

LEAN SIX SIGMA/BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION



CCWS interns discuss changes to intern training plans after the LSS project was completed. (Photo courtesy of the CCWS PO.)

Lean Six Sigma (LSS)—Intern Training Standardization Throughout Program Executive Office Missiles and Space (PEO M&S)

Misty Glover

Based on estimates by the National Defense Industrial Association, over the next 5 years, nearly 50 percent of the acquisition workforce will be eligible for retirement. Replacing the depleted federal acquisition workforce is a top priority, as well as a daunting challenge, for many agencies. PEO M&S is no exception. Within the next 5 years, 45 percent of PEO M&S core personnel will be retirement eligible. To mitigate this strategic challenge, core business management interns were brought onboard to help fill the gap of

retiring personnel. This quick transition to inexperienced personnel created disparity in the levels of expertise within the workforce, raising concerns about the organization's ability to meet its mission requirements. In an attempt to replace the vast knowledge of personnel retiring with 30-plus years of acquisition service, each intern was assigned training courses and provided on-the-job training (OJT). However, this individual approach to intern training resulted in additional challenges due to training variation, inconsistency, and irregularity.

Training Discrepancies

Each intern was graduating from his/her respective internship with various levels of knowledge based on individual training courses, OJT, and rotations completed, at times lacking required competencies to adequately perform journeyman duties. While great opportunities to learn and excel were available, not all interns were given equal access to attend training courses, learn from experienced personnel, and/or rotate through organizations and divisions within the PEO. This lack of standardization resulted in frustration and lowered expectations among senior leadership, interns, and specialists/analysts.

As one of the first PEO M&S intern graduates, I feel strongly that interns should be given equal opportunities for training, OJT, and rotations. Today's interns will soon be leading the acquisition workforce and managing complex weapon systems. Because of the numerous issues surrounding this particular area, an LSS project was initiated. LSS provided an opportunity to make a difference in the PEO M&S intern training program.

LSS is an initiative and set of tools that empowers individuals to look at processes through a different viewpoint in hopes of improving effectiveness and

efficiency. When people hear "LSS", they typically think manufacturing and production; however, LSS may also be used in the transactional, administrative environment. LSS emphasizes customer satisfaction, a culture of continuous improvement, the search for root causes, and comprehensive employee involvement. LSS uses the five phases of define, measure, analyze, improve, and control. Throughout each phase, tools are used with the end result being an improved process with increased effectiveness and efficiencies.

Intern Training Standardization

The Intern Training Process Improvement LSS Black Belt Project problem was defined as follows: "Interns graduate from the PEO M&S intern program with various levels of knowledge and lacking required competencies." The objective was to develop a meaningful and successful intern training program that ensures all interns graduate with required competencies. The standardization of the training plan would reduce variation and time spent working/staffing the plan and minimize time spent in unnecessary training and rotations. Cost avoidance was projected in training/registration and associated costs and amount of time spent developing future training plans.

Dual sponsorship for this black belt project consisted of the Close Combat Weapon System Project Office (CCWS PO) Business Manager and the PEO M&S Business Manager. The process improvement team included representatives from PEO M&S staff and POs with assistance from the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center and other organizations. Since a majority of the team had experienced the problems firsthand, they were willing to go the extra mile to see a change in the process. Additionally, several of the team members were familiar with LSS, permitting the use of more advanced tools.

For data collection and root cause analysis, surveys were sent to individuals ranging from newly hired interns to senior business managers to gain a better understanding of the required competencies. Data was also collected from the team to determine why intern training plans varied so greatly among the PEO POs. Data was compiled and box plots were developed, depicting ratings of training courses, rotations, and curriculum to help interns meet required competencies.

Data was analyzed to determine acceptance range, based on box plots and team input. This acceptance range determined exactly which training courses and rotations would be mandatory for interns, based upon course curriculum and required competencies for each series. The root causes of the problem were identified through the analyze process. Root causes were defined as intern training plans including training only, unnecessary training and rotations, and/or lack of training and rotations to gain the required competencies.

