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LSS, a problem solving skill for graduates and SMEs: Case Study of investigation in a UK Business School curriculum

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Review

LSS, a problem solving skill for graduates and SMEs: Case Study of investigation in a UK Business School curriculum

Purpose - This research aims to investigate the feasibility of a systematic Lean Six Sigma (LSS) education through the curriculum of business schools to respond to the existing gap between the graduate's expectation of employability and skill requirements by the Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Design/approach/methodology - One UK business school has been used as a case study to conduct an extensive module and programme review followed by a semi-structured interview with the potentially suitable core and programme-specific module leaders and also the comparative Analysis between content of these modules and the existing LSS high-street training themes.

Findings – The result revealed a high potential of the existing modules in the business schools equivalent to the private sector training providers to increase the level of LSS problem solving knowledge and skill for all graduates and improve their employability and productivity for the SMEs.

Practical implications/limitations –This research has been carried out in a single UK – based Business School through a qualitative approach. A further in-depth analysis in a broader scale is required to investigate the practical implications in a better way.

Originality/Value –The result of this study highlights the role of LSS to reduce the knowledge and skill gap between the business schools as the source of the explicit knowledge, graduates as the knowledge and skill bearer, and SMEs as the knowledge and skill users.

Key Words – Lean Six Sigma, Problem Solving, Business School, Graduates, SMEs, Knowledge Transfer

1- Introduction

Faced with a fierce global competition, more industrial demand, recent financial austerity and also growing involvement of the private sector, the Higher Education (HE) sector is obliged to be more innovative and proactive in their programmes. Accordingly, business schools are required to increase their mindfulness (Ray et al, 2011), competitive advantage, innovation and distinctiveness in business education (Worasinchai et al, 2008; Blackman and Kennedy, 2009; and Woods and Dennis, 2009). They also need to be engaged in corporate problem solving of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) as the most common employer in the UK economy (Kumar et al, 2011), and graduate employability more effectively (Hamel, 2009; and Anninos and Chytiris, 2011) to improve competitive advantage (Kumarawamy and Chitale, 2012; Worasinchai et al, 2008; and Harrington and Kearney, 2011). SMEs have been defined as organisations with less than 250 employees in the EU definition (Kumar et al, 2011).

The significant gap in the theory/practice interface between business schools as part of academic enterprises, graduates and the industry has been recognised as a current challenge by research studies, but no specific educational programme has been introduced to fill this gap (Reed, 2009). There are also some practical problem solving programmes in the industry that lack theory (Antony, 2008), and are eligible and credible to be embedded in the academic curriculum of business schools to fill the gap (Kumaraswamy, 2012). Business schools are in the competition with the private sector and need relentless change and more effective university-business knowledge collaboration, especially with SMEs for winning competitive advantage (Hughes et al, 2009; and Tikhomirava et al, 2008) to strengthen economic development (Hofer, 2005 and Worasinchai et al, 2008). Recent gaps and differences between business schools as knowledge provider, graduates as knowledge bearer and SMEs as knowledge user have been presented in figure 1. This model reflects the research argument and represents the actual problems in business schools to develop business skills such as problem solving skills for graduates, which is required by SME managers.

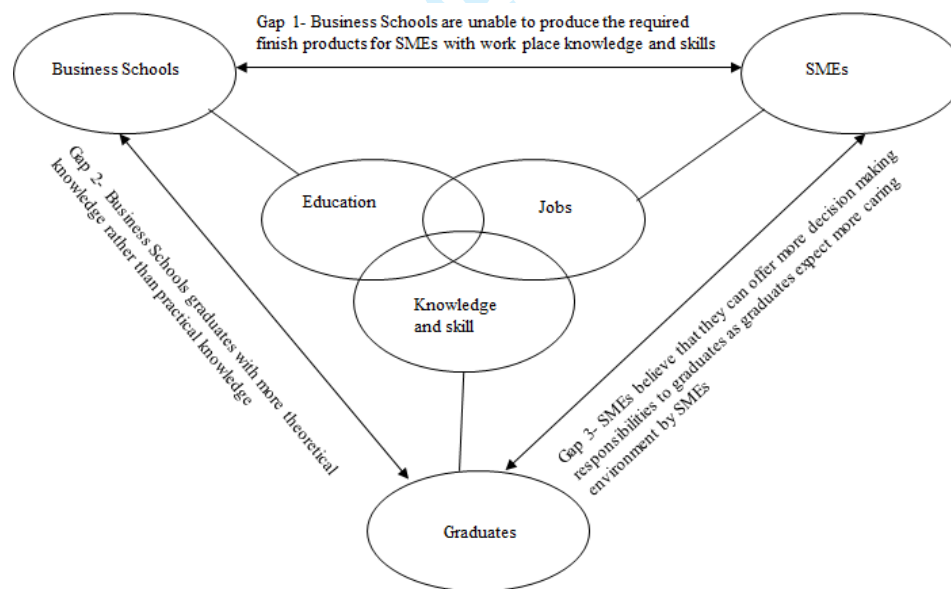


Figure 1 – The gap between business schools, graduates and SMEs

Reversibly, research studies have been criticising the poor involvement of the research in Lean Six Sigma (LSS) as a systematic, training - intensive and practical problem solving tool (Antony, 2012; Antony, 2008; Hilton and Sohal, 2012; and Starkey, 2004). The existing

