

Lean Certification Helps to Make Achievements Sustainable

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The best Lean professionals performing strategically suited Lean activities, resulting in a continuously flowing stream of significant improvements. That's the vision most companies have for their Lean implementation. A well suited certification system greatly helps to achieve and sustain this vision.

While implementing Lean in every aspect of the company is the key to success, Lean manufacturing is most often the area that receives all the attention. But why have short lived success in a Lean manufacturing plant, while engineering, customer service, and administrative functions are in a state of wasteful, disorganized chaos? You may be able to produce products but are your customers satisfied with quality, timeliness and the support you offer? Are all of your employees working at 100% and taking the initiative to continuously improve their working environment and standards?

One of the most difficult questions in the Lean Journey for any business is where do we start? Can you already see areas or people that will be resistant to change? Once Lean Management is accepted, does your company have what it takes to consistently maintain and improve it?

Anyone can go to a Lean training class, but does the rest of the company really benefit from this with solid core changes being made and the ability to implement continuous improvement? Employees come and go taking their knowledge with them. Having Lean Management firmly in place is essential to maintaining core company values. Lean Management is an organizational culture change that needs to be driven from top to bottom and implemented from the bottom up. Therefore, establishing Lean standards are the foundation for any business. These standards define a common business language

which is required to cost-effectively enable business process integration between systems, both inside an organization and across the value chain. With an established Lean standard, businesses gain greater confidence in their project choices and their ability to exceed common expectations.

Enter three professional organizations, forming an alliance to establish the standard for continuous improvement and Lean practices – the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME), the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME), and the Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing. Before the launch of this industry-leading Lean Certification program in 2006, the industry lacked a true consistent standard for Lean professional development and credentialing. Each program functioned independently, leaving organizations with the difficult task of determining whether their current and newly hired employee's knowledge and skills fit their Lean practices. These leading organizations brought industry together to create a rigorous Lean Certification program that Lean-oriented companies and individuals recognize as comprehensive, timely, and effective. In 2010, the American Society for Quality (ASQ) joined this collaborative alliance, which truly aligns these leading organizations to a single standard for Lean certification, providing manufacturers and their supply chains with a roadmap for workforce development. This Lean program, recognized by the logo shown in Figure 1, is the benchmark for achievements and personal growth in Lean.



Figure 1: ME/AME/ASQ/Shingo Prize Lean Certification Logo

Multiple certification levels are available based on key applications – tactical, integrative and strategic (Fig. 2). As companies seek resources for improvement projects, they can quickly and confidently select the right Lean professional based on their specific business requirements. Companies can now have a clear understanding of the capability of their resources. By effectively using these resources, they can confidently attain their Lean goals faster and more efficiently. The Lean Certification program provides the opportunity for significant training and development for both individuals and companies. Individuals begin at the tactical level (Bronze). As their career progresses, candidates build upon their professional

knowledge and skill set while also advancing within the Lean Certification program. Companies have the same option to develop their employees using the Lean Certification structure as their guide.

Mentoring is a fundamental part of the certification program. As certification candidates progress, they are encouraged to mentor or coach others. This sharing of knowledge helps to mold new Lean experts with a clear understanding of the industry standard. This unique and distinguishing feature reinforces the alignment of Lean principles (Fig. 2).

The Lean Certification program comprises Bronze, Silver and Gold levels to represent the growing achievement by Lean practitioners. Starting with the tactical nature of the Bronze level, candidates build their way to Silver and then Gold as they learn and gain additional experiences. Individuals or companies can set the pace at which progression develops. All certification candidates must complete the requirements of each level before they progress to the next level. The progression model shows how each certification builds upon the development achieved in the previous certification. The Bronze Certification level evaluates a person's TACTICAL Lean experience. Attaining Lean Bronze Certifica-

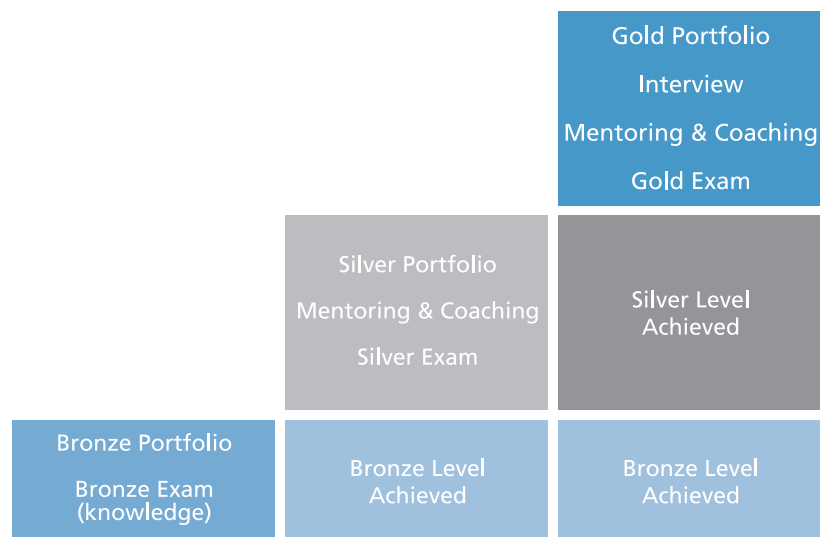


Figure 2: Structure of the SME/AME / ASQ/Shingo Prize Certificate Family

tion shows that candidates possess a solid understanding of Lean principles and tools. They are able to tactically implement Lean to drive improvements and show measurable results. They deploy and apply Lean principles, concepts, and methods locally within a work cell, work group, or value stream. In addition, they are expected to teach the basic tools of Lean. This is the starting point for every certification candidate. Every candidate must complete the Bronze-level requirements before progressing to the next level. Achieving certification in each level consists of 2 phases.

Phase I – Exam

The examination is the beginning phase in the certification process. Exam content is linked to a specific body of knowledge. Candidates pursuing Lean Bronze Certification are expected to successfully pass the approximately 170-question, 3-hour open-book exam before moving to the portfolio phase.

Phase II – Portfolio Development

Lean Certification candidates continually exercise their Lean knowledge by participating in activities in which they apply Lean principles and tools. At the Bronze-Level, practitioners demonstrate their experience through the development of their Lean portfolio. In the portfolio, using the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, candidates provide summary documentation of their best Lean events, projects, and activities completed, in addition to the results and an overall reflection of their work. The portfolio is reviewed by peers who are Lean Certified. This important phase highlights the peer-to-peer development inherent in the program.

Success has to be planned and earned. Lean Management that is strategically driven by standardized Certifications ensures success through focus, structure, discipline, and ownership. The SME / AME / ASQ / Shingo Prize Lean Certification family provides an ideal tool to support it. More information can be found at www.actlean.org/leancert

General Requirements to Qualify for the Lean Bronze Certificate

- Successful completion of the exam
- Education, training & development requirements
- 5 tactical Lean projects and a portfolio reflection that passes peer review

Lean Certification Value for Companies and Individuals

Lean Certificates can help companies to

- Support a clear understanding of the capabilities of their resources
- Structure their Lean training efforts and provide systematic training
- Provide systematic mentoring and develop their own internal Lean experts
- Standardize Lean practices within their organizations, regardless of size or industry

As an individual, Lean certifications are beneficial to

- Develop career planning milestones
- Gain a portable career credential
- Share and gain Lean knowledge through mentoring others
- Align to the Lean knowledge and competency standard
- Attain abilities recognized across the industry

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