the survey reinforced those of others (Chaffee and Sherr, 1992; Marchese, 1991; Sherr and Teeter, 1991; Seymour, 1992; 1993; Seymour and Collett, 1991).

To obtain more detailed data, the second phase was a qualitative study based on in-depth site visits to ten institutions that had been implementing CQI principles and practices for at least three years. The institutions are not a random sample, but rather were carefully selected so that they covered a wide variety of institutions that had some degree of success with the implementation of CQI based upon the literature and from individuals associated with the AAHE CQI Project. The institutions are a mix of four-year public, four-year independent, and two-year community colleges. They are also a mixture of research and teaching focused institutions, are a combination of sizes, and are located across the United States.

At each institution, more than 20 individuals were either interviewed or included as members of focus groups. Individuals interviewed included the following people: the president, the CQI coordinator on campus, the chief academic officer, and the deans and some faculty of the business and engineering schools (if these schools existed at the institution). Business and engineering schools were identified because these are fields in which quality principles are frequently taught, and therefore these schools are likely to be implementing quality practices before other academic areas. Focus groups were made up of a mixture of quality champions, team leaders or facilitators, known critics of the quality initiatives, and any other people who would contribute to the discussion. People who resisted the implementation were specifically requested to be included in order to collect data more representative of the implementation

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process as a whole.

The themes that emerged in the second phase are reflected in a model that is illustrated in Figure 1 (Freed and Klugman, 1997). An analysis of the model (Figure 1) revealed that the role of leadership and institutional culture are woven throughout the model. Four primary patterns emerged in the model. First, leaders are responsible for developing a system for creating a quality culture. Second, the culture can be a barrier to overcome in implementing quality principles and practices. Third, a new culture is a significant outcome of CQI practices. Finally, interviewees stressed that changing the institutional culture is a requirement if CQI principles and practices are going to be long lasting.

The research questions in the second phase were designed to determine what worked and what did not work in implementation, what the hopes were and what the reality of CQI efforts had been, and why the institution was implementing quality principles. Since CQI is about continuous change, this paper examines the specific actions leaders take in demonstrating commitment that leads to cultural change.

Data Analysis

All interviews from individuals and focus groups were taped and transcribed. In addition to tapes, the interviewers took detailed notes during the interview sessions. The tapes were transcribed by a third party who has knowledge of quality principles and practices. The data collected on the site visits were analyzed using the constant comparative method for discovering theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). According to this method, the data are unitized; then the units are categorized; and finally the patterns and themes that emerged in the categories are determined (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This method was used for self-reported data and data

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collected from others (Patton, 1990). Similar to how Lincoln and Guba (1985) borrowed from

Glaser and Strauss (1967) to identify themes and categories, the data were analyzed as a way of

providing rich description of actual experiences rather than developing theory.

Results

An analysis of the model revealed several primary themes. First, continuous

improvement involves making continuous changes in order to improve. Second, overcoming the

challenge of change, in turn, involves creating a new institutional culture. Third, specific actions

and behaviors on the part of leaders are implemented for the purpose of creating a quality culture.

It is important to point out that creating a culture that supports quality principles and practices

does not mean disregarding the existing culture.

In fact, the leaders in this study value the historical culture, particularly the aspects that

have been successful for the institution and for the members. Interviewees stated they want the

culture to be respected even as attempts are made to change the culture. "Preserve the Best and

Improve the Rest" is a motto that reflects what was often heard throughout the interviews. One of

the presidents said that even as the leaders are trying to open up communication channels, utilize

teams, involve others, and improve systems, it is important to work within the culture in which

leaders find themselves. Respecting the past while improving the future requires an awareness

and level of sensitivity that is easy to overlook as leaders pursue continuous improvement efforts

and initiatives.

The difficulty of balancing a respect for the existing culture with the desire to create a

new culture provided the impetus for this study. Specifically *how* leaders are accomplishing this

is the question and examples were collected in order to answer this question. Some of the

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examples appear to be small and trivial, but ultimately smaller actions can make as significant an impact as major changes.

The primary themes that emerged are grouped under the categories of systems developed, main barriers encountered, outcomes of quality principles and practices, and lessons learned. The implementation of CQI is a change in the culture of the institution and the challenge of changing the culture is dependent on the commitment of institutional leaders.

Systems Developed

A system is a whole that cannot be divided into independent parts and then function (Ackoff, 1995). Its characteristics are that each part of the system affects behaviors and properties of the whole system, no part of the system has an independent effect on the whole system, and each subsystem affects the whole system. Systems thinking takes place when all actions are considered to be part of interactive and interdependent systems.

In analyzing the interview data, several systems emerged as a result of using continuous improvement principles and practices. Although the model identifies the development and implementation of nine systems, three systems emphasize specific actions and behaviors on the part of institutional leaders to change the institutional culture: understanding systems thinking, creating a quality culture, and improving communication. What follows is an explanation of each system, including examples of implementation.

