# Coaching and training versus leading projects

When introducing myself at the start of a training course and explaining my current role, I tend to say my time splits into around 30% training or coaching and 70% leading projects. Shamefully for someone who regularly delivers whole modules on the importance of data integrity, I've never actually checked if that's true, but it feels about right.

Keeping a good balance of the two is very important, as although the two activities are often unconnected, they are dependent on each other.

There are different levels of quality where Lean Six Sigma (LSS) training is concerned, and some examples are:

- Books from which the principles can be learnt
- Online training courses which are interactive but not very personal
- Professional training companies who will deliver some PowerPoint slides on whatever subject you ask them to

The gold standard though, which any company that is serious about LSS deployment should aim for, is being trained by someone who is both a professional trainer and has current experience of using the techniques they are training. This is the balance we try to strike at Bourton Group, and for good reason – we know this is the way our clients will get the most benefit from the investment they are making in their employees.

## For individual consultants this is a challenge

Leading a training course and leading an improvement project are quite different activities, and everyone has their own preference, so it would be tempting to focus on one or the other. We are constantly told by our clients though, that the biggest benefit attendees receive from our training is our ability to bring the theory alive with real and relevant examples.

I don't just talk through the structure of a Lean tool; I also talk about the way people have reacted to different elements in projects. I've adapted techniques to work better in different industries, and real-life implementation examples from environments everyone attending will recognise, whatever their job. I'm only able to do this because the majority of my time is not spent talking about Lean Six Sigma, it's spent using it myself.

## Direct project experience is essential when coaching people too

Coaching usually comes after the training, when either individually or in small groups our client's employees want to discuss application of the techniques they've learnt to their own processes.

This is the point as a trainer it's most critical to demonstrate your own experience as well as knowledge, because you never quite know what you're going to be asked.

## There are no pre-prepared PowerPoint slides to fall back on in a coaching session

Thinking on your feet and knowing afterwards that you have used your own experience to help someone is a great feeling. This is quality time that the person actually running the project could only get from someone who has been in the same position they are and faced the same challenges.

## What about the other way around though? How does experience of delivering training help with leading improvement projects?

The first point is that almost all improvement projects have an element of training within them. Even if it's not a formal training session with an Outlook invitation and a buffet lunch, you still need to ensure everyone on a team understands what waste is and how to spot it if you're going to be facilitating them through the creation of a process map.

All Lean tools are like that – you can't guide people through 5S one 'S' at a time without first giving them an understanding of the whole structure, they won't understand why they're doing it. You don't just need the ability to follow the tools yourself, you need the skills and resources to take everyone else with you. If you're experienced at delivering training this will come naturally.

Delivering training also helps anyone who is going to be leading projects to remain current.

Many Lean techniques can be traced back several decades but are still as relevant to industry now as they ever were. Wider Project Management methodology continues to develop though – ten years ago it was rare to hear words like Agile or Scrum used in a business context, but now they are well embedded in many industries and are beginning to be applied to improvement projects as much as projects generally.

Whether they will have the same impact on Continuous Improvement as Six Sigma had in the 1990s remains to be seen, but the risk to any improvement facilitator who focusses entirely on applying the techniques from their own original training to lead projects, is that over time their clients will begin to expect things they don't offer.

Keeping back a proportion of your time for delivering training forces you to constantly be learning new methods and new ways to communicate the content. It also means you continue to mix with recent graduates with new ideas, it keeps you up to date.



## Conclusion

As has often been observed, the role of a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt is a complicated one to properly fill, the knowledge, qualifications and experience required are quite specific, but the personal characteristics required are very broad.

Maintaining that balance of training and project delivery is a critical part of ensuring that you remain a "good all-rounder", that you're as comfortable with a day of data analysis as you are with a day of facilitating training simulations using post-it notes, brown paper and Lego.

That combination is core to providing your clients with the value they expect when engaging your services as a consultant.

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