

The IRSC Way: Better, More Efficient and Customer Friendly

**Barry Keim, Vice President, Administration and Finance
Indian River State College**

**Shelia Daniels, Associate Dean, Human Resources
Indian River State College**

Abstract

Indian River State College operates on the basis of collaborative partnerships, team work and an open forum of creative freedom to address its continual endeavor toward excellence. This philosophy has proven successful in the development of numerous “better, more efficient, and customer friendly business practices.”

Better, more efficient and customer friendly sums up the focus of Human Resources at this institution. Over the past few years of ongoing budget cuts resulting in the spiral down of limited institutional resources, this department has not lost sight of the College Mission, the diverse Customers served, nor its own Role as a Strategic Partner.

The College has made notable strides with the following:

- *Connecting the individual--the individual job, performance, and accountability--to the success of Institutional Goals and Objectives;*
- *Thinking out of the box to improve recruiting processes and efficiencies;*
- *Increasing customer service and accessibility with fewer resources.*

As the College drilled down accountability to become an institution-wide commitment across all job classes, the concept was rolled into an overhaul already in progress of both Administrative and Staff Performance Evaluations. The project embraced marrying employee value with strategic accountability.

Internal recruiting processes underwent an improved, yet inexpensive, means of distributing application materials to screening committees. The changes allowed for much quicker turn around in information sharing and selections. Community outreach for needed applicants was a cross disciplinary and cross departmental partnership that increased applicant flow through off-campus access and education.

Customer service endeavors targeted both internal and external customers of Human Resources. The first objective was to lessen potential gaps in available HR service through a staff buddy system, cross training and job rotations within the department. Eventually, weekly extended office hours evolved to enhance service, complimented by HR staff coverage for extended hours at all campuses during peak periods of the year. The extended hours and availability at the various campuses largely benefited the adjunct applicant pools.

Introduction of the Organization

Just a few months ago, Indian River State College (IRSC) was known as Indian River Community College (IRCC). The college was founded and is seated in Ft. Pierce, Florida with four other campuses and numerous facilities and centers located throughout the neighboring counties. During the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately 38,000 students were served and the college employed roughly 2,000 full and part time instructional and non-instructional personnel.

While maintaining the institution's original commitment to the community needs of St. Lucie, Indian River, Martin, and Okeechobee counties, Indian River State College offers technical programs, A.S. and A.A. degrees, and recently began offering B.S. and B.A. degrees in critical needs areas and emerging technologies. The Bachelor degrees debuted in the Spring '08 semester, with over 500 applicants for the programs. By the Fall '08 semester, applications for the Bachelor programs had grown to over 800.

IRSC has enjoyed national recognition in several areas, including but not limited to Institutional Technology, the Educator Preparation Institute and the Human Resources Department. The college, as IRCC, was also the recipient of one of the 2006 MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Awards. The institution continues to grow each year in enrollments, programs and educational and/or community partnerships. Our educational partnerships throughout the State of Florida include a joint use campus with Florida Atlantic University, and a Center for Medical Education partnered with Florida State University. Additionally, the institution seeks and continues to forge valuable partnerships with prestigious research companies moving into the Treasure Coast of Florida from other areas of the United States. As a

result of these wonderful opportunities and successes, physical plant and personnel needs have experienced tremendously fast growth, with projections that continue the expansion over the next several years.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

The initiatives were all about efficiencies and service keeping pace with a wave of fantastic change that was occurring within the institution during an increasingly limited dollar

environment. The employee and staff performance evaluation tools no longer seemed to satisfy institutional purposes. They served a means, but not the desired end, in supporting a particular component of the college mission to foster professional and personal development of the institution's human resources. Additionally, internal and external environments were increasing the need to reinforce individual job value, contribution and accountability as having an impact on institutional level goals and objectives. The employee evaluation tools needed to more adequately address the spectrum of employee development and accountabilities together.

A natural by-product of taking a more holistic look at interaction with employees was to critique the services provided back to them. The initiative, design, implementation and execution of several strategies around service were embraced by the Vice President of Administration and Finance in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources. Their focus embraced service to active Faculty, Staff and Administration, as well as the myriad of job applicants.

Design

The initiative to revise administrator and staff performance appraisals was begun by identifying a task team for the project. The task team, lead by Human Resources, was comprised of a cross section of administrators and staff. The team represented Vice Presidents, mid-level Administrators, staff supervisors, staff employees and Human Resource representatives to

facilitate. The participants also represented a cross section of Academic and non-Academic areas.

The implementation included elevating the process to an on-line accessible template for improved efficiency and ease in completion by the evaluators. The end product resulted in a paradigm shift, replacing the previous numeric based evaluations with a format of simple performance rankings around levels of “meeting expectations.” Expanding narrative boxes for each criteria of performance allowed for brief critiques focused on growth and developmental feedback. The new format devoted sections to immediate and long term individually based performance plans; individually considered professional development plans; and discussion of individual job functions that support the college mission.

Similar to the improvement of a computer based performance evaluation, Human Resources mirrored the concept of electronic ease in the recruiting arena. The objective was to simplify the reviewing of recruiting pools by hiring committees. While the college undertook the beginning stages of the cost benefit analysis of purchasing off the shelf programs, as opposed to developing an in-house automated recruiting system, a stop gap measure for increased efficiencies became an expanded use of scanning, combined with e-mail delivery of applications. The measure demonstrated creative and successful use of existing tools.

