

Firms save millions of dollars with MCC program

By JANICE BULLARD PIETERSE

An adult education course in quality control at Monroe Community College is helping to train downsized workers and has saved local manufacturers nearly \$8 million in the past year, college officials said this week.

And the quality process, known as Lean Six Sigma and widely adopted by manufacturers over the past decade, is being explored in other sectors of the economy and could mean better efficiency across a spectrum of organizations, said MCC officials and other local experts.

MCC began offering its Lean Six Sigma program a year ago through a partnership with a local consultant specializing in the quality process. The school has trained 64 people, including many laid off by companies such as Eastman Kodak Co. and Valeo S.A., in an array of analysis methods to increase efficiency for manufacturers.

The college set up projects for students with several local, small to midsize manufacturers—where school officials see the most potential for local economic growth—to provide quality-control services that the businesses might not otherwise be able to afford, said Charles Caples, program director for the Office of Workforce Development at MCC. Businesses pay nothing for the service while students gain valuable experience.

The college could not specify dollar amounts saved by individual companies because businesses did not want to reveal financial information, Caples said.

Mamie Kam-Ng decided the \$5,500 MCC training would be a good investment in freshening her skills after losing her quality management job this year in a film division at Kodak. She landed a post as cost-reduction manager with Ultralife Batteries



The school has trained workers, including some laid off by manufacturers like Eastman Kodak Co. File photo

Inc. midway through the four-month MCC program, during which she helped redesign a product at Hover-Davis Inc., which provides component feeding solutions to the electronics assembly industry. She found the course a great way to update her skills.

"Taking this course was a good review of all the tools so I could be more ready when I interviewed, speaking the language, conversant in all the tools," Kam-Ng said. "The other big thing, I went to this program the day after I left Kodak. My classmates were a great support group. It was good to

go from the job to full-time activity."

MCC students have worked with 25 local companies, including GentCorp Ltd., Lapp Insulator Co. LLC, Schlegel Systems Inc. and Printing Methods Inc.

MCC partnered with Transformation Partners Co. LLC of Fairport, which provides specialists with corporate certification in Lean Six Sigma. The strategies trace to processes developed at Toyota Motor Corp. and Motorola Inc. in the 1980s. Lean principles focus on work-process efficiency, and Six Sigma focuses on mini-

mizing errors in product manufacture.

Caples said he is in discussions with several health care organizations, including Via-Health, Preferred Care and Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield, Rochester Region on ways to apply the work of students there.

"They can see the long-term potential benefits," Caples said.

Excellus has done some initial research into how the organization could apply Six Sigma to processes in enrollment and claims, spokesman James Redmond said.

"What it comes down to is examining what you do and how you do it, and how can you eliminate some steps while retaining or improving the quality," Redmond said.

Rochester Institute of Technology officials and a leader in the Greater Rochester Quality Council of the Rochester Business Alliance Inc. said service and non-profit organizations are looking for ways to use Lean Six Sigma processes.

Vincenzo Buonomo, senior program manager at the Center for Excellence and Lean Enterprise at RIT, said he could not put a total estimate on savings realized by local companies from work done by RIT students in Lean Six Sigma since the program started three years ago. But one recent project alone resulted in \$900,000 in annual savings to a local business.

"We're seeing more and more interest from the non-manufacturing companies," Buonomo said. "It's the same thing—how efficiently are they using their resources. It could be looking at processes like order entry, purchasing, scheduling."

Reginald Stewart, past chairman of the Greater Rochester Quality Council and Assistant Quality Officer at Strong Memorial Hospital, said council members met Monday to discuss ways to apply Six Sigma

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ma strategies in health care organizations. He declined to name the health care providers or say whether Strong is involved.

The principles already have been applied with great success in several non-profit organizations, including Catholic Family Center Inc. and the Girl Scouts of the Genesee Valley Inc., Stewart said.

"We've had a lot of success deploying this," Stewart said. The council provides experts from corporations such as Kodak who serve as trainers to volunteer groups

within the organization.

While the trainers need to know technical skills for applying the principles, teams within the organizations do not, Stewart said.

"It's easy to teach teams without everyone having to become an expert," Stewart said.

"Whether it's banking, other types of services, it would mean increasing efficiencies of service," he said. "And by increasing efficiencies, you decrease waste and costs."

"In the next couple of years, I think every major organization will be engaged in it," Stewart said.

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