

CI Academy

Employees from Cook Limerick reflect on their recent experiences with Continuous Improvement (CI) training

At Cook, we value learning from data, experience, feedback, and each other to continually evolve and improve how we work together. In support of our value to Continually Improve, an initiative called CI Academy is being rolled out across Cook globally to provide training on everything from lean awareness to Green Belt qualifications.

Louise O'Halloran

Louise is the newly appointed Continuous Improvement (CI) manager for Customer Support and Distribution (CSD) in EMEA. She has been with Cook for 14 years. She spent three years in her previous role as coordinator of CI for CSD in EMEA before moving to her current role. She recently completed the CI Green Belt training.

Why did you decide to do the Green Belt training?

I wanted to expand my knowledge of CI methodology and problem-solving tools.

Tell me a little about the Green Belt training.

The training was challenging. The course was weekly and very intense, but it was a really good learning curve. The key difference with this course to previous CI development was that we were taught to use statistics to measure if a process is capable or not. This was a really interesting part for me.

The course also provided us with knowledge, mentoring, and the

tools we need to use in our roles. For me it was really great to see how all these things came together as I went through my Green Belt project and saw how they are applied. It makes it all worthwhile.

Finally, participants from different sites and functions across Cook took part in the training, and it was great to meet colleagues from other areas and learn from each other.

What do you most look forward to doing with your new skills?

I'm looking forward to sharing the knowledge I've gained with my colleagues in CSD who are starting on their own CI development journey. Having done the training, I am qualified to mentor and coach others.

I'm also looking forward to starting another Green Belt project in the near future to gain further improvements and get new projects up and running within CSD.



▲ Louise O'Halloran, CI manager for CSD in EMEA.

Eamonn Barry

Eamonn is the director for Customer Support and Distribution (CSD) in EMEA. He joined Cook in 2018 as the director of CSD in EMEA. He recently completed the CI Leadership program.

Tell me a little about the CI leadership course.

The Certificate in Leadership Competency was very comprehensive, focusing on foundation leadership, behavior, leadership style, communication, coaching, development, etc. We were part of the first group to receive the training with leaders from EMEA and AMER, and the leadership course was linked to and ran in parallel with the new CI Green Belt program.

How does this program differ from other trainings you've done in the past?

The training exposed us to a number of new CI tools, such as leader standard work, situation leadership, and a focus on personality and behavior analysis. One completely new aspect was the sound wave program. It assesses how you speak and listen and how to be an effective communicator. There was also a focus on effective coaching and employee development linked to goal setting and how, in turn, goals should be linked back to our corporate and functional business plans.

How do you feel it adds value to the way you (or we) work?

Situation leadership provides leaders with a much better understanding of competencies, and where leaders can better support and coach. Rather than having a blanket, one size fits all, style, the support should be tailored to the level of development and coaching required for each direct report, and you should adapt your leadership style based on the situation.

What key learnings will you be bringing back to your team from the training?

I really benefited from the 1-2-1 coaching, which was aligned to the training program to better manage and understand my leadership style and how to adapt to certain situations. I hope this will benefit and has benefited my team. Attendees also had to demonstrate how they applied their learnings and had to complete a reflection log. This really reinforced the learning from the course. While it meant an investment in time, in hindsight, it was time very well invested and great learning.

As the program is being rolled out across Cook Medical, it is great to interact with colleagues who are beginning to use and apply the same learnings and speak the same leadership and CI language.



▲ Eamonn Barry, director for CSD in EMEA.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Maria Sanchez

Maria is a senior analyst for Global Finance change and the CI lead for accounts payable, travel and expense, and general ledger globally and for Payroll in EMEA. She has been with Cook for eight years and was previously part of the projects team for Finance.

What was it like to go through Green Belt training?

It was a little stressful at times, but once it was done, I was thrilled. It took place weekly over five months, and I had assignments each week. Even though it was given by an outside trainer, everybody in the course worked at Cook. This was really helpful, as we were able to set up study groups to help each other with our projects and show each other how to use the different tools.

What are you most looking forward to doing with the new skills?

