

General Mills' Recipe for Standardized Training

by **Lauren Bonneau**, Managing Editor

In the manufacturing business, many employees operate complicated machinery and work with chemicals and food substances that need to be handled with extreme care, requiring them to achieve various certifications and qualifications depending on their job roles and duties. To ensure employees are properly trained, businesses must provide education and training through materials, in-person instruction, or online training, as well as make sure employees are up to date on certifications.

With 39,000 employees worldwide, General Mills has an enormous training initiative to undertake. In the supply chain area alone, the business operates 31 manufacturing plants throughout North America that employ workers who need to be trained for a number of highly specialized operational and technical jobs in the production facilities.

“The business is leading a continuous improvement effort focused on supporting employee capability development,” says Ron McGuire, Training and Development Manager at General Mills, who is responsible for the education and training initiatives for the North American supply chain organization, as well as ensuring that those initiatives align with the company’s larger organizational learning development strategy. “Rather than tracking and managing employee qualifications and certifications in a variety of ways, we recognize the need to set standards so we are behaving the same way at different plants. An important focus is on how to leverage standardized systems to make sure that the processes and methodologies we’re using to develop capabilities in our people are as efficient and effective as possible.”

At a Glance

Objective: Standardize employee training in the supply chain area to accurately track and manage qualifications and certifications

Solution: Implemented SAP Enterprise Learning and RegLearn from hyperCision

Benefits: New standardized approach to employee training and better insight into required skills for future business growth



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The Move to a Standardized Learning System

Without a standardized system for managing enterprise learning across the business, training can be conducted in a variety of ways. For General Mills, training was often performed differently across its various manufacturing plants based on individual preferences, and was tracked primarily through spreadsheets or paper-based processes. As expected, employees preferred different methods of training delivery; some chose to learn by shadowing a co-worker in a production line and carefully observing how job tasks were done before performing them unattended, and others required focused job task analysis or hands-on demonstration and instruction while taking notes to study or refer back to later.

“Because the training was tracked manually on a plant-to-plant basis, it was hard to even identify what the variations were,” says McGuire. “Adopting a standardized tracking system would make those variations more readily visible to training administrators who could then better understand where the variations exist and what counter measures they could take to start working toward a standard process.”

To adopt a standards-based platform, General Mills needed to retire the variety of independent learning management systems it was maintaining and move to one consistent global system. “Given that we already use SAP software as the primary system for our human resources (HR) data, we determined that we would go with

SAP Enterprise Learning and benefit from the integration capabilities and lower total cost of ownership the solution offers,” says Robin Ritter, Field Manufacturing HR Director for about half of General Mills’ North American plants. Previously, Ritter was HR Director of Talent and Learning Systems for the company and was personally involved throughout the SAP Enterprise Learning project.

This project was a three-year endeavor that started in the summer of 2009 and involved a phased rollout of the learning solution to the various areas of the company. The supply chain organization started the implementation in the summer of 2010 and rolled out the solution to the manufacturing plants by the spring of 2011.

Through the solution’s intuitive web-based interface, supply chain employees can now register for online classes or hands-on instruction and take online assessments, and training administrators and employees can track and review training history. The manufacturing plants are on the same page regarding the regulatory and safety training their employees must take every month. While these topics change monthly, the learning solution created a way to standardize the topics throughout the plants and how each plant runs the training — whether that is with classroom instruction, pop quizzes, online assessments, management training, or a combination.

In addition to easing training coordination, the learning solution has also helped simplify the compliance

processes for both external and internal requirements by standardizing report creation. “As an organization, we’ve always been very committed to safety and compliance, and with this solution, we are putting even more focus on driving a standardized system for reporting and tracking training compliance both in safety and regulatory operations,” says McGuire. “Rather than have training administrators or HR employees manually gather information by combing through spreadsheets, piles, or handwritten data on sign-in sheets, and forwarding it up the chain, now we have better reporting and a more effective way of tracking training.”

Company Snapshot

General Mills

Headquarters: Minneapolis, Minnesota

Industry: Food manufacturing

Employees: 39,000

Revenue: \$16.7 billion

Company details:

- Provides the number one selling flour in the US, Gold Medal flour, which first became available in 1880
- Sells products in more than 100 countries, with offices or manufacturing facilities in more than 30 countries
- Brands include Yoplait, Nature Valley, Pillsbury, Green Giant, Häagen-Dazs, and more

SAP solutions:

- SAP Enterprise Learning
- hyperCision’s RegLearn solution



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— **RON MCGUIRE**, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, GENERAL MILLS

However, as the rollout progressed and employees began using the learning solution to register for training courses, the supply chain organization realized that the system out of the box wouldn't fulfill certain business necessities — most importantly, the need for greater flexibility in the tracking of job requirements and certifications. To fulfill this need, General Mills turned to SAP partner hyperCision, with which the business was already working as the systems integrator on the SAP Enterprise Learning project.

The Need for Tracking Employee Qualifications and Certifications

“Because of the unique learning requirements in a manufacturing environment, General Mills needed a solution that could track qualifications and even more complex certifications at various levels in different plants across the supply chain,” says Ritter. For example, machine operators need to complete multiple training requirements to achieve certain certifications before working with particular pieces of equipment. Someone who operates a food processing machine will have separate qualifications from employees who work in the packaging department.

Previously, each plant had its own process for tracking these employee qualifications. Some plants, depending on the department, required employees to be qualified on two different manufacturing lines at the same time. With employees working in individual spreadsheets or databases, and with no way to pull the information together and share it across the various plants, it was difficult for training administrators and managers to track how many people were qualified for what positions and the status of employee certifications.

