

Driving Six Sigma Success

INTERACTION ASSOCIATES EQUIPS A HIGH-TECH LEADER FOR SUSTAINED SIX SIGMA SUCCESS

SITUATION

In late 2000, a global high-tech company found itself at a crossroads. It had plenty of money in the bank, and its products and services were considered to be among the finest in the industry. However, the tech bubble was beginning to burst, and the organization was feeling the impact: share prices were declining, revenues were disappointing, and competition was fierce.

The organization set “Execution” as its highest priority. Recognizing that it had difficulty measuring the scope of its problems and the effectiveness of its solutions – and that addressing this difficulty could dramatically improve its success – the organization launched a Six Sigma initiative.

SOLUTION

At the outset of its Six Sigma initiative, the company set three high-level goals:

- To improve business processes,
- To create a more customer-centric organization, and
- To incorporate data collection and analysis into decision-making processes.

Within nine months of establishing these objectives, the company had built a project-definition and problem-solving methodology, started promoting the importance of the Six Sigma initiative, and identified development requirements.

To successfully lead a Six Sigma project team, the company’s Green, Black, and Master Black Belts had to be trained in Six Sigma methodology and change management methodology. The company created a curriculum and began training Green, Black, and Master Black Belts in these areas.


But before long, the company became aware of a significant gap in the Six Sigma curriculum. Consultant Jacintha Sayed notes, “Like many organizations, they were experiencing problems in executing Six Sigma – things like increased project cycle time, sub-optimal solutions, and ineffective project leadership.”

Since Six Sigma work relies heavily on what happens in cross-functional teams, it became clear Belts would require group problem solving and group process management skills to make their teams work. The company realized it must equip Green, Black, and Master Black Belts with a full collaboration toolkit to reach its aggressive goals.

The company identified Interaction Associates as the best partner to train project team leaders in this critical skill set, and selected Interaction Associates’ *Essential Facilitation*® workshop as the preferred delivery method.

vital statistics

- **A global leader in products and services that power the Internet**
- **More than 35,000 employees in 137 countries**
- **Member of the Fortune e-50 and one of Fortune’s “Top 100 Companies to Work For”**

 **Interaction Associates** IA is a 40-year firm specializing in the development of Facilitative Leaders. We equip these leaders to solve complex problems and achieve extraordinary results by leveraging the power of people working together. Since 1969, we have partnered with global leaders across all industries, and many of the Fortune 100, to transform the way people lead, and are led, at every level in an organization.

case study

Essential Facilitation® was already being conducted inside the organization's system with demonstrated success.

The *Essential Facilitation*® workshop equips participants with a suite of powerful skills and practices. They learn how to:

- plan and run effective meetings, both face-to-face and virtual,
- facilitate challenging or conflict-laden conversations,
- identify and separate stages of decision-making for better outcomes,
- listen and inquire thoughtfully,
- gain full involvement from all participants,
- navigate complex, multi-layered discussions,
- use an affinity diagram to ascertain the root causes of a problem,
- sort out appropriate participant roles for maximum effectiveness, and
- manage conflicting agendas and positions.

The workshop provides participants with multiple tools and strategies to help Six Sigma teams make smarter decisions, more quickly, with appropriate involvement and improved follow-through.

Interaction Associates consultant and Six Sigma expert Jacintha Sayed explains the importance of these skills to a Six Sigma project team leader: "Understanding the Six Sigma methodology is just one part of the Green, Black, or Master Black Belts' jobs. Their abilities to motivate people to come to their meetings, and facilitate productive discussion, are critical to the success of a project."

Essential Facilitation® also teaches how to move from being content experts to process experts when it's most beneficial. Often, Green, Black, and Master Belts can be most effective by allowing team members to be the subject-matter experts. Keith O'Hara*, a company Black Belt, remarks, "It can be tempting to offer an opinion on the right way to do something, but helping the team tap into its knowledge and use its collective experience to arrive at a solution is a far more valuable contribution in the long term." Charlie Foster*, another Black Belt, adds, "*Essential Facilitation*® helped me understand that my role as a team leader isn't to judge the solutions the team proposes. I'm there to facilitate conversations among team members so they can reach an informed decision."

RETURN ON INVOLVEMENT

One of the most useful collaborative problem-solving methods participants learn in the *Essential Facilitation*® workshop is the "open, narrow, close" process. This tool provides a framework for guiding the group through the phases of perception, definition, and analysis of problems. It also helps teams generate alternative solutions to a problem, evaluate them, and decide which solution to implement.

Charlie notes, "This process has been invaluable in helping us scope projects and measure results more effectively. We used to move too quickly to decision and implementation. We were always good at the 'close' component of process improvement, probably because we didn't spend enough time on the other two steps. Today, we're much better at picking the right projects and scoping them. We are moving forward more productively and managing change better, too."

Charlie notes the teams have improved members' skills in problem identification. "You have to be able to facilitate drilling down to what the problem is before you can implement a solution," he says.

Finally, *Essential Facilitation*® skills help the teams encourage and drive employee willingness to implement the teams' solutions. "People become enamored of, or intimidated by, the statistics. But so much of a project's success is based on employees accepting the solution. If an idea can be built out of acceptance, there is a better chance for successful implementation."

Keith adds, "For people to understand change, they have to participate in it. We now have the skills to help make that happen."

*The identities of the company's employees have been changed to protect their privacy.