

# Personal Dashboards: A Cutting Edge Faculty Performance Evaluation System

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## ABSTRACT

*Northwest Missouri State University, a two-time winner of the Missouri Quality Award and two-time finalist for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, has a long history of quality in higher education. Dr. Dean Hubbard, university President for the last 20 years, has pioneered the quality movement in higher education. Northwest's Seven-Step Planning Process has become a benchmark process that many other institutions have mimicked through the years. Quality is truly the guiding force for our institution. Many years ago, President Hubbard and his staff brainstormed the most important indicators of quality at the institutional level. These indicators are continuously monitored and revised through a data management device that became known as the University's "Dashboard" system, not dissimilar in concept to the dashboard of indicators one can find in any automobile or aircraft. We have taken this institutional approach of driving and managing quality, and applied it to individual faculty performance measurement. We have developed a series of job performance indicators designed to help faculty continuously improve their own performance, and to help administrators monitor, track and reward high-achievers, and motivate those in need of assistance.*

## INTRODUCTION

*N*orthwest Missouri State University (Northwest) is clearly an academic institution on the cutting edge of quality systems research and implementation. Northwest has enjoyed tremendous success in these areas, recently winning its second Missouri Quality Award in five years, the soonest the institution was eligible after winning a first. In addition to being honored at the state level, in the fall of 2004 Northwest enjoyed its second consecutive site visit as a finalist for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, truly a significant accomplishment.

What the examiners seemed to be most interested in is Northwest's predisposition toward institutional continuous improvement. The practice, which permeates the academic culture, inspired us to seek a potential method to better reflect and evaluate faculty on-the-job performance.

For 20 years, our University President, Dr. Dean L. Hubbard, has been a champion of quality practices, and outcomes-based performance measurement. He pioneered a system of institutional performance tracking that came to be known as the University's "Dashboard" system. Much like the indicator panel in a modern automobile helps a driver navigate uncertain terrain and monitor crucial vehicle functions, the University Dashboard enables Northwest administration to successfully accomplish a similar result with regard to organizational performance.

The University Dashboard tracks primarily quantitative trend data, allowing administrators, faculty, staff and our stakeholders to make immediate process adjustments based on real-time data. The University Dashboard consists of over 100 individual performance indicators. Below you will find the six general categorical examples of the type of actionable data that are tracked and the number of quantitative indicators associated with each.

- Student Learning Results (18 indicators)
- Student and Stakeholder Focused Results (27 indicators)
- Budgetary, Financial and Market Results (13 indicators)
- Faculty and Staff Results (18 indicators)
- Organizational Effectiveness Results (18 indicators)
- Governance and Social Responsibility Results (9 indicators)

In addition to the rudder the University Dashboard provides the institution, we also have institutional, faculty and staff performance evaluations, but as of yet, the institution has not taken the Dashboard system and applied this methodology to individual performance evaluation. We believe this can happen, and this is what we are attempting to develop and accomplish in our applied research.

### **THE SEVEN-STEP PLANNING PROCESS**

Via the Culture of Quality program at Northwest, changes in operational or programmatic items must be guided by a procedure known as the Seven-Step Planning Process (SSPP). This stakeholder driven decision-making process has proved highly successful for the institution at all levels.

The SSPP is a circular process involving systematic and precise phases as decisions are analyzed, executed, and evaluated. At the center of this circle lie our four key decisions drivers: student success; student, faculty and staff satisfaction; financial performance; and enrollment. While not every organizational initiative affects all of these decision drivers, most affect at least one of them.

Through the SSPP, we are developing a system of individual faculty performance evaluation that we have named Personal Dashboards. The concept is very similar to the University Dashboard, but at the faculty performance level, rather than the University unit level.

### **PERSONAL DASHBOARDS-OVERVIEW**

Northwest uses a four category system of faculty performance for evaluation: teaching, research, student support, and service. With certain guidelines and parameters, individual faculty members are allowed to select the relative weighting of each category. Given the teaching mission of our institution, most faculty choose from 40% to 70% in teaching, with a requirement that each remaining category be weighted at least 10%.

