

Industry could do better with CI training

BY MARTIN SCHEMBRI*

OVER the last few years we have seen an acceleration of Continuous Improvement (CI) activities in Australian organisations. In the quest to become more competitive, initiatives such as Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma are now commonplace.

To date, however, giving people the skills and tools needed to successfully implement the changes required to streamline manufacturing have been largely informal and unco-ordinated.

In November 2004 a new nationally accredited Competitive Manufacturing (CM) Training Package was released aimed at addressing the training and development issues behind continuous improvement activities. It comprises of around fifty competency units ranging from specific Lean and Six Sigma tools, through to the skills required to lead and manage the change process.

Four levels of qualifications are currently available; Certificate III, Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma. These qualifications have been primarily designed to skill exist-

ing workers and are ideal for team leaders, supervisors and managers who have the responsibility for leading competitive practices in manufacturing enterprises. A certificate II level is currently in development, and is aimed more at operators and new entrants into the manufacturing workforce.

Government funding a factor

Initial interest from industry to the new CM units has been good. A significant factor for this has been that the Certificate IV level qualification in Victoria and NSW is eligible for government funding, which has led to heavy promotion of the program by training providers.

Concerns have been raised, however, that attractive funding incentives may lead organisations to enrol personnel into the funded qualification where their job roles will not allow them to apply the competencies in an effective way.

Victoria has attempted to address this potential problem by requiring that an enrollee have a prior manufacturing related certificate II qualifica-



Package aims to address the training and development issues behind continuous improvement (CI) activities.

ANALYSISMANAGEMENT

tion or at least three years equivalent experience in the manufacturing sector. NSW authorities have also started addressing the issue by highlighting entrance requirements and target groups to new apprenticeship centres who are responsible for signing up the trainees.

Other groups such as the Manufacturing & Engineering Skills Advisory Body of Victoria (MESAB) are also taking active roles and are co-ordinating workshops to explore the implementation strategies of Competitive Manufacturing in Victoria. Three workshops were conducted in 2005 which culminated in a CM trainer's network.

Though the package has been enthusiastically received by industry and stakeholders, its implementation across Australia has been inconsistent. Funding arrangements, access to traineeships and development of implementation guides still continue to vary across the states.

Wider approach needed

For companies contemplating implementation of the new training package, it is important to highlight that the competency units it contains are tools that need to be grounded in the specific context of the organisation. If

used in isolation, they are unlikely to be fully effective. To gain the full benefit of this training, a whole of enterprise approach to continuous improvement is needed.

Managers and Team Leaders implementing competitive manufacturing programs without the whole organisation supporting the implementation will only achieve limited success.

To ensure that the CM training units are delivered in context, it is important that delivery is done on an enterprise-based project basis. In other words, build the training into real projects that will benefit the organisation. This will ensure that the units are being applied to actual work practices and processes, with outcomes being measured in real terms. For this reason, Competitive Manufacturing programs that are institution-based are generally less effective than those delivered in the workplace.

So if your organisation is looking at formally developing continuous improvement skills, this new training package is certainly worth considering. For more information visit the National Training Information Service website at www.ntis.gov.au.

*Martin Schembri is a consultant with *Condico Consulting*, martins@condico.com.au.