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Case Study

Creating Measurable Improvements in a University's Recruitment Processes

> UK University

Summary

❯ Challenge

UK University lost potential staff because recruitment process took so long that candidates took up other jobs – often with rivals.

❯ Root Cause

If one step in the process stalled, entire recruitment procedure was halted.

❯ Output

ESSA (Eliminate, Simplify, Standardise, Automate) system overhauled recruitment process.

❯ Results

Recruitment time reduced from 93 days to 68 days.

Lean six sigma

Creating Measurable Improvements in a University's Recruitment Processes

Overview

Lean6sigma can be applied in many different organisations and for many different purposes – but wherever it is employed, it can achieve remarkable and massively positive results. Applicable even to what might be considered as perhaps amorphous, immeasurable and difficult-to-define processes - such as staff recruitment - lean6sigma is a robust, precise and powerful tool that can bring about major process improvements.

Define

- University operated in a very competitive environment – so it needed to change the way it functioned.

- Existing recruitment methods were so slow that candidates moved on because they had to wait so long for a response.

- The average time taken to recruit new employees therefore needed to be reduced dramatically.

Employing 1338 staff, our client was a UK university that provided a broad portfolio of programmes, including Business, Law, Tourism and Applied Sciences, as well as Arts, Design and Media. The university recognised that it operated in a highly competitive environment - and, as a result, there was a need to change the way it functioned. More than ever before, it was important that the university regarded itself as a business that served many different types of clients. However, due to the inevitable tight budgets for each faculty and service, the university needed to become skilled at doing more with less.

The university recognised that, in supporting its business, the Human Resources department should be fit for purpose and capable of operating effectively in a rapidly changing Higher Education world. The HR department wanted to review and improve its recruitment process, because it was concerned that recruiting took too long. In fact there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that, by the time the Human Resources department had finished the recruitment process, so much time had elapsed that the candidate had moved on or had found another role at another academic institution. Consequently, the university was losing talented staff to the other local universities within the area. Taking the Y Variable as *'time taken to recruit'*, the project aim was to reduce the average time taken to appoint new employees.

Measure

- The team needed to: understand parties' expectations; define what '*time taken to recruit*' meant; undertake Process Flow Diagram; ascertain length of recruitment process.

- Action plan was issued, with specific team members undertaking defined tasks.

- Data capture plan was set out.

Within the 'measure' phase, there were four key steps, after having clearly defined who the customer was – so the team needed to:

1. Understand the expectations of all relevant parties
2. Define what '*time taken to recruit*' really meant (in terms of the operational definition)
3. Undertake a detailed Process Flow Diagram
4. Ascertain just how long recruitment took, and how long staff spent processing an application.

To achieve these aims, the lean6sigma project leader (1) set out a detailed action plan, (2) allocated different team members to various tasks and (3) set out a detailed data capture plan.

Analyse

- Time taken to recruit was defined as: from point post was offered to point of offer to candidate.

- Individual halts in recruitment process halted entire procedure.

- Average time taken to recruit was between 20 and 142 days - a median average of 93 days.

The 'customer' (and therefore the scope of the project) was limited to academic staff - who defined '*time taken to recruit*' as 'from *the point a post was approved to the point of offer*'. The Process Flow Diagram revealed how certain aspects of the recruitment process were dependent upon the preceding process step - and, where this step stalled, the entire process stalled. The customer wanted an efficient process, though the process map highlighted areas of duplication and hand-offs. Through this information, the team recognised that certain stakeholders saw the process as a '*tick-box*' exercise - and although part of the process, they weren't necessarily adding any value.

How long did it take to recruit? The data indicated that the time taken to appoint ranged between 20 and 142 days, with a median average of 93 days.

Boxplot of Time Taken To Recruit
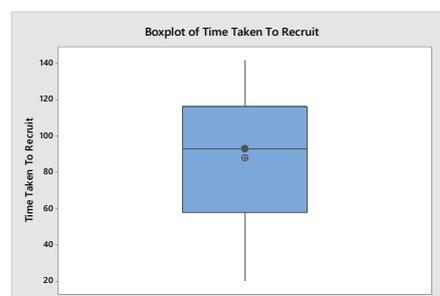
How long was spent on recruitment? By following the process, it was possible to determine the tasks that the various functions and individuals were undertaking. By critically reviewing these activities, it was also possible to determine if they added any value. The total time spent across all functions employed to recruit someone (involving. the hiring manager, the HR team, the Finance department and others) was a staggering 48 hours - and it was assessed that 24% of this time was pure waste.

Taking into account how long each person spent on wasteful activities, it was possible to determine the business cost, both in terms of time and money. The lean6sigma project team determined that the internal cost of each appointment was £6,000, of which £1,479 was wasted time.

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Improve

- 'Quick win' short-term improvements were identified and implemented.

- Medium-term improvements included reviewing the structure of HR support team.

- ESSA (Eliminate, Simplify, Standardise, Automate) was used to create business case for new recruitment system.

To understand this subjective problem in more detail, the team needed to ensure that they eliminated waste or non-value-adding activities in the staff recruitment administration process. Furthermore it was vital that best use should be made of resources - in terms of people, money and time. It was also important to demonstrate positive impact.

From the analysis process, improvements were identified - and the team worked to generate potential solutions. They then objectively evaluated these potential solutions in terms of (1) cost, (2) complexity to implement and (3) risk. All the proposed improvements were data-driven.

'*Quick wins*' or short-term improvements included both reviewing the marketing strategy and stopping certain marketing sources - and the team had data proving that these marketing services were not being reviewed.

The team was also quick to eliminate the sending of duplicate emails to hiring managers. In the medium-term, the team sought to review the structure of the HR support team, ensuring they had the right people doing the right tasks. Furthermore, they were able to build capacity and flexibility into the team by cross-training, and by ensuring that no single person had '*tribal knowledge*' – i.e. that certain tasks could only be completed by one key individual. Finally, with a focus on quality, they set up a talent pool and revised the authorisation process; this enabled a position to be established more easily.

Applying the ESSA acronym (Eliminate, Simplify, Standardise, Automate), the team had enough data to create a business case for a new e-recruitment system. Although it was a long-term goal, automating the recruitment process was key to providing the most efficient process.

Control

- Recruitment process dropped from 93 to 68 days.

- Costs of each appointment were also reduced.

- Project acted as springboard for programmes linked to the University's strategic development group.

Given the competitive nature of the current job market (and how important the student experience is to the organisation), it was critical for the University to ensure that they had the *right* people in the *right* jobs with the *right* skills at the *right* time.

The results of the revised recruitment process included, a reduction in the average time to appoint, dropping from 93 days to 68 days. This was largely achieved by eliminating the number of times the various functions and stakeholders needed to '*touch*' the application. In addition, the cost of each appointment was reduced to £810.

The project also served as a springboard for identifying other projects that linked to the University strategic development group - which is now keen to extend the use of Lean Sigma across the entire organisation.

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