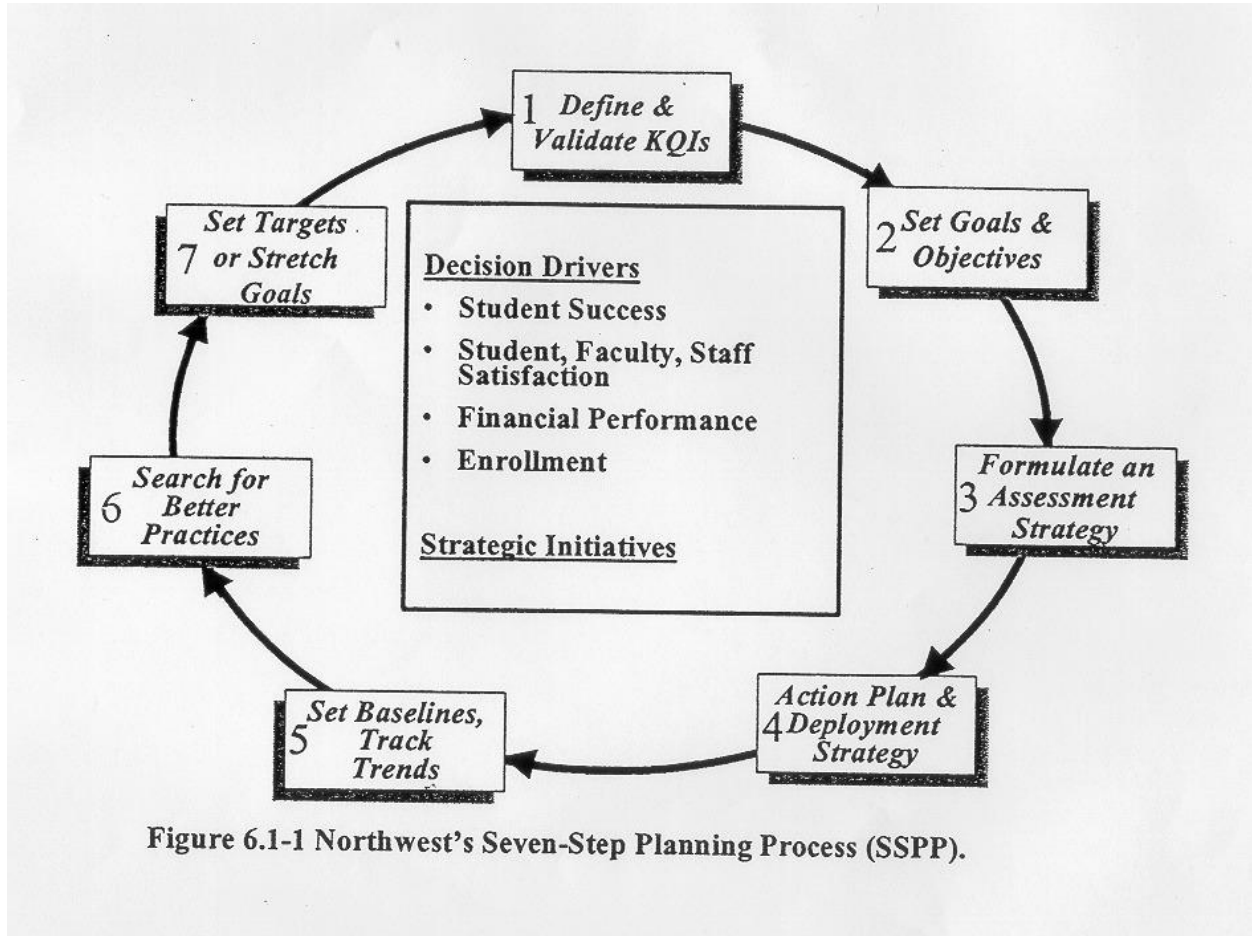
While most faculty and administrators understand what activities should “count” in each of the four categories, identifying opportunities for improvement and tracking progress can be quite challenging. We felt that by establishing a dashboard system of quantifiable indicators, chairs and administrators would have a more accurate way to monitor and help develop personnel, especially faculty in regard to tenure and promotion decisions.

### **PERSONAL DASHBOARDS-TEACHING**

With a focus on quantifiable measurements, we have proposed the following set of performance indicators for the teaching category.

- Teaching effectiveness rating by class
- Number of course preparations per semester
- Number of new course preparations
- Type of course (upper-level, general educations, elective, etc.)
- Total student credit hours generated
- Instruction of the Freshman Seminar course
- Teaching awards and nominations
- Internships and/or independent studies supervised

- Senior evaluation results
- Alumni survey results
- Teaching development workshops or activities
- Grade point average by class (monitored for outlier extremes)
- Major Field Achievement Test (MFAT) scores in area



**Figure 6.1-1 Northwest’s Seven-Step Planning Process (SSPP).**

Source: Northwest Missouri State University’s Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award 2004 Application.