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3 literature failed to address the role of the LSS in a broader view and in integration with
4 business schools as the enabler to reduce these gaps.
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8 The purpose of this article is to review the contribution of modules and programmes in a
9 business school curriculum to common LSS themes in order to fill these gaps. Leadership,
10 project management, process improvement, operation management, statistical problem
11 solving and performance measurement tools and skills are common LSS themes, which have
12 been highlighted by the literature (Antony, 2014; Prashar, 2014; Antony et al, 2007; Kumar
13 et al, 2011; and Hilton and Sohal, 2012). This would potentially develop LSS integration with
14 both HE and research to enhance skill and employability of graduates and the theoretical
15 approach of the LSS. The detailed inter-relationship between LSS themes and proposed gaps
16 has been indicated in the table 1. This table was produced as the result of an intensive LSS
17 literature review by authors and presents the ideal fitness of LSS themes to fill each gap.
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25 **Table 1**
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28 The key issue here is to highlight the role of interface between business schools and the LSS
29 in a cost effective and collaborative knowledge transfer (Burke, 2011; and Kumaraswamy
30 and Chitale, 2012) and an innovative knowledge creation (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2012;
31 Hughes et al, 2009; Tikhomirova et al, 2008; and Wu and Lin, 2009). The LSS training and
32 education programmes can be distinguished as a tool to transfer the explicit knowledge of the
33 academia, which may have already been static to a tacit knowledge for graduates, which may
34 be dynamic in a continuous learning environment and with the high benefit to SMEs (Wu and
35 Lin, 2009). It is also expected that LSS can facilitate the tacit knowledge transfer to an
36 enhanced explicit knowledge for students through case studies and projects.
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44 **2-LSS and knowledge exchange** 45

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47 LSS is widely recognised as a systematic, comprehensive and disciplined methodology that
48 employs statistical and non-statistical tools and techniques to obtain critical knowledge of
49 processes and products essential for reducing the variability and defect, solving problems and
50 achieving both operational and business excellence and customer satisfaction (Antony, 2007;
51 Gijo et al, 2014; Biranvand and Khasseh, 2013; Wu and Lin, 2009; Tracy Zou and Lee, 2010;
52 Aboelmaged, 2010; Manville et al, 2012; Pepper and Spedding, 2010; Braunscheidel et al,
53 2011; Lee et al, 2011; and Assarlind et al, 2013).
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3 The structured and comprehensive training is a critical success factor of any LSS project
4 alongside the top management commitment, leadership and using statistical tools and
5 techniques (Antony, 2014; Brun, 2011; Manville et al, 2012; Wu and Lin, 2009, Aboelimged,
6 2010, Manville et al, 2012; and Hilton and Sohal, 2012). Knowledge management in the
7 current LSS training lacks intellectual capacity, which introduces a challenge (lee et al, 2011).
8 The significance of timely, comprehensive and standardised LSS training has been
9 highlighted by research studies to make it more effective and productive (Laureani, 2012;
10 Pandey, 2007; and Chow et al, 2010; Cho et al, 2011; Manville et al, 2012, Tata and Jones,
11 2011; and Chow et al, 2010), and to promote creating the knowledge management pool and a
12 continuous tacit and explicit knowledge transfer (Wu and Lin, 2009; and Tracy Zou and Lee,
13 2010). It was reported by the research outputs that effectiveness and productivity
14 characteristics are missing in the current LSS training provided by the private sector
15 (Laureani, 2012); and there is a need for more rigorous, robust and standardised LSS training
16 to enhance cost efficiency, governance and standardisation.
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27 The evidence from iSixSigma, a key reference electronic LSS source [1] indicates that the
28 LSS belt - training courses are heavily involved in practical and technical aspects of LSS, and
29 would not specifically highlight the business and management aspects such as culture,
30 leadership, Human Resource Management, process and operation management. It also seems
31 that academia has a critical role to design, redesign or modify appropriate modules and
32 programmes to teach leadership, project management, process improvement, operations
33 management, statistical problem solving and performance measurement tools and skills as
34 key themes in LSS training and education (Antony et al, 2007; Kumar et al, 2011; and Hilton
35 and Sohal, 2012).
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43 The degree qualification, proceeding to the higher education or issuing the LSS certification
44 within existing studied HE programme or through breakthrough short training courses will
45 maintain the revealed challenges in governance, cost, and standardisation of the LSS training,
46 education and assessment (Antony, 2012; and Laureani, 2012) for all parties. Figure 2
47 represents the integrated model of the LSS certification and the LSS education to address the
48 discussed gaps in figure 1. The “Body of Knowledge” presented in figure 2 refers to the
49 intellectual knowledge inside business school, which is provided for students through
50 teaching and learning practices. The “Body of Experience” refers to the tacit knowledge,
51 exploration and skills gained in SMEs, which can be developed through dissertation project
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or placements and can be deployed as case studies. The “Certification” in this figure refers to any qualification, which can be provided as the result of studying in the business schools including degree classifications. This model also indicates that LSS knowledge in students can be formally assessed during the summative assessment process in business schools in a more formalised and standardised format. This can be followed by a degree qualification for graduates partly through assessing students in LSS related modules and case studies or projects in SMEs. The students’ practical skill can also be initially assessed by SME managers through project management in their dissertation project or even through placement activities in which SME management can also monitor student’s competence in practice rather than theory. This could be an interim process for permanent appointment for graduates. The certification process could also be involved with the accreditation and membership in professional bodies that recognise LSS and are usually in collaboration with the business schools.