Understanding Systems Thinking

The institutions in this study understand the concept of systems thinking and are working hard to shift the paradigm from acting and operating independently to thinking and working interdependently. Most interviewees stressed they promote this type of thinking so that decisions

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are consistently made considering how the outcome will influence other parts of the institution. One faculty member expressed it this way:

Because of continuous improvement efforts, I understand more about how interdependent we all are than in my first 25 years in the district. I work with people across this campus. Now I understand how the success of my class is directly related to so many different people on this campus. It is not just me on the center of that stage.

For faculty members, systems thinking means they understand that what they teach is related to what their fellow faculty members teach. Throughout the interviews, interviewees made statements that reflect they are thinking about how they can better serve departments when teaching support courses. The following story best illustrates how people are thinking about the interrelationships of what they do:

I taught the first-level theory course, and I was asked to teach the second level. Since I did not know what the third level required, I enrolled in the third-level course so that I would know how to teach the second level. I wanted to be a good supplier for the third-level instructor.

According to one administrator:

We are taking a systemic view so that we can measure and improve the system. We are identifying the major systems that operate in the university and developing measures so that improvements can be made.

These comments emphasize concepts that are not typical in most higher education institutions: interconnectedness, systems, measurements, and improvements. A pattern emerged that implied people are thinking differently about the work they do. They are asking different questions about interdependence and relationships.

Creating a Quality Culture

Changing a culture involves individuals to change. The senior leaders tend to be the key individuals who need to change because members are watching them for cues. Presidents shared

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stories about personal transformation which was influencing a culture change:

> *A quality culture is about aligning to a shared mission and vision. Once this takes place, the styles, skills, systems, and the strategies used are synchronized to help move the institution in a common direction. This is the culture you are trying to develop. The important point is that it is a process that is inside out. It involves a personal transformation.*

> *The facilitator told me I was the most independent person he knew. It took me two weeks to figure out that that statement was not a compliment.*

> *The only way you can make people believe in this, is to demonstrate that when a team makes a recommendation, that you do it. It does not sit on the shelf.*

One staff member related how quality practices have created a more accepting culture of

diversity:

> *As a black American in a predominately white institution, the respect for people concept of the quality movement is very important. We have rules of conduct posted at meetings such as no person is more important than any other and everybody has something to offer. We generate the rules at the meeting.*

As these comments suggest, CQI requires attitudes, behaviors, and actions that are often a

change from traditional management and leadership practices. Yet, when trying to change the

culture, leaders need to also show a respect for the existing culture. This study found that

important subsystems to creating a quality culture are hiring and retaining the best people,

involving and empowering members, and recognizing and rewarding members.

Hiring and retaining the best people.

When members view the institution as a system of interrelated parts, they understand the

importance of hiring a new person into the system. Each person hired has a chance to influence

the institutional culture, so every position takes on greater significance in the hiring process. The

following examples illustrate some of the changes in the hiring process:

> *We are careful in the hiring process. We go through a script about the vision, our two*

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emphases of academic excellence and continuous quality improvement. I try to impress upon candidates what we are trying to accomplish with quality.

We are working on a synopsis of what we mean by quality so that all candidates can read it over before they come for interviews. In the interviews they can react to it and tell us that what extent they are concerned about customer satisfaction. We ask to what degree they are interested in cross-functional relationships.

To support this theme, another pattern emerged of members leaving institutions because they did not feel comfortable in the new culture. Because some members felt the shift in culture toward teams, empowerment, and more "customer" focused and did not want to change their behaviors or thinking, they left. As one administrator stated, "If people do not have the incentive to be a part of the quality movement, that is not the problem. The problem is we have the wrong people."

Involving and empowering members.

Once institutions hire the most appropriate people for the positions, they want to keep them. The findings of this study revealed that members feel more involved and empowered since the institution has engaged in quality principles and practices. Interviewees expressed how they feel more ownership in the decisions being made. One member expressed it this way:

In an empowering culture, the role is to lead not to manage. People need to carve time out to be leaders. People will find time to do the things that are important because these things are job enhancing. The difference is that someone is not telling you to do it, but rather it becomes your responsibility.

A president stated a similar view:

Leaders are people you follow to places where you would not go yourself. I think you have to create a lot of leaders and in the process hopefully destroy some of the old images of control. When you begin to move from controlling to trying to influence the organization, you make it possible for many people to take on leadership roles.

It was common to hear interviewees saying things such as there is more participation in decision

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making, more people are willing to delegate to others, and there is a conscious attempt to listen to stakeholders.