The implementation team learned about hyperCision's SAP-certified add-on solution, RegLearn, and believed this technology could be the answer. “With the functionality this solution provides, we can easily define and maintain the requirements for each job role and set qualifications for what knowledge and skills an employee needs to perform the duties of that particular job. We can track qualifications with a process we call ‘job task analysis,’ and then effectively model the behavior with a hands-on demonstration that we can check,” says McGuire. “We want people to demonstrate that they know how to perform the job duties before we put them on the line, and the on-the-job training checklist

functionality will help get us to a standard so that is happening at the same levels at every plant.”

In addition to simplifying the maintenance of learning requirements for each individual's job role, the enhancements the add-on solution brings to the learning system's portal interface make it easy for learners to review their specific requirements and any mandatory training. Within the same window, they can click to immediately start an online class, register for an upcoming in-person class or hands-on demonstration, and review their training history to see if any required training is overdue. (Refer to the sidebar at the end of the article for more information about hyperCision's RegLearn solution.)

Rolling Out the SAP Add-On

In February of 2012, General Mills started a pilot project to implement RegLearn at four manufacturing plants. “While we are committed to eventually deploy the solution to all of our North American manufacturing plants, right now, we are in the learning stage for these four lead plants,” says McGuire. “First, we want to make sure we fully understand how the solution supports our business at these plants and we get the structure and architecture of the system right before we deploy across the company.”

Each rollout took about two days, according to Kim Cook, Technology Coordinator at General Mills, who was in charge of the technical implementation of the RegLearn solution as well as the overall training for SAP Enterprise Learning for the supply chain. Because training managers would become the point-of-use people for the solutions, they were heavily involved and offered key learnings throughout the implementation process.

“We travelled to each plant and after the first go-live, we brought someone who had been part of the pilot process to come with us so we could have that expertise in the room,” Cook says. “We found this method worked best — doing a live implementation on RegLearn and then teaching the future users as we went along working with their data.”

The implementation team placed heavy emphasis on pre-planning. Each facility was asked to pick a training plan for one topical area that was important to that particular plant to implement into the learning management system. The four areas the facilities selected were operations, autonomous maintenance (a continuous improvement process that ties into operations), safety, and onboarding. “We are continuing to grow these focus

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areas this year and making sure we have good standards in place so that when we start bringing on more plants, we can use what those facilities have done as a guide,” Cook says.

The team designed a spreadsheet template for the plants to use when outlining the training plans and the requirements necessary to support the plans, such as mandatory classes or any other type of one-off training. “When we come out to the plants for the two-day implementation with that strong model built, we can simply take that information right off the spreadsheets and load it into the learning management system,” says Cook. “We still have to get the content cleaned up, so our new focus will be ensuring we have a solid structure and good performance in our software before we continue with the rollout.”

What Standardized Training Means for General Mills

For General Mills, standardized corporate training has resulted in impressive benefits. First, it has built stronger total employee engagement across the organization. “Our employees are now more involved in making their own decisions and understanding what they need to do for their own development, or what the business requires of their particular organization or business unit,” McGuire says. “Learners now have an enhanced window into their development, knowledge, and skills requirements to support their capability development into the future.”

Uniform corporate training across the supply chain has also created more flexibility in how data can be sliced and diced and made available to senior leadership, who can then make better decisions

about employee capability development. “The big piece for us was to focus on creating uniformity in how we develop the capabilities of our people,” McGuire says. “And now we have more insight into what the knowledge and skills expectations are for our employees — not only the base skills needed to start performing a job, but also what they need to do developmentally to grow their capability over the next 12-18 months.”

In addition, having standards in place for training has been a good driver for better quality content because it forces training managers to look at their current training programs and figure out what they need to fix before putting the data into the learning system. “Our managers and training administrators can be more efficient and effective and make more-informed decisions because they have better access to information now that it’s all in one place,” McGuire says.

Finally, the organization is now able to gain insight into what the future workforce may look like and if the right skills are in place for anticipated business requirements. “We now can have conversations at the plant level around our manufacturing business processes and requirements that we previously haven’t had because we’ve had to dig through what skills we want our employees to have in weeks, months, or years from now,” he says. “The combination of the learning solution for tracking training and signing up for courses, and the RegLearn functionality for combining those courses into qualifications and certifications for certain learner groups, has helped us get that information reported up to the various decision makers in our organization in a timely manner.” ■

Snapshot of RegLearn: hyperCision’s SAP-Certified Add-On Solution

The streamlined methodology that hyperCision employed at General Mills involved the client in as many stages of the RegLearn implementation as possible. This approach enabled the development of a strong knowledgebase within the client at an early stage of the project and optimized the utilization of the system after go-live.

RegLearn met 90% of General Mills’ requirements out of the box, and hyperCision provided development and configuration support wherever required to address the remainder. Furthermore, hyperCision followed its customary approach of incorporating all enhancements performed for the client into the standard RegLearn solution for use by the larger SAP customer community.

The RegLearn solution features:

- **RegLearn certifications** to efficiently enforce individual compliance with a series of training requirements
- **Learner groups** to enable absolute flexibility in defining specific target audiences for training
- **Structured on-the-job training** to define and assess training outside the classroom
- **Learner portal enhancements** to give learners a simplified, prioritized view of their entire training plan
- **External learning** to allow employees to update their training history with external courses taken on their own time
- **Revision tool** to automate course version management and notify learners when learning content has been updated
- **Enhanced follow-up** to enter and report on paper-based test scores
- **Validity period enhancements** to control the initial timing and expiration of training requirements
- **Roster tool** to easily perform mass loads of training completion data after the fact
- **Additional reports and training metrics** to make it simple to track training compliance

For more information about RegLearn, visit hypercision.com.

