

AB Agri - Adam Grimwood



Following the completion of the latest Improvement Apprenticeship cohort at AB Agri, we caught up with Adam Grimwood, Head of Performance Improvement, Manufacturing and Supply Chain. Adam kindly gave us an insight into the changes he noticed in the apprentices, the support they received from CQM and what they can expect going forward at AB Agri.

Adam, what has been the biggest behavioural change you have seen in the group from doing these apprenticeships?

I would say taking more time to understand the problem/opportunity at the beginning and not working from a basic requirement statement. This has helped ensure that they implement sustainable solutions not just the obvious ones that quite often only meet the short to medium term improvements.

How has Ian and the wider CQM team supported the group in achieving their distinctions?

The supportive coaching element of the apprenticeship is key to the success of the cohort. The tailored approach that the CQM applied for each individual was key to empowering the individuals to get the highest grade possible.

What can the group of learners expect now they've completed their apprenticeships, in terms of using the tools and techniques learned going forward?

We see this group of individuals as role models in demonstrating the value of these tools and techniques in driving improvement across AB Agri. Taking their experience and learnings onto other teams and individuals as part of our journey to create an improvement culture.

Post the apprenticeship each cohort member has access to coaches, mentors & necessary tools, with full engagement from their line managers in continuing the application of the tools and techniques. They will be encouraged to not only apply these tools within their department, but also to support broader improvement activity across AB Agri with the benefit of broadening their networks and demonstrating the value of continuous improvement.



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Case Study: AB Agri - Lee Topping



During the post-graduation celebration at AB Agri, we caught up with Lee Topping, Senior Purchase Ledger, who gave us an insight into why he chose the Improvement Practitioner Level 4 (Green Belt) apprenticeship and his project which saved 35 administration days per year.

Lee, why did you choose this apprenticeship?

I have worked in the purchase ledger department for around 12 years, and after undertaking CQM's 2-day lean awareness training I asked to go onto a higher level as I found it very interesting and beneficial. Since I have completed my apprenticeship, I feel that my job role has evolved into running projects and working with other students on their projects too. I am keen to use the skills I have learned so it was the right choice.

Tell us about your project

My project was around a data collection spreadsheet that was passed onto another colleague to complete their task. The work involved was taking around 1.5 hours a day to complete, so ultimately the aim was to make this much quicker and more efficient. I chose to undertake this project because my day-to-day role involved something remarkably similar, and it was a real pain point.



What was the project outcomes?

As a result of the time it was taking, it also was not always input every day, this therefore meant the data could be patchy. Working with our IT department we created some internal software that automatically collected the data and distributed it via email to the people who needed it when they needed it.

The overall impact has been reduced from 1.5 hours a day to 30 seconds of opening an email. This has saved approximately **35 days overall of administration a year representing a considerable time saving and associated cost thanks to a much leaner, automated process.**

What has been your key takeaway?

Lean Six Sigma has changed my entire outlook on my job, it has highlighted areas that needed working on and it has made everything much more efficient. I am not the same person that I was before this apprenticeship. I feel much stronger about and confident in my work. I am simply a better version of myself after doing the course.

I am also helping my wife with her data analysis apprenticeship outside of AB Agri, using to methods I have been taught such as root cause analysis. So, this apprenticeship has really helped on a personal level too and I look forward to progressing onto an even higher level in future.

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Case Study: AB Agri - Jack Gunn



During the post-graduation celebration at AB Agri, we caught up with Jack Gunn, PMO Lead, who explained how he carried out his project for the Improvement Practitioner Level 4 (Green Belt) apprenticeship.

Jack, tell us a bit about your project

My project was to assist the Premier Nutrition planning team in trying to optimise their stock take process through understanding the root cause(s) of what was causing delays or errors and come up with viable and affordable solutions

I began by going to the factory to assess the situation and by working with the onsite expertise, decide on how we could improve the process. We proceeded through a lot of trial and error and concluded that we needed to implement some new hardware and software. We anticipated that implementing the solution would almost pay back the cost of the project in the first 6 months.

We also knew that this solution would cut down on time because the current process was being completed on overtime shifts, so we would be able to cut back on this and cover this in a normal working day.

How did your project change?

We have since put a temporary pause on the project to review the implementation of a new ERP warehouse management system at this site which would supersede what I am working on. However, the project is still there with all the trials ready to go, and even if we do not proceed with the proposed change, it has been great to be able to use the tools and techniques and give the site a second option to use if necessary.

How did your project change? (cont.)

Through undertaking this project, we were able to identify the root cause and put an action plan in place to implement an appropriate solution, to resolve the inefficiencies.

How have you found working with other departments?

It has been welcoming because they suspected something was wrong but was not sure how best to approach. This allowed me to go into the site with an open mind and stick to the principles of Lean Six Sigma, and as time went on and they started to understand how I was going about the improvements, they began to input their own ideas, which was nice to see.

I shared and showed them the methodology and explained if they want to get to the root cause just keep asking why. After a brief time, they began to understand the way to reach the root cause. This really made them stop and think.

Any final comments?

I think the apprenticeship has been great. I have loved working with Ian Hayhurst, the Development Coach, he has really stuck with us and stayed patient and calm. I think the skills you learn and the methodology behind finding the route cause to an issue is key when it comes to improvements.

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Case Study: AB Agri - Adam Mitcham



During the post-graduation celebration at AB Agri, we caught up with Adam Mitcham, Global Dairy Financial Controller, who transferred during his Improvement Practitioner Level 4 (Green Belt) apprenticeship. He explained how he found this and tells us about his project.

Adam, tell us about your project?