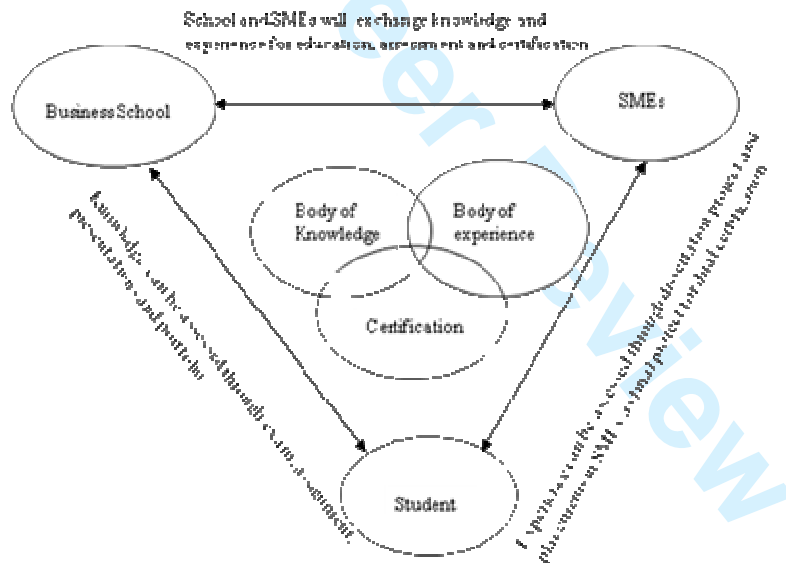


Figure 2 – Integrated model of LSS certification and education

In response to the argument by Antony, 2008 to highlight the research gap in LSS programmes, the result of other research studies revealed that there is a limited LSS knowledge share between academic and organisational environment, which has mainly been focusing on investigation of feasibility of the LSS adoption in organisations including training rather than as immediate evident of motivation to adopt LSS through magnet

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3 curriculum to attract academic research and learning (Aboelmaged, 2010; and Baunscheidel
4 et al, 2011). These arguments instigate the provision of the LSS education as an excellent
5 platform for integrating statistical, managerial and technical tools and skills into any
6 appropriate curriculum of UK based business schools to enhance problem solving and
7 employability skills of graduates.
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10 11 12 **3- Business schools and LSS knowledge transfer to SMEs** 13

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15 The theory/practice gap in the education/research structure of business schools (Reed, 2009)
16 and the dual potential role of business school and industry in knowledge exchange (Alferoff
17 and Knights, 2009; Scarborough and Knights, 2009; Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Harrington and
18 Kearney, 2011; and Ranjan, 2011) have been highlighted to emphasise requiring significant
19 changes in research and education of these schools (Noorda, 2011; Anninos and Chytiris,
20 2011; Harrington and Kearney, 2011; Starkey and Tempest, 2008; and Starkey et al, 2004).
21 Business schools aim to prepare the good innovative and insightful managers and leaders
22 with valuable knowledge through teaching common business principles such as human
23 resource management, organisation behaviour, operations management, marketing
24 management, strategic management, supply chain management, finance and accounting.
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33 The role of LSS tool in problem solving of both manufacturing and service SMEs has been in
34 the centre of attention by many academics (Prashar, 2014; Gijo et al, 2014; Kumar et al, 2011;
35 Kumar et al, 2009, Antony et al, 2005; Antony, 2008; lee-Mortimer, 2006; Kaushik et al,
36 2012; Antony and Desai, 2009; Laureani, 2012, Hilton and Sohal, 2012 and Manville et al,
37 2012). Organisational learning capabilities, leadership (Antony, 2014; Suresh et al, 2012; and
38 Malik and Blumenfeld, 2012), personal and corporate competence of the project leaders,
39 project team and facilitators (Hilton and Sohal, 2012) and also appropriate technical
40 capabilities (Malik and Blumenfeld, 2012) have been highlighted by the literature as critical
41 subjects to succeed in any LSS project. These subjects can be discovered immensely as
42 academic subjects in the Undergraduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) academic curriculums
43 of business schools to develop insightful managers and leaders to deal with business
44 problems.
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54 The application of LSS in academic business disciplines such as financial services (Pandry
55 2007, Antony, 2007; and Delgado, 2010), Human Resource departments (Pandry, 2007; and
56 Chow et al, 2010), information management systems and administration processes (Antony et
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3 al, 2012), strategic management and managerial decision making (Friday-Stroud and
4 Sutterfield, 2007), customer satisfaction analysis (Behara et al, 1995) and supply chain
5 management and logistics (Shokri et al, 2010, Nabhani et al, 2009; Narasimhan, 2009; and
6 Aboelmaged, 2010) has also been highlighted by the literature.
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11 There is a very little evidence of the cohesive knowledge and information sharing within an
12 enhanced circle of collaborative knowledge exchange between SMEs, Business Schools and
13 graduates, which makes business schools failed to provide challenging and stimulating
14 experiences for their graduates (Bickerstaffe and Ridgers, 2007; and Reed, 2009). Business
15 schools can play bigger role to enhance this circle through proactive approach of the LSS
16 teaching or the incremental LSS training for SMEs through placement, dissertations or
17 research projects. The systematic problem solving knowledge and the skill development
18 nature of the LSS education would adhere to the development of a cohesive circle of
19 collaborative knowledge exchange between these three stakeholders.
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27 This study intends to evaluate the potential idea of using the presented LSS themes as an
28 innovative graduate skill development approach in the business - related UG and PG modules
29 and courses to enrich the distinctiveness of the research and professional – integrated
30 modules and the graduate employability in the UK or EU business schools.
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34 35 **4-Research Background and Case review**

