

The Difference Between Black Belt and Black Belt

By Dr Uwe H Kaufmann

Six Sigma has been developed 20 years ago and fine-tuned by many companies since then. However, there is no ISO standard or something similar guiding the deployment or regulating the certification of the key players, Green Belts or Black Belts. There is only one key requirement that helps distinguish between success and failure: business results.

The easiest task in the journey to deploying Six Sigma or similarly Lean Six Sigma is the training of Green Belts and Black Belts. Many training companies have discovered this gold mine and produce hundreds of Belts every year. For small money, nearly everyone can attend twenty 3-hour evening sessions led by trainers who have hardly run any projects to become a Green Belt including certificate. Taking this certificate, attaching it to the CV and going for the next job application is a question of days.

So, what is wrong about this? Basically nothing until a company considers hiring this kind of Black Belt for deployment of Lean Six Sigma.

Would you consider entrusting your beloved car to someone who has just read about driving? Probably not. Why would you put the success or failure of a much more complex task like Lean Six Sigma in the hands of someone who has just learned to spell SIPOC? As the driver has to go through certain procedures, has to pass theoretical and practical examinations and has to prove he is up to the task, Black Belts have to do the same.

In order to become a Black Belt who can add value to your company as such, he has to go through proper training that is put to use on and accompanied by project work. Training is usually completed with an exam often consisting of multiple-choice questions. Project work includes leading a team and coaching team members through the application of the DMAIC methodology by selecting and applying the appropriate tools. Project work is finished when sustainability of process or product change as well as financial impact of the project are confirmed by Master Black Belt or CFO respectively. Black Belt Certification will be granted after completing two such projects.

Remember, when you consider hiring a Black Belt, don't only ask for the Certificate. He will most likely be able to show one. Ask for the projects he or she has led, for the problems solved and for the financial impact of these projects. Best would still be: ask for a reference.

About the Author

Dr Uwe H Kaufmann is the Singapore-based Managing Director of Centre for Organisational Effectiveness Pte Ltd. He has extensive experience in implementing process and organisation improvements for various industries. He specialises in Lean Six Sigma, DFSS Process Design, BPR and Strategy Implementation. He received his Six Sigma Master Black Belt qualification with GE Capital. Uwe is a German national and can be reached at Uwe.Kaufmann@COE-Partners.com.