Another example of involvement focused on empowering a team. At one institution, a cross-functional team from six offices was formed to solve a problem that emerged in a student survey. Students perceived that they were getting the "runaround" from various administrative offices on campus, and this perception was leading to major student dissatisfaction. A team of front-line people, no deans and no vice-presidents, was given the opportunity to study and to make recommendations to improve the situation. Based on their recommendation, a one-stop shopping experience was created for all students without adding personnel. As the president reported:

> *We were able to create leadership capacity in the people who work in the various offices and to promote them. This experience gave them a chance to grow and to learn. That is what needs to be done throughout the institution in order to build the capacity for leadership.*

While the norm in higher education is to form task forces or committees to study issues and to make recommendations, the findings in this study reveal that more of the time teams have authority to implement recommendations within financial constraints. Rather than waiting to see if anything changes as a result of recommendations, the teams in this study make changes in processes and systems that they believe will improve the situation. There is a shift from passive committees to active teams in continuous improvement.

Recognizing and rewarding members.

Having a system to recognize and reward members is important to encourage changes in behaviors and attitudes. This study found that this is the system with which most interviewees

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were ambivalent and discouraged with the progress made to date. Most interviewees indicated that they are still struggling with this system. A common reason given for the lack of progress was that rewards are not a norm in the culture of higher education, and therefore, institutions are inexperienced. Since most rewards in education are usually considered to be intrinsic, extrinsic rewards seem awkward.

A pattern did emerge of some institutions conducting focus groups and/or designing surveys to collect data from employees to determine what rewards would be valued rather than relying on assumptions. At one institution, the findings of the focus groups were communicated by e-mail for reactions from the rest of the institutional community. Yet, in another institution, everyone on the payroll was surveyed to determine what efforts should be rewarded and how theses efforts should be rewarded. Their findings revealed that rewards do not have to be monetary, but for a supervisor "to come to us and say thank you." Again, this reinforces the statement that in times of tight budgets, remembering to give some positive feedback and to recognize work well done is free and can be highly valued.

Examples of recognizing good work include hand written personal notes most often from senior leaders. As long as the note does not appear to resemble a form letter, people indicated that notes are meaningful. These actions and gestures are only perceived rewarding if they are also perceived as sincere. In other words, rewards must be systematically given in a culture of trust. Several interviewees mentioned that they perceive working for a charismatic, well-liked, and respected president rewarding. Since presidents set the tone for the culture, particularly in mid-size and smaller institutions, this finding is interesting and important.

Other institutions have developed a system of plaques awarded to individuals or teams

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who have made significant improvements in systems and processes. Sometimes there is a monetary award attached. For example, one institution established a system by which any member can nominate another member at any time for a quality improvement award. In this system, there are no losers, but only winners. Anyone who is nominated receives an award in the form of a plaque and icon at the department level. The department decides whether the name of the nominee will be forwarded to the president for college-level recognition. If the department recommends the nominee, the award is given. All award winners for the month participate in a drawing for a $50 gift certificate. Presidential coffee mugs are given by the president to people who have an outstanding accomplishment outside the standard criteria. Although this system is being continually improved, interviewees are feeling a sense of accomplishment for their CQI efforts.

Improving Communication

Communicating all system changes across the institution is the key to having members at all levels improve processes and therefore change the culture. This system involves improving how people interact with one another formally and informally so that the overall system of communication is more open and feedback is incorporated.

Several patterns emerged in this system: asking questions greatly affects the ability to communicate; systems are designed with the purpose of sharing information across all levels of the institution; several methods of communicating can be used; and people tend to cooperate rather than compete for information.

Asking questions.

Several themes emerged when interviewees were asked about language. One theme was

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that people continue to struggle with the language of the quality movement. TQM and CQI are two of the terms often used, but the data from this study suggests that it is important to avoid terms that are trendy or make quality improvement efforts appear as a fad. Even though it is important to help people learn a common language, it is important to overcome the language barrier:

> *I am convinced the word quality will go out of style just like the word excellence. The concepts of empowerment, of shared authority and responsibility, of using teams, of getting input from people closest to the process, of putting the customer first are concepts that are here to stay.*

The findings from this study revealed that institutions have worked hard at creating communication systems that integrate students, faculty, staff, and administrators as partners in improving the quality of education. Interviewees reported that implementing quality principles changes both how and what people communicate. The change usually revolves around asking different questions, which results in different conversations. After using quality principles and practices, people are changing their perspectives and looking at situations differently. This new mind-set is reflected in comments such as the following:

> *Quality means getting everybody to ask questions about how we do things, why we do things, and should we be doing different things.*

> *At research institutions everyone is asking questions. Quality means continuing to ask questions about things rather than relying on history or tradition.*

> *My approach to quality is to ask questions. What do you want to do to make it better around here? What are your ideas? Who do you want to participate? Why should they participate? With questions, you get out of TQM-speak or jargon. It is important to think about how to communicate with various audiences.*

Because members in this study have been trained about CQI, they are aware of the communication process. Therefore, they have high expectations and indicate that they become

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frustrated with ineffective communication. Since effective communication is two-way, continuous feedback is an important component of the system. Members, however, expressed willingness to give feedback only if they feel decision-makers are willing to listen. Several methods of communication are being used to encourage, cultivate, and nurture two-way communication among all members.