Community focused recruiting was an added service that paid off with better educated applicants regarding requirements of accreditation for instructional positions, as well as what to expect with the Indian River recruiting processes as a whole. The effort included partnerships again between

academic deans and the human resources department during which community based information sessions were made available to the public in each county.

The last leg of the customer friendly and efficiency based changes undertaken was to better serve the entire HR customer base of Indian River State College. Through ongoing cross training, a job buddy system and job rotations within the Human Resources Department, service capability was increased. Success was evidenced across several HR functionalities where back-ups for service needs could readily be found when “key owners” might be otherwise occupied or off site. Actual job rotations shift primary ownership of functionalities, offer support by a back-up buddy, and allow progression of depth and growth in HR expertise. With the beginning of the fall semester, '08-'09, the department added one more dimension with extended office hours during registration weeks and by appointment through the remainder of the year.

Implementation

Implementation of new performance evaluations began with campus wide communications sent by the Vice President of Administration and Finance to advise the college community of the undertaking. Once the documents were drafted by the task team, the President and the President's Cabinet reviewed the documents and provided input. Agreement of a final set of respective evaluations for administrators and staff led to the conversion process of the paper form to a computer based electronic form. A single department was selected to pilot the program before official launch. Training sessions followed for administrators and line supervisors to

introduce the instrument/s and theory around proper completion and interaction with the employee. Further training was made available for the on-line completion process. It was decided that managers would introduce and educate staff to the new form and process during their first evaluation meeting under the revised methodology.

Scanning and e-mail of received job applications to hiring teams was first tested within the HR department and then again piloted with a single department undergoing a recruiting effort. Once the loops were proven to work, and feedback proved enthusiastically positive, additional departments were introduced to receiving e-mail applications that could be saved in departmental folders for reference at any time.

Community based service around employment, processes and credentialing education was also an effort partnered with several departments. Institutional Advancement and the college radio station, WQCS, worked on the public service announcements regarding the information sessions. IRSC campus provosts across all four counties hosted and were present at the events. Academic areas provided representatives to do active recruiting during each session, while the Human Resources Department staff conducted the “how to and what to expect” presentations and made application documents available. The presentations of information focused on the credentialing procedures, timeline estimates and other applicant processing requirements of the institution, such as finger printing.

The goal of less interrupted service within the realm of Human Resource delivery areas was addressed through a buddy-system of cross training. It was approached as a long term

commitment, which has been in progress at IRSC for approximately five years, is still ongoing and, to remain effective, will likely not end. It requires a matching of staff, skills and interests to begin soundly. Once basic interest areas are matched and cross trained, some “stretch” for the staff beyond usual comfort levels can be implemented in future rotations and buddy re-matches. Jobs are assigned as “primary” to an individual with a counterpart matched to them with a different “primary” job, while both are challenged to train each other on their respective duties and responsibilities. It requires patience, time and positive reinforcement. It requires acknowledgements and celebration of successes.

Once greater service versatility was achieved, partially extended hours was simply a needs based extension of service, when and wherever it was identified. IRSC recognized the need largely as one to better serve both the current and applicant adjunct populations. The extended hours was clearly a service that increased access for those with full time jobs elsewhere that hindered abilities to visit the college HR department when needed.

Reassessments continue on all fronts, as each project evolves and naturally leads to another idea and the next level; as needs for adjustments are identified; as new things become available and affordable “out there” to move us forward; and as better best practices are realized from our institutional collaborations.

Benefits

The benefits gained from the best practices outlined here have been notable across the board. Efficiencies have been accomplished; recruiting expedited; improvements with little to no additional dollars spent have been created through partnerships and creativity; employee morale has been positively touched through greater service efforts that meet their needs more readily; employee senses of value and contribution to the institutional goals, objectives and successes have been enhanced; employees became dynamic, dimensional individuals again in an evaluation process and not simply a summarized cumulative number; innovative forward progress was maintained while system priorities changed in response to budgets and a vastly changing institution and environment.

The budgetary bottom line has been benefited through electronic processing that didn't exist previously; time and tremendous amounts of paper saved for Human Resources by no longer laboriously copying and later shredding applications and attending documents for hiring committees; time saved for administration and supervisors in completing forms and no longer receiving and reviewing paper by hard copy. Technology was creatively harnessed and both direct and indirect costs were saved.

For Indian River State College, the best practices outlined here simply and effectively worked and "better, more efficient and customer friendly" is "the IRSC way."

Retrospect

In retrospect, the roll out of performance evaluation changes is the project where we identified a beneficial change would have been a modified approach to the users. The paradigm shift was very different from the college history and introducing the new direction being taking at the earlier conceptual levels would be something to be added for future projects. Sharing the underlying philosophy and setting the stage, with updates to managers and employees during the design period, would have presented a stronger foundation for the final roll out and training sessions. The audience would have known what to expect and why it was being done sooner to give them time to digest the paradigm shift from quantitative to qualitative evaluations. They

would have assimilated the links being spotlighted between development, accountability, performance and mission sooner, before having to undertake the technical training.

Also in retrospect, we would have included the pilot groups for both evaluations and scanned and e-mailed job applications as active participants in the training delivery. Their insights and experiences in the test phases could have been of great value to share with, and in preparing, the user populations being trained. These pilot departments were a potential training resource and support for their colleagues that were overlooked as a formal ingredient of the implementations at the time, but will definitely be included in future post-pilot training situations.