



***Improving
Collaboration in
Six Sigma Projects at
Dow AgroSciences***

Dow AgroSciences Australia, part of the US\$40 billion a year Dow Chemical Company, is accelerating decision-making and improving competitive advantage through more effective collaboration and the adoption of collaborative technology.

Six Sigma Challenges

Dow AgroSciences Australia forms part of a global network that researches and develops science-based agricultural solutions to control weeds, insects, and disease. It supplies farmers with crop protection and pest management products and information.

James Donlevy, a Dow AgroSciences Australia Six Sigma Black Belt is responsible for managing project teams across the Asia-Pacific to implement improved quality processes. These projects require regular liaison with employees in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand.

The regionally distributed Six Sigma teams in Asia-Pacific had been experiencing team meeting problems associated with geographic distance and cultural differences which were impeding full participation by some team members. In addition, there was general dissatisfaction with low productivity resulting from serial email and conference calls were discouraging some members from participating fully during meetings.

“The biggest thing for me in remote cross-cultural projects is making sure that everyone is heard. Often people don’t feel they can contribute via the traditional phone hook-up,” says Donlevy. “We used the phone and other tools to try and capture information, but I found that I’d be driving the discussion and trying to extract information rather than facilitating group problem solving.”

Other difficulties included coordinating meetings with staff in different time zones, and feedback not being representative of participants’ thoughts. “Sometimes in Asian cultures, people won’t come forward with an idea because they know that it’s not what their supervisor thinks.”

This was particularly an issue where Dow AgroSciences relied on local skills and knowledge of team members to identify process improvements. For example, one project involved assessing why the company had lost market share of a particular product.

The combined effect of these difficulties was a reduction in the quality of operational solutions and led to a search for a solution which would:

- Provide flexible online collaboration across regions and time zones
- Improve participation by team members during meetings
- Enable rapid, simultaneous idea generation
- Efficiently prioritise and develop action items
- Enable online presentations, application and document sharing and surveys
- Help eliminate cross-cultural communication barriers
- Generate reports for immediate distribution

Finding a solution

Dow AgroSciences Australia were introduced to the Grouputer technology and quickly realized its ability to ensure equal participation from all members during meetings, to generate ideas quickly, eradicate facilitation filtering, and to efficiently prioritise and develop action items before closing meetings.

According to Donlevy, the use of Grouputer in Six Sigma projects improved the company's understanding of business issues by gathering more information from across the organisation.

"The most important thing for me is that the technology allows all my team members to contribute. Rather than getting a higher-level view from someone, you actually get to the nitty gritty – and that's where some of the best improvements come from," says Donlevy.

"It wasn't until we started using the technology that I really started to get other peoples' thoughts on current processes and how things could be improved."

The service has also helped the company implement new processes to address the issue of lost market share, with process improvements including changes to supply chain and commercial offers.

With just a web browser team members in the company's Asia-Pacific offices participate in facilitated online meetings that enable them to work together to create and share ideas in a common team space, enhancing the group's ability to analyze situations, synthesize information, prioritize tasks, evaluate alternatives and make decisions in real time. Decision making is further aided by online document and presentation reviews and surveys in real time – or participant's own time.

Grouputer is also enabling one of the international employees to find a valuable voice in meetings. "Since using the tools, that team member has provided some great feedback. Her knowledge of the processes, the way they currently work and the way we can improve them has been very important to getting where we are," says Donlevy.

When team members are unable to meet in real time, Donlevy has switched to self-guided sessions that enable members to join sessions and generate ideas and issues in their own time zones and at times convenient to them.

"The self-paced session allows me to receive input from all the team without having to call a meeting. I can frame the questions as if they are online, and there is a logical flow as to how they should input their thoughts.

"I have received some excellent feedback because there wasn't a time constraint. If I had done that traditionally, it would have been via an Excel spreadsheet, which people would have completed and I would have amalgamated. The process would have been a lot slower."

Dow AgroSciences Australia will continue using Grouputer in company meetings, particularly brainstorming sessions, and intends to use it more extensively in client meetings to assess how it can improve the way it meets customer needs.