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37 This section intends to provide useful information about the HE case study institution,
38 process of sampling, data collection and data analysis. A broad review of all modules and
39 programmes and also some open - end interviews have been conducted in a UK based
40 business school accommodating nearly 4470 students in UG, PG and doctoral levels through
41 six different subject groups. This business school has employed 131 academic staff that 80%
42 of them were academically qualified (completed a doctoral degree), While another 20% are
43 professionally qualified (having master degrees with senior management experience in their
44 previous industrial background). The intellectual contributions of the school has been around
45 1160 publications with 15% of them as peer reviewed journal articles in which 40% of those
46 articles have had contribution to practice. There were 24 active UG and 18 PG programmes
47 or courses that recruit students globally.
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3 As the first step, teaching and learning outcomes and material of all delivered modules in the
4 business school have been reviewed through analysing the module descriptors and teaching
5 and learning plans to identify the suitable modules that potentially can fit LSS themes in their
6 teaching structure. The programme specifications have also been reviewed to identify the
7 taught modules, structure and also other useful information for these programmes. Having
8 identified the suitable modules and programmes (courses) and through a purposive sampling
9 technique, six core UG, and ten core PG modules were selected alongside a few suitable
10 programme-specific modules as sample to conduct an un-structured interview with their
11 module leaders. The sampling was conducted through the purposive method in which
12 appropriate modules were identified as the result of module review prior to the data collection.
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21 Authors found the quantitative data collection and analysis inappropriate for this research due
22 to necessity of interaction and in-depth discussion with the module leaders and also difficulty
23 to get academics to understand the LSS concept through survey. The semi-structured
24 interview was selected to encourage participants talk openly and widely in order to gain
25 different views and insights, alongside the pre-designed questions. The interview questions
26 have been developed as the result of extensive literature review. The ethical consideration has
27 been taken in account and the formal procedure to meet ethics requirement in the school was
28 completed. The reason to select core modules was to ensure about the highest credibility and
29 coverage of all programmes or courses by selecting the maximum number of the core
30 modules, which are delivered for all students from all programmes.
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39 Then, a qualitative data analysis through content analysis of interview transcripts or some
40 recorded interviews was conducted. The coding framework was selected as a four - steps
41 model to breakdown, analyse, compare and categorise sentences (Aronsson et al, 2011). This
42 was followed by a comparative analysis in which the capacity of the delivered core modules
43 in this school to teach LSS themes has been compared with established LSS training subjects,
44 delivered by the private sector. The presented selected LSS training subjects in the following
45 section is the result of that review and on-line search in various reliable private LSS training
46 sources such as “International Association of Six Sigma Certification (IASSC). Then, and as
47 the last episode of the methodology, following questions were raised to reflect the presented
48 gaps. Both questions one and two reflect all three gaps presented in the figure 1, while
49 question three reflects the justification and effectiveness of this research argument.
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3 Q1) Can current UG and PG modules fit LSS themes in their teaching and assessment
4 structure?

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6 Q2) Can existing programmes or courses fit LSS in their teaching curriculum?
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9 Q3) Can current modules cover the existing private sector LSS training subjects
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11 **5-Result**

