

Member Profile

Michele Lamptey Uhrich

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By Heidi Price

Michele L. Lamptey Uhrich is one of the newest additions to the SEI Membership roster.

Uhrich, who works as a Quality Assurance Manager at Northrop Grumman Corporation, joined in August while taking a Lead Appraiser course at the SEI headquarters. Uhrich is PMP, ITIL and ISO

9001: 2000 certified and has worked with several companies to implement process improvement based on these models.

Uhrich, who has been with Northrop Grumman since April, is working with a Northrop Grumman Civilian Agencies program supporting the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. The program is implementing processes that will help it achieve CMMI maturity levels 4 and 5 by 2010. She hopes to be able to lend her expertise as a lead appraiser to other programs within the organization.

“Northrop Grumman has a lot of opportunities for process improvement professionals,” said Uhrich who works out of the organization’s offices in Woodlawn, Maryland.

Prior to her arrival at Northrop Grumman, Uhrich worked at Wells Fargo, implementing a quality assurance system and working on some Six Sigma-based process improvement initiatives. Prior to that, Uhrich worked for several federal government contractors operating in the Washington DC Metro area, such as Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), Zen Technology, SI International, and Data Computer Corporation of America (DCCA), implementing CMMI compliant processes and guiding organizations through the appraisal process.

Uhrich notes that organizations often view process improvement initiatives as a non-revenue generating activity that is separate from their main line of business. The effort is often abandoned after attaining the desired CMMI maturity level.

“If you’re working as a process improvement professional, you’re there to help them define and implement the process,” Uhrich explained. “Once the processes are in place, some companies believe there’s no need for process improvement anymore because they have achieved a maturity rating.”

Organizations often lose valuable process improvement resources due to a short-term focus and the lack of an ongoing commitment to process improvement. Uhrich believes this leads to increased costs when appraisal results are due to expire and process improvement initiatives are restarted. “Organizations are spending a lot of money every couple of years to recreate processes that already existed, and that would have required little additional effort to maintain.

Organizations are spending money on the same effort over and over again. It’s also a lot more difficult next time around, because you are attempting to break bad habits that employees believe are compliant with a given maturity level.”

Uhrich didn’t begin her career in process improvement. She studied economics and accounting as an undergraduate at The University of Reading in England and continued her graduate level studies at the university in international business and Finance. After graduating, she worked in international finance at Abbey National Treasury Services in London. During her time there, the bank decided to implement a whole new automated system for trading stocks and bonds and asked her to consult on the project.

“I started out being a subject matter expert, helping them write the requirements and then I got interested in how the system works and how the software works,” said Lamptey Uhrich, adding that she started taking software development courses. “I never really went back to the banking side.”

Reflecting back on her career, Uhrich notes that even with software development, she kept gravitating towards process improvement. Looking back, she attributes this to an innate need for order, a desire to continually improve, and to quantify progress. She is particularly drawn to CMMI because it significantly improves the predictability of the software development process.

“Projects are able to run a lot more smoothly. Everything is more transparent to the project team. The process is also more reliable—you’re not relying on someone who has everything in his/her head and happens to be on vacation that week,” Uhrich explained. “You can make better budget and schedule predictions, quantitatively measure progress, and see an improvement in the way you develop software and run projects. From a more technical perspective, it also allows you to deliver a product that meets the customers’ requirements.”

Uhrich is interested in researching organizational costs of stop/start process improvement initiatives and is also in the early stages of researching an initiative that focuses on the challenges of implementing CMMI in smaller organizations. She is interested in talking with other SEI Members who are interested, or have experiences in either of these areas.