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Six Sigma - Not Just For Manufacturing

By D. David Dugan

Although the Six Sigma methodology originally started out as a way to improve processes and products in a manufacturing environment, today it has grown to encompass a broad range of industries. As companies begin to realize the benefits a total quality improvement cycle can have upon the organization they are adopting Six Sigma and its practices into their own fold.

Organizations not only receive the quality benefit of Six Sigma in their products and processes, but also significant cash savings can be realized as part of adapting such a process. In one example, GE realized a savings of close to \$300 million dollars in the first year of implementation of Six Sigma.

Health care organizations can see benefits that not only affect the bottom line of the company, but also affect the quality of care and overall recovery rate for patients. In one example a hospital used Six Sigma practices to significantly reduce the amount of time it took to get heart attack patients from ER to the cardiac care unit by close to 41 minutes.

As a result the fatality rate of heart attack patients dropped significantly and the quality of care for those patients improved over 300%.

Financial institutions are using Six Sigma as a way to manage both their customer satisfaction expectations as well as risk management initiatives. By using the methodologies and improvement cycles of Six Sigma Bank of America realized close to \$2 billion dollars in benefits as well as a 25% increase in customer satisfaction.

The construction industry can sometimes be paralleled to the manufacturing industry. Instead of producing the end-product in a factory the construction industry produces the product at various job sites. As such many of the same improvements the manufacturing industry has seen have also been adapted to the construction industry.

Savings of man hours and costs across various projects have not only resulted in lower costs but also in higher quality buildings and infrastructure.

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The Insurance industry is one of the most paper-intensive industries in the world. Claims processing, underwriting and adjustments all take significant amounts of time to collect data and process it in order to make decisions and assist customers.

By utilizing the Six Sigma approach major players in the industry including CIGNA and American Family have seen claim processing times be reduced by up to 50% as well as more analytic assignment of risk factors based on underwriting data.

So how can Six Sigma benefit your particular organization? Start by looking at what your organization produces - be it a service or a physical product. Then look at areas that are known to have defects or are in need of improvement.

By realizing that any product or service is a continuous cycle of improvements you begin to understand the Six Sigma approach. Instead of drastic changes all at once, Six Sigma provides a process by which

small changes are constantly adapted to projects and then measured against past data to judge the quality of the improvement.

D. David Dugan personally helps to maintain the Consulting Information site

<http://consulting.divinfo.com>

which has great information like

<http://consulting.divinfo.com/what-is-six-sigma.php>

What Is Lean Six Sigma

By Peter Peterka

Lean Six Sigma combines the quality improvements that come from using Six Sigma with the speed improvements that come from using Lean manufacturing principles . Six Sigma is a disciplined, data-driven approach and methodology for eliminating defects in any process -- from manufacturing to transactional and from product to service. Lean manufacturing focuses on improving the speed of a process and the elimination of waste primarily by eliminating non-value added steps. Lean Flow and Six Sigma are strongly compatible. Combining these two powerful process improvement methods are combining the contents of two toolboxes that can help your organization improve quality and efficiency.

Lean Six Sigma and Lean Flow initiatives go by many names, including Lean Enterprise, Lean Manufacturing, Lean Sigma, and Lean Service. These concepts are a natural complement to Six Sigma and can be applied to every type of business and process. Both Lean and Six Sigma have points of commonality in their strategies and methods. Both are built around the idea that businesses

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are composed of processes that serve customer needs. They share the goal to identify and eliminate sources of waste and activities that do not add value, in order to create flow with maximum productivity, capacity, and throughput. Both place great emphasis on training to bring members of an organization to a high level of understanding and expertise on the tools and processes of the methodology. Also, both lean and Six Sigma require and encourage the engagement of management and key mentors within the organization to assure that the prioritized projects are executed as part of a way of doing business.

Lean methods and data are used to reduce costs, shorten cycle times, expand capacity, and improve productivity. Lean concepts and the Lean Flow system quickly identify improvement opportunities through the use of value stream mapping. Lean emphasizes all-encompassing principles together with targeted recommendations to achieve improvements. However, Lean principles are oftentimes inadequate to solve some of the more complicated problems that require advanced analysis.

Because Six Sigma requires in-depth statistical metrics to analyze quality at all levels of the supply chain, eliminating defects it can improve all Lean methods. Six Sigma - when combined with Lean - allows for easier identification and quicker resolution of quality issues or problems, and reaps quick results while opening people's eyes to new and better possibilities on plant floors. Six Sigma's core implementation strategy of establishing dedicated Six Sigma champions and black belts who oversee and mentor process improvement projects provides crucial structure and guidance, thus greatly enhancing Lean initiatives. Therefore, Six Sigma is very valuable when introduced during the deployment of Lean principles to ensure that the improvement roadmap includes a generic problem-solving approach.

Lean Six Sigma creates greater understanding of the value of your work by defining it as something that your customers want to pay for. Lean Six Sigma helps build customer loyalty by driving improvement in areas most important to your customers. Its metrics generate clear targeting of customer needs, and drives real, tangible value creation.

Lean Six Sigma is a highly sustainable approach that becomes woven into the fabric of the organization and involving people at all levels – from the executive suite to the front line. Full

deployment of Lean Six Sigma will foster an environment of continuous improvement where the cultural norm of your organization becomes striving for the total elimination of waste through a succession of small, action-oriented (kaizen) events within the production process.

Lean Six Sigma fulfills your overall strategy and future success by significantly improving quality and reducing waste. It empowers every employee with new ways of thinking about your processes and helps make drastic improvements to the organization's performance. Lean Six Sigma creates a powerful linkage from your strategic priorities to operational improvements and facilitates the transformation of a business.

<http://www.6sigma.us/>

Peter Peterka is the Principal Consultant in practice areas of DMAIC and DFSS.

Peter has eleven years of experience performing as a Master Black Belt, and has over 15 years experience in industry as an improvement specialist and engineer working with numerous companies.



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