According to this study, some of the more common methods include campus forums, newsletters, e-mail, formal and informal gatherings, and surveys. Each method occurs on a regular and consistent basis so that people can rely on that method of communication. Each of these methods will be discussed.

Campus forums.

Campus forums are one way to keep quality initiatives alive and visible. One administrator explained the forum this way:

> In the first year we had an all-campus forum in which there was a panel that the chancellor chaired. Several of the deans were on that panel. This was a perfect opportunity for anyone to ask questions. That was an exceptional day for me to listen to our people, to interact with them ... We have the forums once a quarter, and people are curious about what is going on.

Although campus forums are a common practice in many institutions, what is different is the atmosphere of the event. Interviewees often described these events as having a theme and a party atmosphere. One respondent provided this description:

> We are starting to have two meetings each semester in which the whole university community is called together to hear what is going on. We are going to ballyhoo and recognize people who have done an outstanding job on quality.

Some other indirect benefits are reflected in this quotation:

> Out quality event put people who are hidden within the infrastructure of the university into the role of teachers. The whole university has the chance to recognize the quality

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work they are doing. We had positive publicity from the event. There were pictures in the paper of regents talking to custodial and information technology people.

As these statements illustrate, campus forums improve communication while highlighting the players behind the scenes. The forums were described as events that help build a sense of community.

Newsletters.

Many of the institutions in this study publish a newsletter that describes their quality improvement efforts. These newsletters are one way to develop a shared vision, to highlight quality efforts, and to share success stories. They also serve to continually educate all members about quality principles, practices, and tools.

The publication rate varies from weekly to monthly to quarterly, but the importance of the newsletters does not vary. Interviewees stressed how critical it is to have a system in place that consistently communicates the efforts being made to improve processes and systems. One respondent described the value of newsletters best:

> *We need an internal publication to keep everyone informed about what is happening on campus. We need someone to translate what is going on internally and to transport the information externally.*

E-mail.

E-mail is another mode of communication being used consistently at the institutions in this study as a way of encouraging anyone to talk to anyone else about anything. It was often reported that e-mail has helped to drive out fear because it facilitates communication across levels. It was also said to level the playing field because it flattens the organization by removing hierarchical barriers that often cause fear.

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A system that works well in one institution is a weekly report from the president. In this report, people are encouraged to ask questions of the president about whatever is on their minds. Every Monday on e-mail or by hard copy the president responds to every question asked that week. The questions can be asked anonymously, but as the system continues, the president said more people feel comfortable taking ownership and are not as concerned about anonymity. A general consensus among faculty, staff, and administrators was that the e-mail system of reporting has greatly controlled rumors that can negatively affect the institutional culture. Several people referred to the report as "the rumor control letter." The key to this system is that it happens every Monday and everyone hears the response to everyone else's question therefore, providing the same information to everyone. E-mail encourages more casual communication and links people together, which helps reinforce the concept of systems thinking.

Formal and informal gatherings.

Another way to open communication channels among members is through the use of formal and informal gatherings. Systematically getting members together in order to share information and to collect feedback on how processes and systems are working is an important part of the communication system.

The president at one of the institutions in this study invites members to breakfast so that senior leaders can collect informal data from people at various levels. Approximately 20 people are randomly selected for each breakfast for which there is no agenda. Usually the group is a mix of faculty and staff members, and administrators, and the intention is to maintain an informal atmosphere. It was described as a way to give administrators an opportunity to share success stories, to ask and answer questions, and to control rumors.

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At another institution, the president hosts a tea. Everyone eventually will be invited and each group consists of a mixture of members from various levels within the institution. It was stated that the tea has three governing principles: 1) to say thank you for work well done (at the tea, everyone is given a small gift by the president); 2) to define reality: vision, mission, and values; and 3) to discuss current questions in the system. In addition, the president wants to collect data. Before the tea, people are asked to complete a card with two questions. For example, questions have included: How does my job impact retention? What is the best thing going at this institution?

Regardless of the means of getting people together, the goals remain the same. Having a system of regular gatherings encourages members to openly communicate and interact which helps contribute to a culture of trust and support. These gatherings also create a sense that everyone is one the same team working for the same goals.

Surveys.

Another critical component of the communication system is the use of surveys to collect data for decision making. Surveys are being used to collect feedback on a regular basis so members feel they have consistent input into the system. Institutions need to monitor the expectations of stakeholders to determine their level of satisfaction and surveys are one of the best ways to do this.

In the institutions studied, they not only understand the value of collecting data, but they also realize the importance of telling members what they "heard" from the data. Completing the feedback loop is the key to opening up communication channels.

