

SPECIAL SECTION

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Six Sigma courses teach quality improvement

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Contributing Writer

Nearly 30 years ago, Motorola started a quality improvement process training that set a goal for the entire company: create error-free products 99.997 percent of the time.

The metrics-driven process was so successful it has been used countless times since by companies of all shapes and sizes in every area of business from manufacturing and marketing to accounting and sales.

"When Motorola started the quality improvement process training known as Six Sigma in 1985, they immediately realized that they could not achieve their desired quality levels unless their suppliers provided them the same level of quality inputs to their processes," said **Ken Levine**, Six Sigma master black belt and certified purchasing manager director for **Georgia State University's** J. Mack Robinson College



Ken
Levine

of Business. "Likewise, their suppliers shortly came to the same realization. As a result, Six Sigma has been cascading backward through the supply chain for almost 30 years."

Though the main Six Sigma program is still wildly popular, its 2.0 clone, Lean Six Sigma (LSS), is where the action really is these days, according to executive education leaders. Lean Six Sigma is the combination of two approaches dedicated to the corporate bottom line: Lean, perfected by Toyota in the early 1990s, focuses on cycle time and waste reduction, while Six Sigma focuses on problem-solving.

"When combined, Lean Six Sigma is a powerful and proven business management strategy that teaches you how to improve the quality of your company's product while streamlining production efforts," said **Teresa Daniel**, senior marketing manager of the executive education program for **Georgia Tech's** Scheller College of Business whose LSS clients have included **GE, The Home Depot Inc. and JP Morgan Chase**. "The ultimate goal for Lean Six Sigma is to improve customer satisfaction while simultaneously improving corporate profits."

Business schools are filling up Lean Six Sigma classes year-round. Most schools

offer two of the main LSS certification levels: green belt and black belt. In general, Daniel said, green belt involves teaching the DMAIC – Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control – and helps employees solve problems related to their jobs, while the black belt program certifies that employees have the advanced skills



Teresa
Daniel

needed to become an expert problem-solver whose primary job responsibility is to solve problems and implement Lean.

The curriculum is fairly standard for both green and black belt programs as virtually all LSS training providers follow outlines established by the American Society for Quality, Daniel said.

Georgia State offers one-week green belt and one-week black belt programs. "Our green belt candidates are required to complete four homework assignments in teams during the week of the workshop, and most complete these assignments and receive their green belt certificates on the last day of the workshop,"

Levine said. "Our black belt candidates must complete an approved LSS improvement project and are given up to a year to complete their certification."

Georgia State also holds monthly LSS community meetings.

"These events are open to the public, and give our black belt candidates the opportunity to present the status of their certification project and get help," Levine said. "It is also a great way for interested people to experience our program in advance firsthand, and meet current and previous students."

Southern Polytechnic State University offers LSS programs at three different levels, according to **Ruston Hunt**, extended university dean.

"Six Sigma is an important part of our undergraduate industrial engineering technology program, our fully online master's of science in quality assurance and our continuing education, non-credit format," Hunt said. "In all three cases we teach Six Sigma so that our students will be able to practice the tried-and-true techniques of quality improvement and cost reduction originated at Motorola in 1986."

Employees with certification in LSS are sure to stand out, Daniel said.

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