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13 The initial result of the interview analysis indicates that five out of six UG module leaders
14 that were interviewed knew about LSS. The result of interview has also confirmed that all
15 UG modules that were aware of LSS have been concerned with teaching team and whether
16 there would be adequate number of teaching staff, especially for more technical aspects. This
17 has also applied to the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and other PG modules,
18 where all the MBA and most of the PG module leaders were aware of LSS and had
19 concerned about teaching resources. However, this was less critical matter for them, since the
20 module size for PG courses is smaller than UG modules and can be handled with the less
21 teaching staff. It was evident from the teaching material of all of these interviewed UG and
22 PG modules that some of them could incorporate LSS themes and principles such as Total
23 Quality Management (TQM), Lean Management, Statistics, Research Methods, Organisation
24 Improvement, and Leadership without any referral to the LSS. Having presented some overall
25 result of the interview, the following result is presented as the direct analysis for each
26 presented question.
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38 Q1) Can current UG and PG modules in the business school fit LSS themes in their teaching
39 and assessment structure?
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42 The result of the module review and interview presented in table 2 revealed that there are
43 some delivered core level 4 (first year), level 5 (second year), level 6 (final year) and level 7
44 (PG) modules that can meet or have already met one or more than one LSS theme including
45 the LSS methodologies and their tools and techniques in their teaching structure. It was
46 apparent that only the module leader for the “Management” module, which is a level 4 core
47 module wasn’t aware of the LSS. However, as discussed above, there are different basic and
48 principle leadership and management aspects of the LSS that could be addressed in this
49 module without referral to the LSS. The other UG module leaders were familiar with the LSS
50 relatively and all supported benefits of the LSS to increase the problem solving skills for the
51 UG students through business curriculum. All PG module leaders had some theoretical
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3 knowledge of LSS and initially supported the theoretical benefits of incorporating LSS in the
4 business curriculum.
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8 Module leaders for “Business Processes and Systems” (level 4) and “Business Performance
9 Management” (level 5) both agreed that LSS could be recognised as a potential backbone of
10 the re-development of these modules to make them practically more productive and effective
11 elements in order to complete the learning loop. It was found that the “Solving Business
12 Problems” module in level 4 and the “Business Performance Management” module in level 5
13 are core modules that can potentially fit more technical aspects such as statistics or some key
14 tools for LSS methodologies. Module leader for the “Business Processes and Systems”
15 module agreed to incorporate some principles of the LSS education such as TQM, Lean and
16 Performance Measurement in his teaching structure. He also agreed to systematically
17 incorporate the LSS definition, benefits, key success factors and barriers of LSS as part of
18 one or two lecture topics for this module. *“It is easy for us to develop the LSS or Six Sigma
19 principles more systematically as part of our operations management lectures as the tail for
20 TQM and Lean Management lectures, and it would even be better if the lecture lies before the
21 statistics lectures in other level 4 modules”*, said the module leader for the “Business
22 Processes and Systems” module.
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34 The module leader for the “Business Performance Management” module also agreed to
35 encounter the DMAIC methodology as part of the teaching structure. *“We are prepared to
36 develop some of our lecture and workshop material as the following chain of Six Sigma
37 related topics in the level 4 modules to provide a systematic business performance
38 improvement tool; this would enhance the practical implications of this module as part of the
39 learning outcomes”*, said the module leader for the “Business Performance Management”
40 module. She has also acknowledged the requirement of the staff development and resource
41 management to cover the big range of students from variety of programme backgrounds.
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49 *“This is massively in the favour of this module to present some practical aspects of statistics
50 with a real world examples and through real problem solving methods”*, said the module
51 leader for the “Solving Business Problems” module, when was asked about the benefits of the
52 LSS in their teaching structure. In contrast, he has also acknowledged difficulty of the
53 teaching staff development to incorporate the LSS methodology in their statistical material
54 teaching in a short period of the time. In another scenario and through discussion for other
55 question about the importance of some LSS themes in teaching for the Business Schools, the
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3 module leader for “Business Performance Management” module has emphasised on “process
4 improvement”, “variability and defect reduction” and “continuous quality improvement”.

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8 In addition, it was found that these two modules alongside a level 6 core module as the
9 “Strategic Management and Leadership” can also potentially cover more business principles
10 and strategic aspects of the LSS in their teaching structure. This was supported by the module
11 leader for the “Strategic Management and Leadership” module to follow the other two
12 modules to support the leadership and strategic aspects of the LSS after learning about more
13 technical and operational aspects. *“We would consider to establish a strong chain of business
14 management and leadership education that could support businesses and I think LSS could
15 be a right example; my main concern is the degree of changes that we might have to do in
16 our teaching content”*, Said the module leader for the “Strategic and Leadership
17 Management” module.
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25 The “Business Research Analysis” and the “Analysing Organisations”, are level 7 or PG
26 (including MBA) core modules that can potentially cover technical and statistical aspects of
27 the LSS, while business and management - related aspects of the LSS could fit in PG core
28 modules such as the “Operations Management and Organisational Improvement” and the
29 “Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage”. *“We have been covering different areas of
30 organisational excellence and we have already been teaching Six Sigma and Lean in a very
31 limited level; but this can definitely be modified towards these two tools if there is any
32 agenda to promote LSS for PG students”*, said the module leader for “Operations
33 Management and Organisational Improvement”. His remarks have been reiterated by the
34 researchers in regards to practical implications for PG graduates. The response from module
35 leader wasn’t clear since he would not be sure about the cultural elements of the offshore
36 businesses that would be the main employers of the PG graduates who are mainly
37 international.
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48 The “Dissertation” as a UG and also PG core module and the “Work Placement” can be used
49 equivalent to the practical professional project in which students can apply their LSS
50 knowledge in the practice and business environment for a period of 4-5 months project. *“It
51 was clear to us that most of the final year UG and PG students have been doing their
52 dissertation in SMEs if they wished to collect primary data. This has been much more
53 effective process if they have had one year placement with the potential data in their hand”*,
54 said the dissertation module leader. The response from dissertation module leader who
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3 coordinates both UG and PG dissertations was positive to encourage students to do some LSS
4 case studies in small scales if it is possible, but he also recognised the issue of supervision,
5 and also the student – led dissertations in this case. *“I am a bit concern that we push students
6 towards certain topics and therefore deter students to select their own research topic as it
7 should be”*, said the module leader for dissertations. However, he was happy to start this in a
8 small scale and for a limited number of interested students with supervision from the
9 competent staff at the early stages. It was found that LSS teaching themes can align some UG
10 modules such as the “Solving Business Problems”, the “Business Processes and Systems”
11 and the “Business Performance Management” to make a more effective and productive
12 teaching stream.
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21 **Table 2**
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26 Q2) Can programmes or courses fit LSS in their teaching curriculum?
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29 The result of the programme review, interviews and module review revealed that LSS themes
30 can relatively and under certain depth fit in curriculum of all UG and PG “Business and
31 Management” programmes, since all interviewed core modules are being delivered in the
32 corresponding programmes. Researchers decided to carry out further analysis in relation to
33 the course or programme suitability of the LSS education. Having analysed the programme –
34 specific modules from Business and Management programmes, the module leader of some
35 appropriate programme-specific modules as sample have been interviewed under the
36 purposive sampling strategy. The result of this in-depth analysis, which was presented in the
37 figure three, revealed that some UG programmes with more business and management focus
38 have more compatibility to incorporate LSS themes. This was due to having more focus on
39 LSS themes in some programme-specific modules. The X-axis in the figure three represents
40 the number of core and programme-specific modules in each programme or course (Y-axis)
41 that can fit one or more than one LSS themes in their teaching structure. For instance,
42 delivering modules such as the “Business Research and Reflective Practice” and the
43 “Managing professional skills” for the “Corporate Management” programme have been
44 found as two programme-specific modules that could present the higher degree of LSS
45 methodology in their teaching structure as the tail of what has been delivered in the core
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modules. This might make the “Corporate Management” programme as one of the most suitable courses to incorporate the LSS education and perhaps certification.

