



Rail company training keeps efficiency on track

by Stuart Smith, Six Sigma Group

Network Rail, who operates Britain's rail infrastructure, has raised its game with a major business improvement programme that has involved training over 1,200 people in the past three years.



It has laid the foundations for long-term sustainable business improvement through one of the largest Six Sigma training and deployment programmes in Europe. The Six Sigma Group, part of Bourton Group Ltd, was chosen to support the deployment to deliver operational performance improvements as measured by delay minutes.

“Initially we trained and worked with Network Rail staff to address the root causes of process variation through the use of the Six Sigma framework DMAICT (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control and Transfer). This translated into a programme to enable Network Rail to become ‘self sufficient’ with respect to training, project deployment and benefit delivery” said Stuart Smith, Director of The Six Sigma Group. “The senior management team recognised that ‘quick fix’ activity was not sufficient to deliver the required long term improvements demanded of the business” said the Head of Six Sigma Deployment for Network Rail. “Network Rail needed to train its people in the use of tools and techniques that would enable performance improvement to be sustained over the long term, helping to deliver a world class railway.”

Network Rail staff found themselves taking on new roles under Six Sigma – senior managers became ‘Champions’ to drive projects. Full-time leaders of business improvement projects trained as Black Belts to help them coach others in the use of the improvement tools. Leaders of small-scale projects trained as Green Belts while part-time project team members became Yellow Belts. Experts were also developed to work across all project teams – these are the Master Black Belts. Between them, trained staff have identified 300 improvement projects. Network Rail has gained £5 million of savings and efficiency improvements, and has reduced the time trains are delayed by 50,000 minutes alongside numerous ‘non financial’ or ‘non direct performance’ based project benefits.

Across various functions, targeted projects have delivered initial productivity improvements of 12% and one single project reduced material costs by £400,000.

Network Rail and Bourton Group/Six Sigma Group were jointly awarded a UK Skills Regional Training Award 2006 for this programme.

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