Based upon acceptance range and root causes, intern training plans were developed for the positions of 1102 Contract Specialist, 1515 Operations Research Analyst, 0343 Program Analyst with Financial Management emphasis, and 0343 Program Analyst with Review and



CCWS former and current business management interns, from left to right, are Misty Glover, Cheree Hastings, Elois Powell, Corrie Hughes, Regeana Williams, Lacey Harrison, Robert Weaver, Kalie Meadows, Kara Light, Karen Carden, and Josie Hampton, standing behind the new Javelin statue at PEO M&S. (Photo courtesy of the CCWS PO.)

Analysis emphasis. The training plan curriculum was analyzed to determine the optimal combination of training courses, rotations, and OJT to expose interns to the appropriate curriculum to gain the required competencies. Critical voice-of-customer requirements were met by developing a standardized, consistent training plan that leads to Level II certification. While interns will be unable to apply for Level II certification because of the experience requirement, they will complete all the training requirements during the internship.

Intern training is primarily OJT, supplemented by appropriate formal classroom instruction in designated courses and selected readings and correspondence courses. OJT provides for the acquisition of necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding of the designated career field. The mandatory rotational training within the intern's assigned organization gives the intern specific knowledge of each area within his/her organization through hands-on training. The mandatory rotational training in the other related organizations provides the intern with an orientation of all of the functions of resource management to acquire an understanding of relationships with other business management organizational elements.

After meeting regulatory and qualification requirements as stated in the plan, the intern is eligible for promotion to the GS-12 level. After completion of all phases of training, he/she is able to perform business operations analysis duties in the area assigned at the specialist (journeyman) level with only guidance and supervision normally provided to a full-performance analyst at the same grade. The intern can also apply knowledge and acquired skills in work situations requiring independent judgment and personal responsibility for completing total projects or major portions of projects.

Training begins with the PEO M&S New Employee Orientation. After these 5 hours of general orientation, the intern gains a working knowledge of Army acquisition organizations, the training and development plan, and the most important aspects of civilian personnel administration. The intern should acquire knowledge of the organization, function, and mission of the business management arena. The orientation and training provides background for the intern to become an effective workforce member. Financial management interns then follow a 3-year planned track of courses and OJT that includes rotational assignments. The intern's progress throughout this training program is evaluated semi-annually the first year, then annually for the second and third years.

Although the training plans are standardized across the PEO, the schedule is designed so that reasonable adjustments are allowed to meet the individual intern's needs. For example, when a learning objective is met in a reduced time, the balance of hours is devoted to other related productive assignments within that division. Electives or individual Defense Acquisition University courses can supplement to best fit the intern's career path. Additionally, in the event changes are made to certification requirements for the position held, the intern training plan is updated accordingly.

Results

The training plans were approved by PEO M&S. The PEO M&S Training and Career Manager is responsible for maintaining the intern training plans, which are posted to the PEO M&S Intranet for easy retrieval. The standardization of the training plans reduces variation and time spent working/staffing the plan, and minimizes time spent in unnecessary training and rotations. The financial benefits reflect cost avoidance, which is forecasted to occur in the time spent developing future training plans. Cost avoidance

also occurs with the intern's time spent in OJT (rather than "unnecessary" training and rotations). The total cost avoidance is projected at approximately \$25,500 per plan.

As a result of the project, intern training plans were standardized for program analysts with emphasis in financial management and review and analysis, operations research analysts, and contract specialists. The improved intern training program has been in implementation at PEO M&S since summer 2009. Incoming interns are placed on an appropriate intern training plan. Feedback, thus far, is favorable by interns, supervisors, and business managers. Supervisors and interns have found the standardized plan extremely beneficial, knowing the plan is equivalent to others within the PEO. The suggested training/rotation road map schedule included in the training plan provides a smooth transition to the Individual Development Plan and the overall internship plan. Standardized training plans also allow a quicker, simpler process for hiring interns, eliminating the time required to prepare an intern plan.

Through the use of lean tools and the LSS program, PEO M&S now has a standardized, integrated intern training program, resulting in an overall more efficient and effective workforce. This improved process and program is just one way LSS can make a difference in the way the Army acquisition workforce operates.

MISTY GLOVER is a Program Integration Support Specialist in the CCWS PO, PEO M&S. She holds a B.B.A. in business management from Athens State University and an M.S.M. in acquisition and contract management from the Florida Institute of Technology. Glover is Level III certified in program management, a U.S. Army Acquisition Corps member, and a certified LSS black belt.