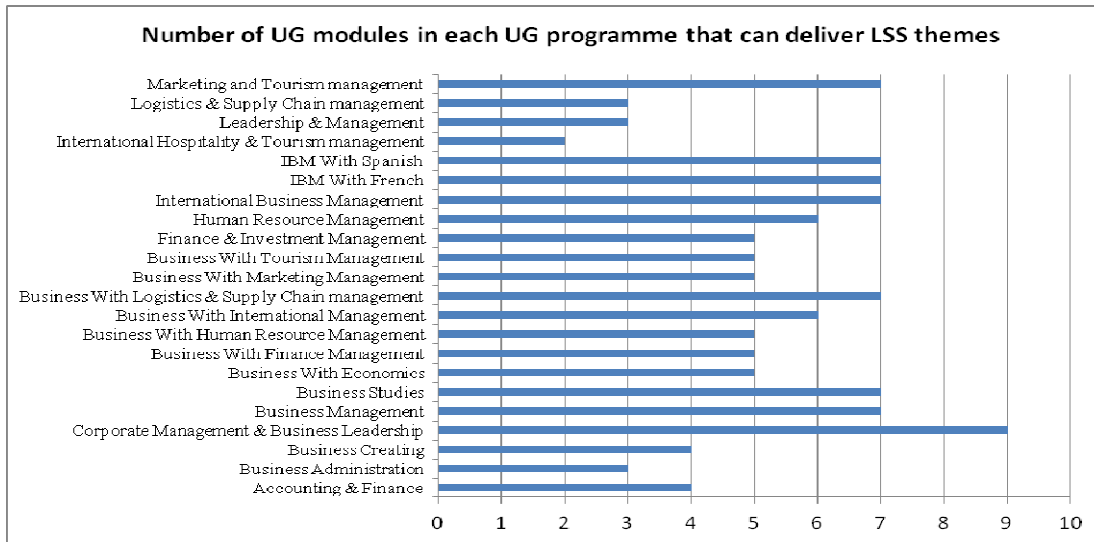


Figure 3 – Number of UG modules in each programme that can deliver LSS themes

The result for PG programmes has suggested that business related programmes such as the “MBA”, the “Business with Management”, the “Global Business Management” and the “Business with Logistics & Supply Chain Management” have more compatibility to be involved in the LSS teaching modules. This was supported with indication of higher number of the programme-specific modules from these programmes that can fit LSS themes in their teaching structure. The “Work-Based Action Research Project” and “Consultancy Projects” are two practical modules taught in MBA programme that can fit any skill development aspects of LSS problem solving perspective such as implementing methodologies in SMEs. The “Managing Sustainable Supply Chain” is a module that is delivered specifically for the “Global Business management” and the “Business with Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management” programmes that have been found capable to deliver business and strategic aspects of LSS themes such as operations management, project management, performance measurement and process improvement.

Apart from this, since Business and Management students from all programmes will be taught with core modules in all levels (UG and PG), therefore all graduates from Business and Management programmes would have some level of LSS knowledge and skill.

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3 Q3) Can current modules cover the existing private belt- system LSS training subjects?
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6 The result of comparative analysis through on-line sources presented in the table 3 revealed
7 that there are some core and programme-specific modules in this business school that have
8 capacity to meet common required theoretical and practical LSS training and education
9 themes provided in the private sector and therefore, meet professional and practical aspects of
10 the LSS education and training. The result of the interview analysis revealed that all common
11 subjects that have already been covered by the private LSS training providers can be met to
12 the certain level in few core and programme-specific modules from level 4 to level7 to meet
13 one specific belt-training level of the LSS (Black, Green, Yellow) depending upon the level
14 of LSS themes involvement in teaching curriculum. The “Dissertation projects” in both UG
15 and PG courses can be recognised as an equivalent to the professional or practical projects
16 undertaken through private training providers.
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25 The result of interview and also module descriptor and teaching and learning plan review
26 revealed that technical training subjects by the private sector such as applying LSS
27 methodologies, selecting successful LSS projects, and selecting right statistical tools can be
28 taught during first two years of UG study in the business schools (through the business
29 problem solving, the business processes and systems and the business performance
30 management modules), while more business and strategic related subjects such as
31 “Communicating a Business Strategy” can be delivered in the third or final year of study (e.g.
32 strategic management and leadership module). The coverage of these LSS subjects in PG
33 courses is more levelled down and balanced as a few modules have capacity to cover all
34 relevant subjects in their teaching structure. This means that business schools have no
35 disadvantage against the private sector training providers in relation to capacity and
36 capability of teaching required subjects for a LSS education that promotes problem solving
37 skills. The main challenge here is the teaching resource development, which represents the
38 degree of knowledge and experience within teaching team of those modules. This however
39 has not been recognised as a great deal in this studied business school. *“This issue would be
40 gradually solved by sending few potential academic members of staff to the Six Sigma
41 training belts or through actual LSS research project delivery for local SMEs by the
42 academic staff”*, said the module leader for the “Business Processes and Systems” module.
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Table 3