My project revolved around one aspect of my role at AB Agri, which was overseeing the bank accounts and by extension the completion of supplier payments through the banks. Up until my project this was an extremely manual task with a significant number of our payments being cross border payments which added a layer of complexity. As this was a very manual process this would be one person's **main priority for 2.5 days a week** to make sure these payments were processed.

The idea for my project was to look for software that could offer an automated solution for this task. This would be able to save on time and ensure greater accuracy in our payments which would allow the team to **focus on more value-add tasks**. As we began to investigate this, we noticed that quite a few options became available, and thanks to the tools I had been learning whilst on the apprenticeship, it gave me the mindset to assess information in detail and not assume I knew the answer.

Originally the idea we had was to develop the software ourselves, however after looking at all the angles of the project we quickly realised that we could leverage an existing relationship to utilise software that already exists. This international payment software was recently developed by the third party and is linked to a domestic payment software that we had already implemented which allowed us to utilise a lot of previously created and generated documentation.

How did you find the transfer to ABF?

I have been in ABF for just over 3 years, however while I was studying my apprenticeship, I moved to our sister company within ABF, Westmill Foods. I had to balance the apprenticeship while also trying to understand and learn my new role.

At first, I thought this was going to be a challenging task but with the support I received from my line manager and Ian Hayhurst from CQM, I managed to balance all workload and apprenticeship well. During this time, I made sure that I had a plan in place to catch up if I fell behind. This was focussed around making sure I did not set myself unachievable time frames and used catch ups with my mentor to monitor my progress.

How was Lean Six Sigma relevant to your role?

Lean Six Sigma is often overlooked as a qualification that is predominantly more helpful in a manufacturing environment, which could not be further from me in a finance role. What I found is that it offers a great framework to bring a structure into our projects and deliver the best outcome for our projects, but it is also a very flexible style of working and you can pick the relevant tools from Six Sigma that will benefit your project.

Ensuring that you have good support links in place between a good tutor like Ian and a supportive manager and an effective mentor really makes all the difference in helping to drive progress in your apprenticeship.

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Case Study: AB Agri - Shelley Robinson



During the post-graduation celebration at AB Agri, we caught up with Shelley Robinson, Central Finance Transformation Manager, who shared how she carried out her project for the Improvement Practitioner Level 4 (Green Belt) apprenticeship.

How have you found working across departments?

They have been good, during my apprenticeship I ran a few workshops which included various stakeholders from across the business, I quickly realised this process was a pain for everyone involved so they were all on board with improving the process as everyone had something to gain from it.

What are your overall thoughts on Lean Six Sigma?

I think it's often just related to manufacturing processes but what I have learned is it can be applied to any process in any environment, it's a very logical approach to improving performance, by breaking down the process and analysing the areas of waste but also using the tools to find and test out different solutions, I am now using the Lean Six Sigma methodology in all my projects and I have created a small works project pack using some of the key tools and techniques from LSS for my colleagues in Central Finance to undertake their own projects.

Shelley, tell us about your project?

The project I chose was the new supplier set up process. I carried out some initial analysis on how long the process takes, which showed that for each new supplier it was taking around 2 hours to set them up on the finance system. With around 8-10 new suppliers a day there was a reasonable opportunity to reduce the set up time.

I analysed the process and found that information was missing from the forms, as well as missing approvals. This meant that the team in Central Finance were spending time on getting the forms completed correctly and the missing approvals before performing their actual role of validating the supplier information and creating the supplier Masterfile.

The solution was to create a form that has mandatory fields for users to complete along with an approval workflow to reduce the number of hours that went into this process. After the project was completed, the time required reduced by 75% down to 30 minutes, this time saving allows the team in Central Finance to perform other value adding tasks.



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Case Study: AB Agri - Kelly Grimwood



During the post-graduation celebration at AB Agri, we caught up with Kelly Grimwood, Head of Responsibility Programme Delivery, who talked us through her project for the Improvement Technician Level 3 (Yellow Belt) apprenticeship.

Kelly, tell us about your project

My project was around equine packaging. We have recently had new regulations within the UK that placed a tax on any plastic packaging that didn't contain a minimum of 30% recycled plastic content. This gave us an **opportunity to** work with our suppliers to identify alternative packaging solutions, that enabled us to **improve the packaging we use but also to reduce the tax we would have to pay.**

We decided to focus on our equine facility at Premier Nutrition, where we use a range of plastic packaging for these premium products. We looked at solutions that would enable us to achieve the minimum recycled content limit or to lower the amount of packaging we used in the first place. We worked with our largest equine customer, targeting plastic tubs and lids.

This didn't come without its challenges, we needed to ensure we maintained the premium appearance, and our customer was clear that they wanted to keep the white tubs, so it was important to consider both aspects, to reduce our plastic use whilst keeping the luxury feel of the packaging. The recycled content packaging we identified enabled us to **maintain that critical to quality requirement, and to increase the recyclable content to meet the >30% threshold** in both packaging items. This also resulted in **significant savings on the plastic packaging tax.**

How have you found implementing Lean Six Sigma?

It was interesting because you are using a set framework, and the people I was working with didn't necessarily have a lean background. The main concern for the team was to ensure we continued to meet the customers requirements, without impacting the quality of the product.

The beauty of lean is that by working through the framework, we are ensuring we identify what our critical requirements are and establishing the best solutions to achieve that. By engaging with the team from the start, and taking the journey together, the team were happy to try different techniques and to work with me on this project.

Has this inspired culture change in the department?

Whilst the project was focused on packaging, the data I was analysing then led me to a whole new opportunity for a project focused on their ordering and lead times. The CI Team are now undertaking this project, which aims to reduce their down time, and production time.

The best thing was that this didn't just end up being a learning journey for me, we all learnt new skills and the benefits of using the techniques, which hopefully they will go on to utilise as much as me.

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