The communication methods most often being used emphasize vertical communication

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so that members feel comfortable communicating. Campus forums, newsletters, Email, formal

and informal gatherings, and surveys are being used on a regular basis to encourage a more open

environment for communication. Members are asking different questions which influences the

data collected or information received in the communication process.

Barriers and Overcoming Barriers

A section of interview questions in the second phase addressed obstacles to CQI efforts.

Members of the administration, faculty, and staff were asked about the specific barriers to

implementation and the general barriers over the course of their quality efforts. The responses

helped to determine the progress institutions have made in implementing CQI. Interestingly, the

findings revealed that the barriers almost mirror the systems being developed. When the system

is initially being developed or is not as strong as interviewees would like, problems within the

systems to enact quality initiatives become barriers themselves. Themes that emerged included:

involving and empowering members, recognizing and rewarding members, driving out fear and

creating trust, and communicating within the institution.

Involving and Empowering Members

Involving members appears to be an easier concept to understand and to implement than

empowerment. The paradox of empowerment is that "empowerment means letting go while

taking control" (Baker, 1994, p. 62). It was common to hear interviewees say, "They don't seem

to be able to let go." One of the college presidents who has studied extensively about how

quality improvement affects the human side of the institution explained the concept of

empowerment and the complexities involved in empowering others:

> *Empowerment means authority equal to responsibility in the organization. There are*
> *decisions that people at various levels can make based on their authority. As a college*

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president, there are things that I am held responsible for, therefore the authority rests with me. Employees confused wanting suggestions and input with implementing them. They felt they were not empowered. They need to understand there is a difference between the opportunity to give your input, which we welcome at all times, and always having your opinion be the prevailing opinion. We have had to refine some of our authority because we were on the edge of chaos.

The president continued:

We got carried away and caught up with the concept of empowerment and we thought that we could declare overnight that employees were empowered. The truth is, not everyone wants it. There are a number of things that have to be in place in the organization in order to have empowerment: driving out fear, being sure people have information and development necessary to be empowered, understanding the boundaries that accompany empowerment. This was our mistake early in our efforts.

We have addressed some of these misunderstandings in our internal newsletter. Our goal is to push decision making and responsibility down to the lowest level, and sometimes the lowest level is the college president.

It became clear from the findings that involving others does not mean giving people free rein to make decisions, but it does mean outlining the constraints so that acceptable decisions can be made. Members need to have a similar understanding of empowerment and boundaries. Through continual education, people can learn when it is appropriate to make decisions.

Recognizing and Rewarding Members

A theme emerged that there are major barriers in recognizing and rewarding members. There was even a theme of no incentives offered. Another pattern found members highly skeptical of any incentive, reward, or recognition. This pattern reinforces the significance of developing a culture of trust. When people do not trust the leadership, the reward system is not perceived as effective.

Quality improvements are often made as a result of people working together and rewarding them in meaningful ways is a challenge. When talking about rewards, one president

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responded with the following example:

> *The district has awards for outstanding innovator, teacher, manager, and support staff person ... We decided that their system was inconsistent with what we were doing, but we did not want to boycott their process. So we nominated the entire college for innovator, all faculty members for teacher, all administrators for manager, and the entire support staff for support staff person. We had a lottery and we selected someone from each of the groups to receive the awards. We wanted to participate, but on our own terms. This example indicates that we operate in a different paradigm.*
>
> *Another year, we selected an outstanding team of trainers, faculty, administrators, and support staff, and they became our outstanding people. Now the district has moved from innovator of the year to innovation of the year to recognize that teams can innovate. The district has a team studying rewards and recognition.*

When the focus remains on how to keep the improvement efforts visible, then it appears to be easier to address issues of rewards and recognition. One campus noted for its excellent horticulture program plants trees in the names of people who are outstanding employees. One interviewee stated that this system is a life-affirming way to recognize people at all levels. At another institution, there is a quality improvement wall where photos of teams and their charges are displayed for all to see. Several commented that the wall attracts attention from visitors and prospective students, which often leads to conversations about quality improvement efforts on campus.

Driving Out Fear and Creating Trust

The presence of fear in the culture inhibits continuous improvement. Deming's eighth point in his Fourteen Points as explained in *Out of the Crisis* (1986) is Drive Out Fear. Driving out fear is critical to creating a culture that supports continuous improvement because it is like a cancer that destroys an institution's long-term growth and viability. Fear inhibits the implementation of quality principles and practices.

Fear manifests itself in many different forms: fear of the leadership, fear of retribution,

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fear of speaking out against those in power, fear of losing jobs, and fear of continuous improvement. Basically, people fear change. There is a perception that continuous improvement is another way of saying downsizing or layoffs. In the minds of some interviewees, quality improvement translates into fewer jobs for fewer people so that the system works more efficiently. It is difficult to argue with these fears when institutions restructure and jobs are eliminated.