5- Research, managerial and business implications:

This research study was conducted in a single case study that could limit validity and significance of this study in the HE sector. A multi-case study analysis involving different business schools or even other faculties or schools could be approached. However, this was not practically possible at the time this research was conducted due to time restrictions. The result of this study was consistent with the literature for the role of business schools to promote more competitive advantage, innovation and distinctiveness in the business education (Worasinchai et al, 2008; Blackman and Kennedy, 2009; and Woods and Dennis, 2009). The LSS integration with the business schools curriculums could potentially increase the opportunity for promoting more innovative and distinctive curriculum with more emphasise on skill development for graduates. The result would also support the literature (Kumar et al, 2011) about requirement of more significant role from business schools to develop the corporate problem solving in SMEs. LSS would have potential to develop this collaboration through establishing its themes in business and management modules.

The result of this study is consistent with the research arguments that had identified a theory/practice gap for LSS and business schools (Reed, 2009, and Antony, 2008). It appears that integrating LSS themes with business and management modules would reduce this gap. This would promote more academia-lead research programmes and research papers in both conceptual and case study aspects of LSS. This study also supports the literature proposal about improving business school competitiveness in the market (Hughes et al, 2009; and Tikhomirava et al, 2008), where LSS integration with HE teaching can potentially develop income generation for HE sector through projects, and providing training sessions for businesses.

The result of this study has addressed the issue of research gap in the LSS that was acknowledged by the literature (Antony, 2012; Antony, 2008; Hilton and Sohal, 2012; and Starkey, 2004). Integrating LSS themes in the business and management modules would encourage academic staff and graduates to be involved in more LSS research activities and collaborate with LSS practitioners. This would consequently promote the collaborative and innovative knowledge development and transfer for business schools that has been recognised as a requirement by the literature (Burke, 2011; Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2012;

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3 Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2012; Hughes et al, 2009; Tikhomirova et al, 2008; and Wu and
4 Lin, 2009). This study has addressed the maintenance of governance, cost, and
5 standardisation of LSS training, education and assessment (Antony, 2012; and Laureani, 2012)
6 through proposing a systematic and standardised HE structure in business schools with the
7 sustained quality assurance for LSS training and education.
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12 All highlighted critical academic subjects to succeed in LSS projects have been met in this
13 study. Organisational learning capabilities, leadership (Suresh et al, 2012; and Malik and
14 Blumenfeld, 2012), personal and corporate competence of the project leaders, project team
15 and facilitators (Hilton and Sohal, 2012) and also appropriate technical capabilities (Malik
16 and Blumenfeld, 2012) could fit in the analysed modules for both UG and PG levels.
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22 This study revealed that business schools could potentially enhance graduate's capability to
23 be employed in different sectors that have already been applying LSS. Financial services
24 (Pandry 2007, Antony, 2007; and Delgado, 2010), Human Resource departments (Pandry,
25 2007; and Chow et al, 2010), information management systems and administration processes
26 (Antony et al, 2012), strategic management and managerial decision making (Friday-Stroud
27 and Sutterfield, 2007), customer satisfaction analysis (Behara et al, 1995) and supply chain
28 management and logistics (Shokri et al, 2010, Nabhani et al, 2009; Narasimhan, 2009; and
29 Aboelmaged, 2010) have all been business and management areas that have been targeted by
30 LSS projects and have also been established as either a business programme or an academic
31 teaching context in the studied business school.
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40 It appears that this research study could promote a closer collaboration between SMEs and
41 business schools through a theoretical and professional approach. This collaboration would
42 be strengthen through sustainable knowledge and skill development for business school
43 graduates that can establish a greater impact on SME requirements for problem solving skills.
44 This would potentially increase the employability of graduates, while improve performance
45 of SMEs continuously. It will also develop an enhanced and effective curriculum in business
46 schools, ultimately resulting in developing more innovative and competitive business schools.
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52 **6-Concluding remarks and future work**

