

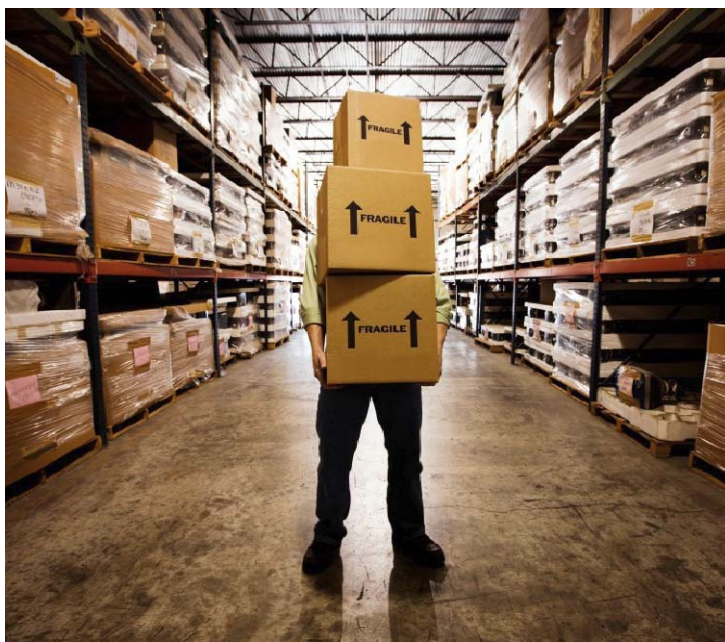
## Lean Six Sigma Talent Demand

The fifth annual study by executive search firm **The Avery Point Group** finds lean talent demand continuing to surpass six sigma as companies grapple with today's bleak economic environment.

The recession and rapidly slumping sales are forcing many companies to reevaluate their priorities with regard to continuous improvement initiatives. As a result, demand for lean talent is showing signs that it is accelerating its edge over six sigma as the more desired skill set, according to the recent study.

*"As an executive recruiting firm, we have a unique vantage point from which to observe the latest trends taking place in industry,"* explains Tim Noble, managing principal of The Avery Point Group. *"Trends in industry are often telegraphed into candidate requirements in job postings, and they can serve as a window into the latest corporate initiatives. Our annual study continues to serve as an industry benchmark that offers useful insight into the latest trends taking place in the area of corporate continuous improvement."*

Based on its fifth annual study of internet job postings, The Avery Point Group found that



demand for lean talent continues to gain ground over six sigma as the more desired skill set, reinforcing last year's study that signaled an ongoing shift in focus toward lean. This year's study showed that lean talent demand exceeded six sigma by almost 11 percent, further widening its lead over last year's results that showed only a slight edge for lean over six sigma.

This year's study also found, for those companies seeking lean talent, only 44 percent are requiring candidates to possess six sigma knowledge as well. On the other hand, for those

companies seeking six sigma talent, fully 49 percent of the roles also require candidates to possess lean knowledge. *“Reflecting the broader job market, demand for lean and six sigma talent is down versus 2008 and 2007 peak levels,”* states Noble. *“However, on a relative basis for the hiring that is taking place, companies are starting to shift more and more of their focus toward lean. This is perhaps an indication that they see lean as a better and more practical hedge against today’s tough economic challenges.”*

The Avery Point Group fully expects this shift toward lean to accelerate further as the recession grinds on. *“We have had a situation in the past couple of months where companies have had to take unprecedented and drastic actions, shedding large amounts of labor to bring their cost structure and inventories in line with plummeting sales,”* comments Noble. *“As the dust settles, and as companies regain their footing, some may find that their remaining operations aren’t as flexible or as effective at servicing their market’s new realities. For some companies this situation can be a transformational opportunity to leverage lean, while for others it could spell further disaster.”*

The Avery Point Group is already seeing a few forward thinking companies seizing on lean as a competitive and strategic opportunity to transform their businesses amid the recession. These companies see lean as a key to reducing waste, improving cash flow, and improving operational flexibility, thus enabling them to adjust more quickly to the new realities of today’s economic climate. As the nation exits the recession, these forward thinking companies may be well positioned to leverage huge productivity gains as volume returns, outpacing their competitors by achieving higher inventory turns, greater operational flexibility, and lower operating costs.

Could the recession and the growing shift in talent demand toward Lean be signaling the beginning of the end for six sigma? *“Certainly not”* concludes Noble. *“The overall foundation of continuous improvement should be viewed as a collection of tool sets that includes both lean and six sigma, which are applied when and where appropriate. Overall, there are certainly benefits to integrating both methodologies, but the steep challenges of today’s recession may be better served by lean’s more immediate and practical focus on waste, flow, and flexibility.”*

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