The challenge becomes how to help members embrace change and this is being most often accomplished through continual education and development. It became clear that when members understand that CQI does not automatically mean members will lose jobs, then fear diminishes. One pattern that emerged reflects the correlation between trust in leaders and fear in the culture. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that when members trust senior leaders, less fear exists because they trust the motives of the decisions made. But the institutions in this study commented that there is still much work to be done in this area. Developing trust was said to be the hardest part about changing the institutional culture. Lack of trust is a major barrier to continuous improvement efforts.

To overcome this barrier, members need to understand quality improvement so they realize *why* certain decisions are made. Additional education combined with a system to continually communicate quality improvement successes helps to diminish fears. Encouraging people to openly discuss their fears in hopes that changes can be made to improve the situation is another way institutions are trying to drive out fear.

The most specific example of overcoming this barrier was the Drive Out Fear Day by one of the institutions in this study. Their objective was to "discuss the undiscussables." According

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to the president:

> We identified fears through an anonymous survey of employees ... We had an all-college
> meeting with a consultant. He conducted a seminar on what fear is, what it looks like,
> what the symptoms are, and the damage that it causes. We divided into small groups and
> we gave the different fears on which to do cause-and-effect diagrams. The steering team
> reduced most of the fears and summarized them as, "I may not be able to do a good job
> and there is too much work to do, how can we get it all done" (i.e. copier is always
> broken, people stand and talk around my desk, not enough computers). We analyzed the
> results, and we conducted staff development seminars on the giving and receiving of
> feedback so employees know how to talk to one another. We studied the repair record of
> the copier and ended up putting a sign that says "This machine functions properly 95
> percent of the time" to counteract the perception that it is always broken.

When the president was asked how the day could have been improved, this leader replied:

> Even though I feel like I would not do it again, I talk about it in presentations and people
> are amazed. But we need to talk about trust and not fear. We need to discuss the
> "undiscussables" or the things that are going on in the organization that people are
> afraid to talk about because of fear of repercussions. The consultant encourages people
> to talk openly about the things that are discussed around the water fountain. He
> contends that as long as there is fear in the organization, it will be difficult to have
> creativity, innovation, teamwork, and empowerment. If the undiscussables continue, they
> become a part of the culture, and they give people a sense of helplessness ... My goal is
> to drive out fear, not drive out standards.

Numerous interviewees at this institution confirmed that even though Drive Out Fear Day was

stressful for everyone, it was healthy and they appreciated the opportunity to be open and honest

with members of the administration. Reflecting on this day, a faculty member commented:

> We filled the flip charts with fears. The president was visibly shaken. A few years ago,
> people would not have said anything. Now they have gotten past that and they feel free to
> say what they think. We have changed from a hidden fear to a culture that is more
> positive and open. As people talk about fears, many are being resolved.

Trying to decrease fear as a part of the institutional culture is a strong theme that

emerged. Comments from other interviewees at other institution in this study also indicated that

they recognize the detrimental aspect of fear and they continue to work on developing a culture

where people feel comfortable making improvements. As one of the other presidents pointed

out:

> *As president, I have talked about helping people reflect on their work. That is a more acceptable term in higher education. Quality is about making public your private assumptions and testing them. It is about making your fears public. We are focused on driving out fear.*

According to one interviewee, "Leaders need to change their behaviors for people to lose

their fear." In the transition to creating a culture free from fear, management beliefs and attitudes

must be supported by management practices and reinforced by systems within the institution.

Communicating

The main communication barriers mentioned were a lack of sincere listening, a lack of

trust among members, a need for better methods to communicate about continuous improvement,

and use of authoritarian language. These elements damage the institutional culture and inhibit

continuous improvement; people do not feel comfortable making suggestions and improving

processes. When fear permeates the workplace, quality improvement efforts are thwarted:

> *We are learning to listen, but it is not an easy thing. We need to observe and listen. Administrators need to practice what they preach. They need to continue to have an open door policy, even if it is painful.*

> *Dissenting opinions need to be allowed, otherwise resentment and frustration occur.*

Language continues to be a challenge. To overcome this barrier, some institutions have made a

conscious effort *not* to use the term total quality management or TQM:

> *We don't spend any time talking about TQM. We spend a lot of time talking about continuous improvement and how to improve. We talk about how to use our skills and abilities to continuously improve.*

> *I will go a whole day without saying the word "quality." You do not need to say it if you are doing it. You need to make sure that you are asking the fundamental questions that are at the core of quality. What are the indicators of success? Use the tools to answer*

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the core questions.