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55 It was concluded that LSS education can be established in both UG and PG levels in business
56 schools through a standard teaching and assessment structure of both core and programme-
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3 specific modules to promote skill development, innovation and competitiveness. It will
4 potentially provide graduates with a theoretical and practical knowledge and skill of problem
5 solving with a reliable and standard assessment and certification, which is required by the
6 SME managers. The teaching structure in business schools, which cover both theoretical and
7 practical perspectives, will underline the common LSS training themes that are required for a
8 young graduate equivalent to certain levels of the LSS Belt training. Therefore, it was
9 concluded that business schools can have a significant role to reduce the existing knowledge
10 transfer gap and to reduce the research gap in the LSS practice, if they apply a structured LSS
11 education as part of their curriculum.
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19 This research study has been limited to a qualitative approach within a single business school,
20 and this could be extended to more quantitative methods after the pilot study in some
21 modules or programmes in one business school or for other business and engineering schools.
22 This research study recommends the necessity of establishing a LSS – oriented teaching in all
23 business schools in a smaller scale such as continuous re - engineering and re - designing of
24 some core modules in a certain period of time. There is a vast opportunity for the further
25 research study in order to highlight the gaps and provide more detailed aspect of LSS role in
26 reducing the gap between business schools, graduates' employability and SMEs problem
27 solving required skills. The researchers believes that the same type of research could also be
28 applied for the engineering schools, where there is the same gap and also high compatibility
29 between LSS teaching and curriculum of engineering schools in practice similar to business
30 schools.
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40 There is a need for more extensive review of other business schools. There are also some
41 practical implications to be considered such as school/university-wide policies, admission
42 and logistical limits to design a new programme or a new module, and also operational and
43 administrative issues of modifying different modules under different leadership.
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For Peer Review

LSS Themes	Gap 1 – inability of business schools to provide required workforce for SMEs	Gap 2 – lack of practical knowledge and skill for graduates provided by business schools	Gap 3 – difference between SMEs' perception and expectation from graduates
Statistical Problem Solving Tools	Graduates are able to systematically collect data and solve problems in SMEs	Graduates learn problem solving and decision making skill and knowledge to be used in practice	Graduates can be involved in decision making process with having practical systematic problem solving skill
Performance Measurement Tools	Graduates learn about theories and skills of data collection, data analysis and performance measurement tools and techniques		Graduates can build trust by proposing some professional aspects of performance measurement
Process Improvement Methodology	Graduates learn a systematic process improvement methodology with professional usage for any sector		Graduates can be involved in decision making process with practical skill in sustainable improvements
Project management	Practical Project Management skills of graduates would be developed and assessed with integration with practical problem solving tools and techniques during dissertation projects		Graduates can practically lead sustainable problem solving or business improvement projects in SMEs
Operations Management	Graduates would be able to be involved in problem solving, improvement and performance measurement of all operations in planning, sourcing, making, delivering and sales processes		Graduates gain more confident to be involved in decision making and project management of all operations
Leadership	LSS leadership focuses on both practical and theoretical aspects		Decision Making tools will be taught through LSS teaching

Table 1 – Role of LSS themes to minimise the proposed gaps

LSS Themes in Training & Education		Problem Solving Tools	Performance Measurement Tools	Process Improvement Methodology	Project Management	Operations Management	Leadership
UG Level 4 Modules	Core Module						
Solving Business Problems	√	√	√				
Business Processes & Systems Management	√	√	√	√	√	√	
	√				√	√	√
UG Level 5 Modules							
Business Performance Management	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
UG Level 6 Modules							
Strategic Management & Leadership	√			√	√	√	√
Dissertation & Professional Project	√	√	√	√	√		
MBA Modules							
Business Research Analysis	√	√	√	√			
Operations Management & Organisational Improvement	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Dissertation	√	√	√	√	√		
Research methods	√	√	√	√	√		
Other Postgraduate Modules							
Business Research Analysis	√	√	√	√			
Analysing Organisation	√	√	√	√	√		
Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Business Environment & Strategic Management	√			√	√	√	√
Dissertation	√	√	√	√	√		
Research methods	√	√	√	√	√		

Table 2 - Core UG and PG modules in the Business School to incorporate LSS in their teaching structure

	Respective Core Modules of the Business School			
Delivered Subjects in a private Belt system LSS training	UG Level 4	UG Level 5	UG Level6	PGT & MBA
Communicating a business strategy across the organisation			Strategic Management & Leadership	Business Environment & Strategic Management
Integrating with Lean Manufacturing, TOC, & other improvement methods	Business Processes & Systems		Dissertation	Business Environment & Strategic Management, Dissertation
Applying the DMAIC improvement process	Business Processes & Systems & Business Problem Solving	Business Performance Management	Dissertation	Operation Management & Organisational Improvement, Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Selecting successful Six Sigma projects and project teams	Business Processes & Systems	Business Performance Management	Dissertation	Business research Analysis, Analysing Organisation, Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Dissertation
Planning and executing projects		Business Performance Management	Strategic Management & Leadership, Dissertation	Dissertation
Benefits of Six Sigma projects	Business Processes & Systems		Dissertation	Operation Management & Organisational Improvement, Analysing Organisation
Selecting the right statistical tools	Business Problem Solving	Business Performance Management	Dissertation	Business Research Analysis, Dissertation
Six Sigma philosophy of process improvement	Business Processes & Systems	Business Performance Management	Dissertation	Operation Management & Organisational Improvement, Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Customer centred business	Business Processes & Systems	Business Performance Management	Strategic Management & Leadership, Dissertation	Operation Management & Organisational Improvement, Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Lean principles	Business Processes & Systems	Business Performance Management		Operation Management & Organisational Improvement, Managing Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Dissertation
Statistics	Business Problem Solving		Dissertation	Business Research Analysis, Analysing Organisations, Dissertation
Group/organizational assessment			Dissertation	Dissertation

Table 3 – Respective Core modules in business school to meet common high street LSS training subjects