

Sonora Quest Laboratories



Testimonial of Value of Arizona State Quality Awards Program

“At Sonora Quest Laboratories, we take the business of healthcare very seriously. The patient comes first in everything we do. We have a moral and ethical responsibility to produce error free work, on time, every time. Our commitment to medical quality is fundamentally grounded in a key quality principle: ‘If you don’t measure it, you can’t manage it.’ The successful deployment of our Problem Resolution Process has been key to meeting/exceeding customer expectations. Being recognized through the Arizona State Quality Awards Program validates that this process delivers exceptional performance.”

Company Information:

Highest Ranking Official:

David A. Dexter

President & Chief Executive Officer

David A. Dexter

Chief Executive Officer

Sonora Quest Laboratories

Contact Person:

Jean Hammelev

Executive Director of Quality

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Highlights of Organizational Process:

Client Problem Resolution Process

The problem resolution process in place in 1999 was described by its users as manual, complicated, cumbersome, not standardized, and untimely. There was no confidence that the process would allow for timely follow-up or resolution to problems that were documented. The variability and unaccountability of the whole process led to dissatisfied customers, both internal and external.

A Six Sigma project team was assembled in January 2001 to address the organization’s problem resolution process. The objectives for the improved problem resolution process were to reduce resolution turn around time (TAT) and increase satisfaction for both internal and external customers. It was determined that a Voice of the Customer (VOC) Survey should be conducted to obtain and quantify the customer expectations surrounding the timeliness of problem resolution and notification.

Type of work:

Sonora Quest Laboratories (SQL) is a joint venture clinical laboratory between Banner Health, the largest health care system in the state of Arizona, and Quest Diagnostics Incorporated, the largest clinical laboratory provider in the United States. SQL provides a broad range of laboratory testing services to physicians, hospitals, and other healthcare providers throughout the state of Arizona.

Workforce: 1300 Employees

The scope of the VOC survey included 100 active clients, based on a 95% confidence level, with 5,500 active accounts and a precision of 10%. The 100 clients were randomly selected and stratified by volume.

In early planning of the improved process, features that the team felt should be considered were department specific designees responsible to resolve the problem and forward the response in a timely manner; an electronic process to eliminate transportation delay, and documented communication to Sales and Operations to close the feedback loop and ensure accountability. The expected outcomes were to increase customer satisfaction; meet the 48-hour cycle time that was VOC defined, and assure a closure rate of 100%.

The final design requirements for the improved process were:

- Single Point of Contact – Process includes Client Problem Resolution Process Designee List with contact names. This allows for immediate investigation and resolution of problems identified, reported, and built in department accountability.
- Clear understanding of problem resolution process between Sales and Operations
- Regular Sales/Operations interaction to review status of problem solutions and modify process if not working effectively – The Quality Department at SQL monitors the effectiveness of the process through established measures established in the control phase of the project. Reports are provided to Sales showing current problem activity specific to an individual sales representative’s client base.
- Process for identifying and handling clients at risk – Sales and Marketing Support addresses this requirement through their SOPs.
- High level of visibility/reporting relationship – President/Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Director of Quality were the Six Sigma Problem Resolution Champions. Multiple avenues of communication of information are built into the process.
- No net cost to the Organization – Improved process is conducted with existing or approved resources with no increase to head count associated to the process of problem resolution. There was no necessary purchase of electronic software or hardware.

SQL now utilizes a complaint management process called the Client Problem Resolution Process (CPROB) to address problems identified both internally and externally. CPROB is the problem resolution process implemented through the efforts of the Six Sigma process improvement methodology. To ensure that Sonora Quest Laboratories resolves complaints promptly and effectively, measures are in place to document problem closure rate, percent closed within 48 hours – the customer requirement, and percent of customers satisfied with resolution to their problem.

Complaints and problems are documented in the CPROB function of the laboratory information system (LIS). A complaint or problem is identified either externally by a customer or internally within the organization. If the customer is satisfied with the resolution on the initial contact, the problem and resolution is documented in the CPROB function of the LIS.

SQL recognizes that problem resolution is key in sustaining customer satisfaction. The Client Problem Resolution Process provides SQL with opportunities for implementing meaningful change. Quality indicators and customer satisfaction survey scores provide management with information on areas requiring improvement/change and data to support and prioritize needs.