Yet another administrator said:

> *I am not calling it anything. I think it is a way of thinking. People will call me and ask me how I have time to practice quality. They do not feel they have time for team meetings. I ask them if they have meetings, and the answer is always yes. Then I tell them that the quality principles are a new way to have meetings. It is a whole other way of thinking or another way to manage the work that is done. It is more efficient, it is going to save time in the long run, and it is probably going to save money. I do not think it has to be called anything.*

The word "customer" is another language barrier for most of the institutions in this study. These findings corroborated this hurdle frequently mentioned in the literature (Seymour and Collett, 1991). This hurdle hinders momentum of quality initiatives on campus. Usually the resistance comes most from faculty members who have the attitude of "Who are they to tell us" or as one faculty member stated, "The inmates are running the asylum." To view students as customers, faculty need to shift their thinking so that the focus is on learning rather than teaching. The following example illustrates this barrier and how to overcome it:

> *The college of arts and sciences faculty got together and voted something like 47 to 1 against the idea of viewing students as customers. And the president said, "I don't care what you call it. As long as you realize that if they are not here, we are not here." Now we often talk about those we serve. We emphasize that in higher education viewing the student as customer does not mean that the customer is always right.*

Language is so important because as people begin to communicate differently, they start to behave differently. Using different language changes actions and behaviors because it is a reflection of changed thinking.

Outcomes of Implementation

Eight distinct themes (Refer to Freed and Klugman, 1997) emerged as positive outcomes

of using quality principles and practices and many of these same outcomes were found in a national survey as well (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1994). Three of the eight outcomes are significant to the research question for this paper: more collegial leadership style, improved communication, and new institutional culture. Leaders create change and set the direction in which the institution moves. Interviewees expressed that people were communicating differently with one another since engaging in quality improvement initiatives. They also stressed that there has been an overall culture change within the institution.

Since culture is the "invisible tapestry" that weaves all of the principles together, it is the critical outcome. Quality principles and practices are a culture change for higher education since these institutions have a long history of traditions and tend to prefer the status quo. Changing the culture can produce conflict because old habits, ideas, behaviors, and practices rarely change without some irritation. These conflicts should be perceived positively because they indicate the organization is changing and hopefully improving. Throughout the interviews, it was emphasized that resistance to change can be decreased if members understand *how* the changes will increase the effectiveness of the institution and *how* the changes will lead to greater job security and more meaningful work.

The findings in this study reveal that it takes years for leaders to build the trust that is necessary to adopt quality principles and practices. The change required an intentional and intensive commitment on the part of the leaders.

More Collegial Leadership Style

The presidents of the institutions in this study were described by their colleagues as collaborative, persistent, visionary, and caring. When interviewees were asked about the

presidential leadership style before CQI, the styles were mostly described as authoritarian and

more controlling. As stated by one administrator:

> *The past president was much more autocratic than now. Our current president's style is conducive to quality improvement, to the sharing of information. We began to feel empowered immediately. People felt they could have a hand in shaping the future of the institution.*

As a result of persons in positions practicing continuous improvement, staff members are made

to feel they are significant members of the institution:

> *Our institution previously was very autocratic, especially in reference to how staff members were treated. We have been trying to build trust; we have staff meetings every month. People now feel they have some power and a lot of success.*

The findings of this study indicate that leadership at all levels has improved as a result of

using quality principles and practices. Leadership is critical to implementation because leaders are

important drivers in the quality improvement efforts; they set the tone in a culture and are able to

promote changed practices and behaviors. All of the other outcomes discovered in this study are

dependent on effective leadership at all levels.

Improved Communication

According to the literature, a quality culture is one in which there is open and honest

communication based on a climate of mutual trust, respect, and support (Freed, Klugman, and

Fife, 1997). Members in this study stated how they expect information to be readily available.

There is an intentional sharing of information rather than hiding it. Two faculty members

related the following examples:

> *Communication is better. In the past, we were given no justification for things that were done. It may not be perfect now, but there's a 200 percent improvement over the last seven or eight years.*

> *The budget used to be a very closed process and now that is different. You didn't really*

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know what any other area had and now you can find out.

As part of learning how to communicate more effectively, most of the institutions in this study teach members how to conduct effective meetings. Several interviewees said that meetings are more focused, more efficient, more productive, and more positive since CQI efforts. Participation is greater and meetings start and stop on time. Since members spend time in team meetings, this outcome is important in the communication system.

New Institutional Culture

This study found that as people became more familiar with quality principles and practices and more comfortable with philosophy of continuous improvement, the culture changed. People began to take CQI efforts for granted. Several administrators and presidents pointed out that their institutions are at this stage in the quality journey:

> *The quality improvement process is becoming transparent; we can't see it because the people are using it.*

> *Quality is becoming a way of life.*

> *We take for granted the progress, but we do things differently.*

> *We are forever significantly changed. At least the people who are here will never be able to do what they do without being affected by this.*

The data revealed that people are thinking differently, acting differently, and therefore feeling differently about the institution. Across institutions of all types, intentionally practicing quality principles and practices positively influences the culture. Although it is not an easy task, leaders are understanding that it is not what they say but what they do that sets the model and tone for people to follow. One administrator said it best, "Quality is making change happen."

