iGrafx®

Case Study

DECOMA

BUMPER PRODUCTION WITHOUT BOTTLENECKS

At Decoma, a supplier to the automotive industry, iGrafx helps to identify inefficient business processes

The Story

Decoma, an automotive components supplier from Altbach, Germany, specialises in bumpers, side sills, radiator grilles, embellishment strips and other components that lend a car an impressive exterior appearance from both the front and rear. The company belongs to the Canadian Magna Group, which employs around 16,000 people at 54 sites.

The Challenge

Decoma, like many vendors in automotive closely guards the identity of the companies that buy from it. Whilst such details may remain a business secret, its common knowledge that the automotive industry is dominated by fierce competition, where only those companies that are efficiently managed are set to survive. For this reason, the prevailing management philosophy at Decoma embraces "Six Sigma" thinking. Quality control and improvement initiatives are Six Sigma centric, focusing on the elimination of errors in processes, cost reduction in a bid to increase both customer satisfaction and deliver increased profit-turnover ratios. As a "spin-off", the decision makers at Decoma see whether a second method deployed, namely Lean Management, works more effectively. The iGrafx software provides invaluable support by enabling users to map, model and analyse workflows based on the principle of Business Process Management (Enterprise Process Management). Business Process Management defines the documenting, analysing, optimising and controlling of processes in common with Six Sigma's DMAIC concept of Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control. This enables iGrafx to offer a complete solution for each phase of a Six Sigma project.

The Solution

In defining the actual and required state and conducting initial measurements, Decoma stumbled upon a critical point–namely, the throughput times for customer enquiries did not always satisfy the company's exact requirements. "Although we were pretty quick, we weren't satisfied. We had a rough idea as to where the problem might lie and, for this reason, we chose to deploy iGrafx in order to first isolate the problem and ultimately to resolve it," says Rainer Seufferlein, Manager Six Sigma at Decoma.

"I have now been working for four years with the program and I am very pleased with it. This is why we deploy it in conjunction with the MINITAB® statistics application in an effort to stabilise and optimise processes. The important thing with all Six Sigma projects being that you work 'top down', i.e. starting from the business plan. In many cases, this rule is ignored," says Rainer Seufferlein, an accredited Six Sigma Master Black Belt and a recognised expert in this field. In this role, Rainer has invested five years learning, working on projects, and mentoring. One such project—throughput time reduction—required an eight person team lead by Decoma colleague and aspiring Master Black Belt Ivica Sekulovic with Rainer in the role of trainer.

The Analysis

The "problem child" turned out to be the customer unit in the UK. The employees here receive numerous enquiries from automotive manufacturers in the form of technical specifications that document the precise details of components. At the interface between the employees of the customer unit and the production centres, difficulties were encountered with the coordination. Delays

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always occurred when the specifications of new products were still unclear. “Needless to say, the design and the associated key data always come from the manufacturer. As to the question of how things look, for example, on the ‘inside’ of a bumper, our engineers have scope for design,” explains Rainer Seufferlein. As a result, the process from a customer’s enquiry through to the final answer is highly complex. After all, many different departments within the company contribute their input to this process. With its graphic representation of the various processes, iGrafx brought the decisive insight into all the different ramifications—in the analysis phase of the Six Sigma projects. “It transpired that the workflows were simply not cleanly defined.

As a result, the employees at the customer unit constantly ran into difficulties,” says Rainer Seufferlein. For instance, they often had to consult with the engineers and asked colleagues and the car manufacturer for information that was in fact already available. “In spite of all the forms, important data was still not available to everyone. This resulted in unscheduled and unnecessary overtime hours having to be worked for those concerned,” says Rainer Seufferlein.

The Benefits

In the subsequent ‘improvement‘ phase of the Six Sigma project, iGrafx once again revealed its true strength. Using iGrafx, it was possible to check existing workflows for their efficiency, and in turn to conduct tests in a virtual environment using the simulation to access the effect of changes on the process capability. At the same time, the user sees all the activities important for the modelling process on one screen, such that the generation of the actual process is performed swiftly. A further function that proved useful for Decoma was the ability to import empirical data from the MINITAB application in order to use these for the simulation. “If you can first act out on the computer what happens in reality, you can save yourself from quite a few unpleasant surprises,” says Rainer Seufferlein.

With the help of iGrafx software, the last step, namely of checking the solution proposed for the Decoma problems, was quickly reached. “We streamlined the forms, standardised process workflows based on the proposals of the iGrafx program within the scope of revised work instructions and devised a database structure for the presentation of information, which facilitates the communication between departments,” says Rainer Seufferlein. “The work has now not only become less, but above all ‘easier’ as the employees no longer have to constantly ask ‘Am I doing it right?’” Furthermore, the main objective of the Six Sigma method has been upheld, namely the pursuit of maximum customer satisfaction.

Using iGrafx, Decoma was able to standardize process workflows and facilitate communication between departments, reducing confusion and improving efficiency and customer satisfaction.

* At the moment of the Case Study writting Rainer Seufferlein was Director Six Sigma at Decoma.

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