There are two main things. Firstly, I would like to create a culture of CI within Finance—for CI to be the new day-to-day practice. I believe we currently have quite a few processes that we do on a day-to-day basis that could be done much more efficiently, but we are so used to them that we don't think twice about the process. Now that we have completed a few workshops, I can notice the team saying, "Great, we have fixed that, but we actually have another similar process, which I think could be improved too." So, it's just about helping people to start thinking differently about everyday processes.

Secondly, there was so much material covered in the course, and I now have so many new tools that I am looking forward to applying across the different projects I am working on.

What's the key takeaway that you're hoping to bring back to your role and your team?

As part of the course we had to do a project, and I had a real "aha" moment when I realized that the team really knows what they're doing, they actually have a lot of the knowledge already, and they know the processes inside out. Now it's just helping them to think about how we can do things better so they come up with the solutions for themselves.

How does that course differ from the courses you have done in the past?

I have previously done the Yellow Belt training, which at the time was classroom based, so it was a very different experience. The Yellow Belt course, while it was more spaced out, felt like I worked alone more because we never created the support group that we did for this course. We had coaching sessions as part of this course, which were great because you could go through things you didn't understand, discuss your progress, and other things. After every few classes we had a one-to-one session with the trainer, and that was helpful. Overall this course went at a faster pace, but we had lots of support throughout, which was great.

What would you say to others thinking about doing the course?

While this course was really great and I have learned so much, I would say to others don't wait until you have done a CI course to start thinking about how you can use CI to improve things around you. Start raising your hand to point out if something is not efficient or is taking too long. If you don't have the capabilities to fix it, somebody else will.

How would you sum up CI in one line?

Doing less with less.



▲ *Maria Sanchez, senior analyst for Global Finance change and CI lead for accounts payable, travel and expense, and general ledger globally and for payroll in EMEA.*

Eugene O'Neill

Eugene is the director of Finance for Shared Service and EMEA. He joined Cook in May 2018 as a financial controller for Cook Ireland and in March 2020, he moved to his current role. Eugene recently completed the Continuous Improvement (CI) Leadership program.

How does this Leadership program differ from other programs that you've been on in the past?

For me, I had done some of these leadership trainings before, but this one was remote, and that was a big change. This meant that we had a wider group involved, including a lot of people from the US, so we had a completely different perspective. Previously, it would have been limited by location, so you have people of similar backgrounds and experiences. Overall, it was a very positive experience and a very positive course.

How do you feel it adds value for the way you (or we) work?

The big thing about it is that Cook is trying to create a lean culture within the organization, and that works two ways. Obviously, it works from the bottom up but also from the top down. You've got to create that culture and create that space to allow lean to flourish. For me, it provides a framework for people so that they can learn the skills: how to identify opportunities, how to identify fixes, how to put them in place, how to put metrics in place, and how to make CI standards work.

What would be the key standout that you would bring back to your team from this training?

Self-evaluation to better understand your leadership style. Do you help people to figure out a problem for themselves, or do you give them the answer? And the second piece was team evaluation—trying to understand your team better, because you'll have some people on your team who are very good organizers, who are very good at doing projects, and they are just wired that way, whereas other people may be very good analytically and not as strong at project management. It's trying to understand your team and trying to adapt your style so that you're not using a "one size fits all" approach.

What would you say to other teams who might not be as far along on the CI development path?

Just start! Look for somebody who can guide you and help you. There is no point reinventing the wheel on this stuff, because it's already there. You need someone to give you advice, but also someone to lead it, someone to become your CI champion. Don't start with the most complex problem that you have; start building up small wins. It's not just for manufacturing; it's anything that is a process or has a transaction. Small things help; for example, organizing the office can be a great starting point. You need to start measuring straightaway. Otherwise, you don't have a stick to the ground, so you don't know if you are improving or not.

It's important to be open, sharing the positive results and the negative results so that everyone can learn from them. The other thing I would advise is get out there, be out there with other departments at Cook, and see what other people are doing. You learn from others and learn different ways from different people.



▲ **Eugene O'Neill**, director of Finance for Shared Service and EMEA.