



Improved Field Service Performance Driven by Simple Problem Solving Techniques

The fast pace of the energy industry today requires that refineries, power plants, and other petrochemical operations be up at all times. This requirement means that any maintenance performed must be done live. A Texas based leading provider of specialty industrial services to the energy industry asked its employees to identify cost savings opportunities. The organization has the largest North American service network so it was logical that their field service operation was a good source of improvement and cost reduction.

Management felt that to get the effort off on the right foot, a foundation of problem identification and solution was needed. Being a Six Sigma oriented organization, they felt a simple approach to process improvement techniques was the right fit. They contacted P Squared Consulting to provide straightforward, common sense process improvement training to the team members responsible for the initial cost reduction projects.

A top project was selected - improve the performance of technicians in the field. A cross-functional team was put together representing both geographic and functional aspects of the field service organization. Using some of the quality tools the team learned from the P Squared training, an initial brainstorming session gathered over 60 ideas for improvement in ten areas including internal and external communication, training, equipment, culture, certification, and manpower.

The team then used another quality tool, multi-voting, as a way to prioritize these areas and identify the area of highest impact. "Inadequate training" resulted as the top problem area and was then further analyzed into five possible root causes. The root causes were then analyzed and the true root cause of poor technician performance was identified as lack of proper on-the-job training (OJT) by qualified trainers.

The final step was to generate high return solutions, put them in place, and repeat the measurements that identified the problem in the beginning. Without the use of quality tools to step them through a simple process of problem solving, the team might not have selected the optimal root cause and resulting best solution.

The effort resulted in a formal OJT program that was incorporated into the company's personnel certification process. And the final results...

Drastically improved competency of field technicians which led to increased performance, created a mentoring program, and reduced costs for field activities across the board.