These indicators attempt to gauge not only faculty workload, but the quality of a faculty member’s overall performance. We felt it important to simultaneously measure student satisfaction, via the teaching effectiveness rating, and also track grade point average by class to help ensure that effectiveness ratings are not artificially influenced by the relative rigor of the course. Additionally, this system helps norm the effectiveness rating for other possible extenuating factors like whether the course is a required one (versus an elective), the overall size of the class, and if it is a new course preparation for the faculty member.

Business students at Northwest take the Major Field Achievement (MFAT) test in the capstone business course, Organizational Policy and Decision Making. Northwest’s Booth College of Business and Professional Studies has a target for 60% of business majors to exceed the 50<sup>th</sup>-percentile on the MFAT exam. Some areas of the College, such as Accounting, already have 90% of their students exceeding this goal, and faculty performance evaluations in those areas should reflect the value-added by those faculty in our proposed system. We also believe that “extra”

initiatives undertaken by faculty, like supervising internships, attending teaching development workshops, and knowledge sharing with others should be recognized.

### **PERSONAL DASHBOARDS-RESEARCH**

We are suggesting the following dashboard measures for evaluating the research category.

- Textbooks written
- Textbook chapters written
- Publications-scholarship of teaching (T)
- Publications-scholarship of integration (I)
- Publications-scholarship of application (A)
- Publications-scholarship of discovery (D)
- Non-refereed publications
- Professional reviewer
- Case materials written
- Professional presentations made-international, national, regional and local
- Professional meeting discussant or session chair
- Professional meetings attended
- Grants written
- Professional memberships
- Continuing education for professional license
- Other relevant professional activities

We found this to be one of the more difficult categories in which to apply numerical quantification, as the quality of what constitutes research can vary broadly. Still, we believe there is value in tracking these criteria in some quantifiable fashion. One of the stretch goals of our pilot project is to attempt to develop more quality-normed dashboard measures in this evaluation category for the benefit of all concerned.

### **PERSONAL DASHBOARDS-STUDENT SUPPORT**

In benchmarking other institutions, we discovered that most schools combine these sorts of activities into the “service” category. However, one of Northwest’s most important decision drivers is student satisfaction. Consequently, we chose to keep measures of student support as a separate faculty evaluation category.

- Number of student advisees within major
- Number of “deciding” student advisees
- Student organizations sponsored or advised and frequency of meetings, responsibilities, etc.
- National and/or regional student organization awards
- Student recruitment events
- Student support awards and nominations
- Field trips or other professional experiences
- Undergraduate and graduate student research projects
- Networking activities for students

As part of the formal evaluation, certain other qualitative factors also need to be considered relevant, but these quantitative metrics give faculty and administrators a realistic guide to basic student support functions of the individual faculty member.

## **PERSONAL DASHBOARDS-SERVICE**

Our service category classifications deal with service to the University, the college, and to the community at large.

- University committee chairs or membership
- University subcommittee chairs or membership
- College committee chairs or membership
- College subcommittee chairs or membership
- Departmental committee chairs or membership
- Community technical or professional service
- Special assignments consistent with university mission
- Faculty mentorship
- Teamwork activities
- Community organization membership and activities
- Volunteer work with the university and with the community

## **CONCLUSION**

The system of Personal Dashboards described above provides faculty and administrators a readily quantifiable method for evaluating and improving faculty performance. We have currently developed measurable indicators in the categories of: teaching, research, student support and service. These indicators, when monitored via our Personal Dashboard system, provide continuous feedback and “at-a-glance” information when properly implemented.

Our continued challenge is to now develop the system, by adding and/or removing indicators as needed based upon the appropriateness of the indicator. Benchmarking this system against similar peer institutions will also be very helpful in the on-going development of this metric. Consequently, it is now our goal to go forward from that point and attempt to assign “points” to various indicators, making it possible to come to an overall aggregate score for the faculty member, not unlike a GMAT or ACT score for students. We can use this score for performance placement and show where opportunities for improvement may exist, as well as quantifiably demonstrate performance excellence for faculty evaluations, where appropriate.

Indeed this is a challenge and, if determined to be feasible, may revolutionize our current way of not only obtaining faculty performance results, but reporting them in an easy-to-read and understandable fashion for the betterment of a faculty member’s professional career.

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