

Celerant clients, former clients & friends of the business share their expertise and experience.



Brage Sandstat is Manager, Norway Operations.



*‘We’re not doing a project.  
We’re not doing a programme.  
This is the way we work.’*

**W**hen ConocoPhillips Norway launched their ‘Good to Great’ Initiative nearly 10 years ago, they were determined that it would leave a genuine legacy. Brage Sandstat was one of the Leadership Team who made sure that it has.

**Why launch Good to Great at that time?**

The short answer is to create a culture of Continuous Improvement, but it was also a matter of timing. Back in 2002 - 3 things were good for us. The price of oil was good and our operations were steady. So we said to ourselves ‘It’s always a good idea to repair the roof while the sun is

shining, rather than wait for the rain.’ We’d also just completed a major reorganisation across the North Sea and naturally, after implementing a new organisational structure you want improvements to follow. So we decided to launch Continuous Improvement.

Our objective was to create a legacy and that the exact word we used. We wanted to leave a legacy of Continuous Improvement within Conoco Phillips and Ekofisk.

Now this organisation has existed for 40 years and it was never a poorly driven asset, so there was really no great need to do anything. This was a very proud organisation, a steady, stable organisation and the largest single oil asset in Norway. So driving any type of change here was like pulling teeth without anaesthetic. No one could really understand why we needed to do this because we were already very good.

The team here was one of the best in Norway, they were benchmarking very highly. So what really drove it was us thinking that the time was right.

We’d had various improvement initiatives over the last 20 years and you learn something and create something every time. But they didn’t deliver a lasting legacy. So the ambition and desire we had with Good to Great was that we were going to start something and carry it all the way through and leave that legacy.

**How many North Sea assets were involved?**

All assets were included. Today we have 1,300 people offshore at any one time, which means about 4,000 people offshore and 800 onshore. That’s the full complement over the entire organisation, including finance, procurement, logistics and operations - the whole spectrum, including contractors.

All groups were involved. Good to Great was initiated by the Leadership Team and it has touched all groups and all departments.

**Did you bring your contractors into it as well?**

Absolutely. They were not part of the original structure, but they themselves applied to

become part of it and have really been involved in the Six Sigma methodology. This was about improving the entire operations in Conoco Phillips, Norway. So we’ve had cross functional improvement teams in production, procurement, logistics, drilling and so on. Our whole focus is really cross functional.

The attitude of the Leadership Team is a major factor in the success or failure of a programme. How did that work for you?

Without the support of the entire leadership team this would not be possible. You have to be passionate about continuous improvement and you have to generate this first win. Several of the original leadership team that took the initiative to get better have moved on. My task now is to train as many people as possible within the organisation to make it stick, so that the legacy stays behind.

That’s why we’ve always been so keen on training our own people. We have had external help for a period of time to ‘Train the Trainers’, but the idea was always for them to train us so we could be self sufficient. Today I have Master Black Belts, Certified Black Belts, we have a lot of Green Belts - and what’s new this year is that we now have trained permanent coaches offshore. This is to complement what’s been achieved so far.

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We feel that now is the right time for us to deploy full time coaches. These are our own people. We can now train our own employees in full Black Belt certified training - we have that internal capability. We call it The Good To Great Academy.

### How do you select the people who will drive the legacy?

Some apply, but mostly we select them ourselves. We usually pick Line Managers. We choose some of our best people and take them out of offshore or onshore Leadership positions, then train them in the Six Sigma methodology or coach train them. They stay in the improvement arena for a year or so and after that we promote them to a bigger job. That's the whole idea behind the legacy, to train as many of the offshore-onshore people as we can in the methodology, the way of thinking, the way of talking, the way of doing. If we can have all these people thinking about improvements they will start asking the right questions and that will keep driving Continuous Improvement.

That's how we're going to drive the legacy into the future. It's not about Brage Standsat or any particular individual. It is about critical mass, it's about sufficient mass of trained Leaders and employees who will continue to ask those questions and make our culture of Continuous Improvement live by itself.

### Offshore platforms are tough environments. How did people there react?

It was important that we didn't talk about Six Sigma, we banned those words. We never talked about Black Belts or Green Belts either because people wouldn't have had a clue what we were talking about. We called them Practitioners and Facilitators instead. We told people this was about Continuous Improvement and we showed them some of the programmes we had and some of them said 'Oh yeah, we know all about this because we've already been trained on Team Productivity Maintenance. We're already doing this, so it's not a problem.' Others didn't think it was going to work, but if they had to do it, they would.

People might think that a lot of offshore workers are single minded, tough guys, but these are well educated, knowledgeable people and some of them have been with us for many years. Some may think the oil industry can be a little bit rough, but when you come into the operating arena these are top people. They needed to be led, they needed to see the way forward and I think we struck the right balance because we had quick wins and the way that it was rolled out on the various platforms worked well.

We have 4 big complexes with 24 platforms, so we implemented Good to Great in a cascade system. As we rolled the initiative out it got a

lot of attention within the company, so when we went to a platform and said you're going to do it, we gave that platform and their operation so much attention that the other platforms started getting envious and asking us when we were going to come to them? So it was really a question of them pulling, rather than us pushing at the end. That's what made it such a big success. They wanted it.

As we implemented it on each platform we learnt a lot and took that learning onto the next platform. By the time we had done the entire round everything was being done very efficiently. Onshore we'd already done improvement projects across the various disciplines, so there it went a lot more smoothly than I had anticipated.

### Were you prepared to take as long as it took to make this work?

The time element was absolutely critical to our success. When we started to think about repairing the roof there was no one who set the pace for us. So this became ours and that's really important.

The way we articulate it is that we're not doing a project, we're not doing a programme, this is the way we work. This is how we think, this is how we'll become. This is something that we live and breathe every day. ■

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