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<u>Lessons Learned</u>

If an institution is serious about its quality improvement efforts, it continuously learns

from its successes and from its mistakes. In the interviews, it was clear that people constantly

reflect upon what is working and what is not working because of their continuous improvement

mind-set. While the responses varied from institution to institution and from person to person

within the institutions, several themes emerged in the data. These themes became 12 lessons

learned (Freed and Klugman, 1997), lessons that should be kept in mind by any institution

implementing quality principles or contemplating doing so. The most poignant themes emerged

as:

- An Effective Communication System is Necessary

- Institutional Culture Must Change

- Quality Culture Leadership Must Change

An Effective Communication System is Necessary

An open communication system that is fueled by feedback is essential to keep people

informed and interested in making continuous improvements. The ideas and concepts not only

need to be explained and discussed, but the results of the implementation also have to be shared

with people at all levels to maintain the momentum. As one administrator stated:

> *We need to work on communicating our achievements. We need to communicate to
> people how the teams are using quality practices effectively. We need to let the
> institution know about the improvement successes. People need to be reminded to keep
> the momentum going. There is a tendency to revert back to old habits.*

Institutional Culture Must Change

Engaging in quality principles and practices is a culture change for higher education

institutions. Examples of this culture change include shifting from a product focus to a market focus, from administrators who direct employees to leaders who involve them, from a belief that knowledge is power to an understanding that open and honest communication is the basis of an institution committed to CQI, and from individuals who only "talk the talk" to leaders who "walk the walk." One conclusion from this study is that if the culture does not change, the institution is not truly dedicated to continuous improvement. A pattern in the responses indicated that if quality principles and practices are not woven into the institutional culture, it will not last. One interviewee expressed it this way:

> *Senior leaders come and go so unless you get continuous improvement into your culture, It will blow away.*

Leadership is Critical in Changing Culture

The findings in this study consistently emphasized the critical role of senior leaders in changing the culture. Leadership is needed throughout the implementation of CQI. This study found that the most successful quality initiatives have senior leaders who prepare their institutions for change. They have often undergone a personal transformation that enables them to empower, to involve, and to recognize the efforts of others. Their role in sustaining a culture of quality improvement is essential. As stated by one president:

> *I am an advocate of Stephen Covey's principles because they link personal behavior with the organization ... The fundamental principle at the personal level is trustworthiness. I thought it was only character and then I found out that it is confidence as well. I thought that empowerment was given. It's not; it comes from within. If you have the right kind of environment, you will have empowerment. Then you have the concept of alignment. I carry a compass with me to remind me of my moral compass. I don't govern my life by a calendar or a watch, but by my moral compass.*

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Conclusions

Edgar Schein (1985), one of the authorities on corporate culture, identifies five primary mechanisms to develop and reinforce the desired corporate culture:

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control.

- Leaders' reaction to critical incidents and organizational crisis.

- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching.

- Criteria for allocation of rewards and status.

- Criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, and retirement of employees (pp. 223-43).

Schein (1985) concludes that leaders need to take calculated and overt steps to encourage the establishment and maintenance of the desired institutional culture. This study discovered that when leaders practice what they preach, others watch and follow their examples. Establishing systems to reward and recognize members, encouraging the interaction and involvement of administrators, faculty, and staff, and cultivating a climate of trust are several ways to promote a change in culture.

Speaking from experience, Dean Hubbard the president of Northwest Missouri State University, said in 1987, "I believed that we'd never begin to continuously improve quality until we had a major cultural change." (Marchese, 1994, p. 9). Hubbard describes how he started the quality conversation at his institution with a question, not a program. He remembers always getting hung up on some problem and it struck him that the common thread across all of the problems was that they did not have what he has come to call a "culture of quality." He proceeded to write a letter to the faculty asking them one question, "What are the changes we

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need that would create a "culture of quality" on this campus?" (p. 9).

Since continuous improvement is all about continuous change, the key is to create a culture where members feel comfortable with change. At the institutions further along in the quality improvement journey, members expressed feeling comfortable with change. One administrator exclaimed, "We eat change for breakfast. We love to make improvements." The role of leaders should be to create a work environment in which change is recognized as necessary and beneficial so individuals can adapt to change more easily.

The institutions in this study, for the most part, have shifted their thinking. This in turn has changed their behaviors. They understand systems thinking, have developed new systems, and have improved existing systems. Institutions are consciously aware of the interconnections and interdependency of systems and people within the system.

These institutions have developed systems that encourage and promote openness, which usually is a culture change. According to one administrator, "We have people practicing continuous improvement, and they do not even know it." Statements such as this indicate that CQI has become a part of the "invisible tapestry."

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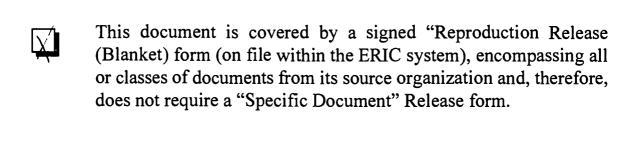
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