

Lean Sigma lessons learned

Six Sigma and Lean Sigma programmes are often viewed as an organisation improvement programme. Organisations are increasingly frustrated with the slow, staid approach which can take months/years to deliver substantial return.

We summarise the key issues we see most often in lean sigma programmes. Each can lead to very costly delays or jeopardise your programme. T-Impact's Agile Lean Sigma approach was specifically designed to address these issues and ensure you achieve quick return on your Lean Sigma investment.

Lesson	Description
Be pragmatic	<p>Build support and address change resistance by delivering first. Engage with senior staff and the broader company when first tangible results are coming in</p> <p>Don't try to sell the benefits based on what other companies have (told you) they have gained</p> <p>Gradually move to a culture of continuous improvement. Don't rush this – cultural change takes time, it also takes effort.</p>
Start small & agile	<p>Don't sign up to a big programme until you and your staff better understand what Lean Sigma is and what your company needs from it, and if you can afford it.</p> <p>Run the work as projects, and run them as fast as possible. Don't take more than a few weeks on the work – the world changes and people get bored waiting for something to happen.</p>
Choose the right project	<p>Think of sensible projects – scope for level 3 processes and focus on real issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't do something that is too big (level 1 or 2) • Don't do a pet hate projects (particularly those suggested by the CEO) • Don't do something that is too small; anything that can be fixed or addressed using a JDI (just do it) approach should be fixed elsewhere • Don't use this as an excuse to list all the things in the office that have not been fixed or sorted. This is just a dumping ground for problems that someone else should be dealing with. • Don't let the focus move from processes – a problem statement should be 'the process of ... does not do / generates errors ...' not 'my problem is I/we don't have...'

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Focus on value	<p>Celebrate the results, the findings, the step change in thinking</p> <p>Don't celebrate quantified savings – that makes it just an accounting exercise</p> <p>Go for something of value in terms of benefits that you can gain from – Revenue generation / hard savings / risk avoidance / soft savings / future cost avoidance.</p> <p>Don't just focus on one benefit – hard savings can be hard to bank, and soft savings can have real impact. For a company about to grow, benefit can be in terms of making processes scalable and avoiding a doubling of heads beyond the simple scaling.</p>
Avoid lean for lean's sake	<p>Ensure your focus is on what Six Sigma / Lean Sigma can deliver, and where you are going to go after that</p> <p>Don't make the focus just on getting Lean Sigma in to your company – no company ever needed Lean Sigma, but rather the results Lean Sigma brings</p>
Staff utilisation	<p>Don't try to improve a process part time as an extra to someone's normal job. It takes momentum and effort to get the work done. Provide staff with time to participate in work shops and analysis. Provide temporary cover or back fill staff for large projects. Ensure your LSS consultant has effective time management tools to minimise impact on staff.</p> <p>Use staff part time. Don't sign staff up to a major and unknown career change by asking for volunteers to become 'full time' Black Belts</p> <p>Ensure you transfer skills, particularly when using an external consultancy. Don't let contractors do the work, don't let BBs do the work – ensure that everyone is involved; the 'grass roots' will pick up the concepts and often get very excited and will take something of the tools and the approach back to their work.</p> <p>Your staff don't need to be six sigma green belts to understand the process and take over continuous improvement.</p>
Tools	<p>Use a collaborative process mapping tool to capture and document your process. The best ones (such as IBM Lombardi Blue Works Live) are offered as Software as a Services (SaaS) and only cost a few hundred pounds per project</p> <p>Don't use Visio (PLEASE!!!) – issues of consistency, ownership and configuration management are always under estimated. These can add substantial effort to your project</p> <p>Brown paper is now very old fashioned – process mapping tools accelerates your projects and enables you to keep the momentum</p>
Keep it real	<p>Capture the real process</p> <p>Don't let managers write the 'what we think it is process' because it never works like that on the shop floor. Always go to the Gemba!</p>