About Dow AgroSciences

Dow AgroSciences Australia actively researches and develops agricultural solutions to assist Australian farmers. Through an extensive network of internal and external experts, the company is working around the globe to develop and deliver the best possible products for local growers.



About Grouputer

Grouputer is a privately-held company providing e-meeting and e-learning tools for business problem solving, planning and training. The company launched the first-ever portable electronic meeting system, Decisions, in 1993. This empowered consultants, facilitators, and trainers to use technology to deliver on-site electronic meeting services to customers.

Since 2003, the company has focused on Internet collaboration between people meeting together in real time and anytime, in the same-place and remotely.

The company services customers in the United States, Latin America, Canada, Australia and Europe through direct sales and value added resellers. Customers include the Fortune 500, management consulting firms, universities and defence.

About Grouputer e-collaboration technology

Grouputer integrates web conferencing, group decision support, business process authoring tools and people management features to enable complex decision-making, training and learning in synchronous, asynchronous and blended sessions.

For Corporations

Grouputer is a knowledge creation technology that helps teams rapidly capture and leverage the knowledge of staff, customers and suppliers to create sustainable competitive advantage. Grouputer increases productivity by up to 500 percent and cuts meeting time by as much as 56 percent.

For Management Consulting Firms

Grouputer enables consultants to deliver superior service to customers in less time, increasing available consulting days and creating the potential to license their expert methodologies packaged and branded in Grouputer software.

Training and Learning

Grouputer enables educational institutions to deliver interactive, online learning to a broad spectrum of learners working together in realtime or anytime with or without an online facilitator/teacher.

How it Works

Grouputer enables Facilitators to conduct online meetings in much the same way as they would if everyone was in the same room, including preparing the meeting in advance or on the fly.

For example anyone in the group is able to:

- Make a PowerPoint presentation
- View, share and edit documents together
- Brainstorm ideas, categorize, vote, prioritize and create action plan for decisions
- Conduct Surveys for customers and staff
- Train on software programs
- Troubleshoot remote computers
- Download written Reports of the meeting
- Conduct group web tours
- Receive automatic invitations
- Automate delivery of business process methodologies such as Six Sigma, Process Improvement, Strategic Planning
- Use in synchronous (facilitated), or asynchronous (self-guided) modes and switch between both modes

Impact on group performance:

Group performance is positively affected by:

- Parallel and simultaneous input of ideas in text e.g. all participants “talk” at once
- Opportunities for equal input
- A full-unbiased record of a group’s activities that are recorded by the system
- (Optional) anonymity so that some of the participation inhibitors are minimized
- Mechanisms that discourage disruptive behaviour by individual group members
- Mechanisms that encourage critical thinking and problem solving

In relation to group productivity, 30 different projects reported that:

- The person hour reduction in project time averaged 55%
- Overall project time decreased by an average of 92%
- Compared to traditional group activities for accomplishing similar tasks, groups report that using GMT takes significantly less time and in general the process is much more satisfying. (Liou, Post 1992)
- Productivity improvements ranged from 25-50% for four person groups and up to 200% for 12 person groups. Sloan Management Review Study conducted by Gallupe and Cooper (1992)
- More ideas were generated and large groups could be effective
- There was a greater likelihood of producing more high quality ideas than traditional brainstorming with flipcharts
- Parallel entry of ideas and a record of ideas generated were also positive features

In addition, behavioural improvements include:

- More goal-directed group behaviour
- Leadership and coordination were handled better and participants have more healthy interpersonal relations. (Bostrom, Anson, 1992)

Grouputer is particularly well suited to teamwork support as it additionally enables:

- Customization of complex methodologies, such as Six Sigma, which “automates” delivery of the methodology and facilitates training and meetings in both realtime and asynchronously.
- Group Decision Support tools to assist consensus building including agenda setting, text based discussion, prioritization of options, voting tools and action planning.
- Grouputer integrates the problem solving, task and team management requirements essential for successful Six Sigma initiatives.



For more information or to arrange a demonstration contact:

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