

The Journey from Big Corporation to Consultant

From a Belt's point of view, one of the great things about Lean Six Sigma (LSS) techniques is that they can be applied to any situation.

Lean Six Sigma Application

You do not have to be an expert in the processes or even the industry in which you lead an improvement project; indeed, it can often help if you're not.

Yes, a little bit of background knowledge might give you some credibility in the eyes of the people involved in the project, but if you already have an intricate understanding of the process, you risk not asking enough challenging questions about why things are the way they are.

Those challenging questions might hold the key to a significant improvement.



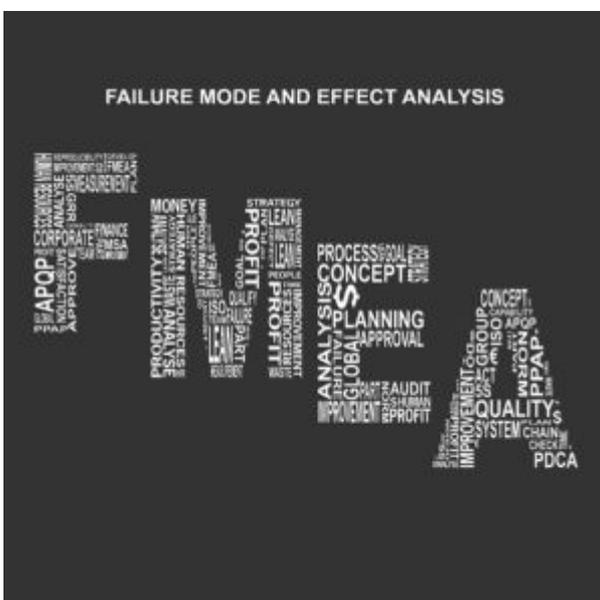
Convincing everyone that you're the LSS expert

Of course, what you do need to be an expert in, and convince everyone else you're an expert in too, is LSS methodology.

A Black Belt certificate is all very well, it demonstrates on paper that you have the ability to use improvement techniques to deliver real benefits to an organisation, but what actually matters when faced with a team of people who have a problem and are anxious for you to explain how they can solve it is whether you can demonstrate that in person.

This is where the "all rounder" nature of a Lean Six Sigma Belt role comes into play. You may well be comfortable performing a complex statistical analysis, or able to recite the headings at the top of an FMEA with your eyes closed, but how good are you at quickly forming positive, friendly working relationships?

You need to be able to do all three!



The journey from big corporation to consultant

When I moved from a large multinational corporation into a Management Consultancy role, it became clear to me that forming those relationships can vary a great deal depending on the circumstances.

Throughout my time running LSS projects in a big company, the relationship I had with project sponsors and team members was very different to now.

There were two main reasons for that, firstly although we worked for the same company, they may not have known me. However, on a positive note this did mean we had a lot in common and ultimately had the same goals.

Secondly, the people I worked with, although not always entirely welcoming and pleased I was there, knew they had no choice. Someone, somewhere higher up the organisation, had taken the decision that change was needed, and they knew they had to work with me to deliver it.

This type of relationship, where there are common goals and a common understanding of why improvement is necessary, is very different to working as a Consultant. I remember an early assignment of mine for Bourton Group, with a company where it was clear that not everyone was in agreement on the need to have us there at all.

While senior people in the organisation had committed a lot of time and resources to enable the smooth operation of our project, I eventually realised that the main goal of the sponsor of my sub-project was to avoid me recommending any changes at all!

Navigating my way through that situation, especially as there was very clearly significant improvement opportunities, was a baptism of fire from a consulting point of view, and not something which was covered on my Black Belt course. I made it though, and left the organisation with improvement recommendations in excess of £5 million, to date the biggest individual benefit I can attribute to any project I've done.

Conclusion

Gaining that acceptance at the beginning of a project is so important because at some point in the improvement process, often after the analyse phase, you can find yourself telling people something they would rather not know. When those same people are paying you a daily rate to be there, you have to be very confident that they will conclude the best course of action is to follow your recommendations, rather than just not have you there anymore.

Bearing this in mind creating presentations for Senior Management has introduced a whole new dynamic to the way I work. I am no longer 'just' a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, I am also a Management Consultant. The two are not contradictory, but it's a merging of two sets of skills similar to a Lean expert learning to use Six Sigma. It is this kind of challenge which continues to make the job so interesting.

I joined Bourton Group following on from a successful career in performance improvement. I am a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt with nine years' experience of leading hard benefit generating projects, across multiple functions of a large organisation. I have delivered numerous Continuous Improvement training courses, and coached colleagues at all stages of the Lean Six Sigma training process.



If you have a question about something in this article, or if you're looking for support with another situation, feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at info@bourton.co.uk.