



Meghann Silverthorn, Defense Contract Management Agency Lockheed Martin Denver, poses for a picture at the contract management office. Silverthorn manages the performance indicator metrics for the office.



# Process Drives Success

Sam Rousso | DCMA Public Affairs

**Metrics — it’s a term frequently used in the business world.**

**Metrics are tools to identify key performance areas and track how successfully an organization does its job.** In the Defense Contract Management Agency, at the contract management office level, leaders have found that strong processes yield accurate measurements and keep the organization on target with the agency’s strategic plan.

In the Western region, two CMOs with strong processes in place, DCMA Santa Ana and DCMA Lockheed Martin Denver, shared how they’ve been able to establish and maintain strong processes through organizational change and implementation of the agency’s strategic plan.

Carlene Cooks, who handles the management process, and Troy Olsen, who handles the management analytical process, work the metrics at Santa Ana, Calif. At Lockheed Martin Denver, Meghann Silverthorn is the key individual.

“When the agency changed from performance-based management to performance management, DCMA Santa Ana managers and functional subject-matter experts immediately met to identify the performance goals and expectations and then developed and executed strategies to achieve them,” Cooks said.

Cooks said they were initially concerned with the number and types of some of the performance indicators and how they flowed to the CMOs. However, “As the process

began to mature, we were pleased the agency council took a strong look at the PIs and reduced the number for which CMOs were responsible from 89 in June 2009 to the current number of 47,” said Cooks.

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— Meghann Silverthorn, Defense Contract Management Agency Lockheed Martin Denver

Santa Ana also has 11 metrics for three Acquisition Category I programs it monitors.

Lockheed Martin Denver’s process evolution was similar, Silverthorn said. “We developed robust PI processes that began with the indicator matrix, which clearly delineates which metrics apply to CMOs,” she said. “Pairing with Metrics Studio, [the system used to monitor and analyze PIs], the indicator matrix shows valuable information such as the latest metadata sheet for each established indicator.”

Silverthorn said every PI in Metrics Studio was assigned a local indicator owner. Each indicator owner then received individualized attention from the performance improvement officer on the process of indicator maintenance.

The owner reviews a metadata sheet to understand the requirements within the scope of their individual expertise and to learn how to duplicate the data collection methodology, filtering criteria and computation. Local owners are encouraged to contact the agency-level owner with specific questions and concerns so they can build working relationships and gain direct understanding of agency intent regarding their specific metrics.

Communication has been paramount to success, especially with the recent changes the office has gone through in performance methodology, evolving from performance-based management to performance management, as well as the agency realignment, Olsen said.

“Exchanging information is critical to reducing error and ensuring consistency by generating comments in a standard format for entry into Metrics Studio,” Silverthorn said.

The comments include items, such as the PI number and the method of data entry, to assist viewers with little knowledge of the indicator matrix.

Other internal strong points, according to Silverthorn, have been the office’s standardization in using the comments field in Metrics Studio. This allows the office to capture its burn down plans and corrective action plans. The office has also used the “reports” tab to link its portal project files to include any follow-on data necessary. “By storing the files on the portal, access to the information is easier,” Silverthorn said.

Cooks pointed out that Santa Ana’s PIs are continually being reviewed. “We also educate our constantly changing workforce to help them understand the agency’s performance management philosophy and expectations and how their individual performance can impact organizational performance either positively or negatively,” she said. “This is keenly needed to influence and improve CMO performance through workforce achievement.”

Santa Ana’s Olsen emphasized this point. “Other internal strong points have been our standardization in utilizing the ‘comments’ field in Metrics Studio, which captures our burn down plans and CAPs where necessary,” Olsen said. “We also utilize the ‘reports’ tab in Metrics Studio to link our portal project files to include any follow-on



Troy Olsen, left, and Carlene Cooks, Defense Contract Management Agency Santa Ana, pose for a picture at the contract management office. Cooks handles the office’s metrics management processes, and Olsen handles the metrics management analytical processes.

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— Troy Olsen, Defense Contract Management Agency Santa Ana

data necessary. By storing the files on the portal, anyone outside of our CMO can access the information without logging in to the telework terminal server first.”

Both CMOs acknowledge there have been times when things didn’t go as planned, and weak points were identified and resolved. “The due date for presentations was too close to the established date for the joint metric status meeting, causing no read-ahead charts to be available. DCMA Lockheed Martin Denver fixed this by changing the due date and allowing more time for problems to be addressed and for supervisors to come to the joint meeting well-prepared,” Silverthorn said.

Another issue was the concentration of certain manufacturing and electronic data systems metrics with one industrial specialist. Silverthorn said other weak points were identified in areas outside of their control, such as a lack of Metrics Studio data inputs or the varying availability of agency-level PI owners needed to address questions and concerns.

Olsen said his office encountered similar issues. “At times, it has been difficult to get questions appropriately addressed by the indicator owner listed on the various metadata sheets. Ownership of the metric starts from the top and is a necessary process for the flow of data to reach all parties timely and accurately,” said Olsen. “As a result, we have had several months where the data posted manually into Metrics Studio was a best guess since we couldn’t resolve some of the issues at hand.”

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— Carlene Cooks, Defense Contract Management Agency Santa Ana

Cooks echoed the other two responses. “The current weak point or challenge is that of total workforce execution, which is needed for the organization to be successful in achieving performance goals. This can be the result of slowness of workforce adaptation to change, inexperience due to constant employee turnover, time required to adequately and successfully train new employees or poor performance,” Cooks said.

Identifying and working problem areas led to enhancements and success in key areas. At Santa Ana, these included standardization of roles and responsibilities via published operation instruction, adjusting individual

performance plans to focus on critical metrics that may be underperforming and in-house training on the relevant software.

At Denver, supervisors became fluent in metrics and gained a solid understanding of the processes being measured. The CMO, with improved collective insight into the PIs, is now positioned to advocate for improvements to the performance management process agency-wide. “As DCMA Lockheed Martin Denver’s management team has grown to understand the metrics and what the agency is trying to measure, its members can generate new ideas and best practice solutions for other agency activities,” said Silverthorn. “They can also provide appropriate recommendations and opportunities for improvement. In short, we can be at the forefront of generating excellent performance management benchmarks — or at the very least, active participants in current and future conversations.”

Success or failure, strength or weakness — process improvement remains the goal. “We will continue to manage and measure our performance monthly during our performance reviews, maintain and update milestone and burn down plans, address the metrics process during our quarterly functional roundtables and evaluate on a monthly basis our performance against the agency goals,” Cooks said. 

*Defense Contract Management Agency Santa Ana and DCMA Lockheed Martin Denver say having strong processes in place has been key to implementation of the agency’s strategic plan. (Photo courtesy of iStockphoto.com)*

