

Case Study

Trelleborg Sealing Solutions



Training and Support for a Global Deployment of Manufacturing Excellence

Faced with a difficult economic climate and a reduction in sales, training is often one of the first areas to be cut. Trelleborg Sealing Solutions (TSS) decided to press ahead with a global deployment of Manufacturing Excellence with the objective of improving plant efficiencies and customer service. The challenge was to devise a programme that would achieve the objectives quickly and cost effectively.

Requirements

TSS, as part of the Trelleborg Group, employs over 4,000 people in 22 sites across 4 continents. The company has two Business Units, Elastomers and Engineered Products. Both Business Units had existing improvement initiatives, but were at different stages of development, and each recognized that a fresh impetus was required to ensure that further improvements could be made, and a sustainable approach to improvement created.

TSS sought a partner that could deliver training across the world, at all levels from the board to practitioners, and support them with advice and consultancy. The brief was to come up with a consistent message to all levels in both Business Units, ensure that management were involved and aligned, and that improvement activity on each site supported strategic goals and delivered a clear return on investment.

Objectives

TSS decided that the programme theme would be Manufacturing Excellence, a Trelleborg Group objective. It needed to draw on Lean and Six Sigma methods, and include elements of change management. TSS chose SigmaPro because of their global capability and experience with Lean, Six Sigma and Management of Change, together with a proven return on investment.

“The first phase delivered just over £1m in savings, an excellent performance during the difficult economic climate. Not only did the programme yield substantial financial benefits, but TSS now has 19 trained Black Belts that have the skills to continue to drive high level improvements across the organisation.”



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The Approach

Four key stages of work were planned

1. Assess the organisation
2. Prepare by obtaining director level support
3. Involve and train Senior Management
4. Train practitioners and carry out improvement projects

The assessment was completed using internet and telephone surveys and some face-to-face discussions as this was a more cost effective way of obtaining data across a number of sites and countries. A workshop for Senior Directors was held to discuss the assessment, agree a vision for the programme and develop an outline plan.

Product and Development Director for TSS, Jan Martin Hansen, had identified that one of the critical success factors was the involvement and commitment of senior and middle management. A series of workshops were held in which 63 managers from across the world came up with plans for implementing manufacturing excellence on their own sites. Each team identified key strategic products and improvement needs, driven by market and customer requirements. SigmaPro consultants provided support to ensure there was a detailed plan for improvement for each TSS site. Support was provided across 18 sites, in countries including Sweden, Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Malta, Denmark, USA and the UK.

Following the creation of the site development plans, improvement leaders (Black Belts) were chosen and over a 6 month period, training was given to them and the first phase of projects completed. The training contained a combination of Lean and Six Sigma methods, to enable a wide range of projects to be tackled. The participants also went through an intensive session on managing change and building high performance teams to help them to implement changes quickly.

SigmaPro provided support during the programme using a combination of site visits and interactive web conferencing. The innovative web conferencing solution was chosen to enable support to be provided when required in small amounts with zero travelling time and cost. The support was rated as 90% as good as face-to-face by the Belts with a huge advantage in cost and time.

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The Results

The first phase delivered over £1m in savings, but not only did the programme yield substantial financial benefits, TSS now has a group of trained Black Belts that have the skills to continue to drive improvement across the organisation.

“Although both Business Units had improvement initiatives before, there were different approaches and we wanted a consistent approach....” said Jan Martin Hansen, *“this programme has given us that, with the benefits of economy of scale. Prior to the programme we were making improvements, but the programme has given us greater ability to tackle a wide range of improvement challenges”*

To run the programme in a difficult economic climate was a difficult decision to make, but it has proved to be the correct one. Belief in the approach was an important factor, as was the involvement of senior and middle management. The innovative approach to project support has been a great success, and has now been used in other programmes.

Next Steps

The programme overall has been a success, with a clear return on investment, and the creation of a group of Belts who are now making further improvements on their own. Was there anything that could have been done better?

“There was some feeling initially that the Directors were being asked to make a decision between Lean and Six Sigma approaches” says Chris Rees, Director of Operations for SigmaPro, *“when in fact what was being proposed was the combination of the two. We could have moved even faster if the initial message had been clearer”*.

Improvement is continuing across both Business Units, with further projects now well underway. TSS is now starting to train Green and Yellow Belts using a Manufacturing Excellence curriculum developed in conjunction with SigmaPro. Four UK sites are trialling the first training wave. Further training is planned across other countries, helping to create a sustainable approach to improvement. TSS is also promoting the use of the same approach across other parts of the Trelleborg Group.