Six Sigma Green Belts for the service sector

According to the *APO Productivity Databook* series, the service sector accounts for the largest share of all national economies, independent of development stage. Those in the APO region are no exception. However, the lack of proper training and quality assurance undermines the development of the service sector in APO member countries. Therefore, the APO organized an e-learning course on Six Sigma Green Belts to provide insight into service quality and how the Six Sigma Green Belt approach could improve customer satisfaction. It was conducted in three phases for 337 participants from 15 countries via the Global Development Learning Network of the World Bank.

"When implementing Six Sigma in the service sector, we first need to understand the unique aspects of service processes. Then we need to identify opportunities for improvement and put in place effective measures of performance. Only then should the Six Sigma project be launched," said Senior Manager Kabir Ahmad Mohd. Jamil, Malaysia Productivity Corporation, who worked as an instructor in partnership with Industry Department Program Officer Duangthip Chomprang.
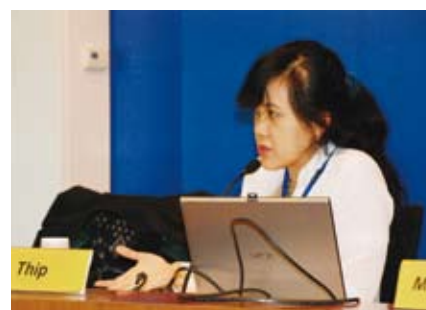

Participants in phase III of the course

The first two of the 16 modules identified the characteristics of quality in the service sector from different perspectives. Perceptions of service quality varied among participants depending on their background, but were mainly based on manufacturing. Group work and case studies examined where service quality and Six Sigma intersect with regard to process capability, value propositioning, business process management, and quality.

Chomprang explaining service quality

Best known for its "zero defects" goal, the Six Sigma approach seeks to optimize daily operations through continuous improvements while pursing total customer satisfaction. It is characterized by objectivity and its define-measure-analyze-improve-control cycle. Developed by Motorola in the 1980s, Six Sigma has become a major productivity improvement tool in the manufacturing sector. It was subsequently introduced by General Electric to improve nonmanufacturing processes in the service sector.

The Green Belt is the introductory level in the Six Sigma discipline. Therefore, the course focused on basics such as approaches to productivity improvement, quality concepts, and applications in the service sector. The service sector has minimal barriers to entry, unlike manufacturing where technology and high capital investments are prerequisites. The completion of all phases of the e-learning course will result in the creation of a pool of Green Belts working in the service sector in member countries. From a strategic viewpoint, those human resources in the sector are crucial, since they are needed to raise productivity levels and service standards in each country, sector, and regionally over the long term in an increasingly globalized, service-oriented world economy.