

Lean Six Sigma-getting better all the time

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to assess Lean Six Sigma to identify important advances over the last ten to 15 years and discuss emerging trends that suggest how the methodology needs to evolve. The goal is to aid those who want to use the method to improve performance as well as assist those developing improvement methodologies.

Design/methodology/approach

The use and development of Lean Six Sigma is reviewed including the origins of the method, the what, why and benefits of the method, how the approach is different, the integration of Lean and Six Sigma, implementation mistakes made, lessons learned and developments needed in the future.

Findings

It is found that organizations have many different improvement needs that require the objectives and methods contained in the lean and Six Sigma methodologies. It is also found that deployment and sustaining improvements are major issues that can be overcome by building a sustaining infrastructure and making improvement a business process. Critical issues include using Lean Six Sigma to generate cash in difficult economic times, development of data-based process management systems and the use of working on improvement as a leadership development tool.

Practical implications

These findings suggest that improvement is most effective when approached in an holistic manner addressing improvement in all parts of the organization using a holistic improvement methodology such as Lean Six Sigma. Improvement must address the flow of information and materials through processes as well as the enhancement of value-adding process steps that create the product for the customer. This leads naturally to making improvement a business process that is planned for, operated and reviewed as any other important business process is.

Originality/value

The roadmaps, guiding principles, and deployment pitfalls identified will be of value to those initiating and operating improvement processes in their organizations enabling them to rapidly create useful and sustainable improvements. The discussion of needed enhancements will be of value to those who are working to improve the effectiveness of the approach.

Keywords

Leadership

Lean production

Six sigma

Performance management systems

Business improvement

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Critical issues include using Lean Six Sigma to generate cash in difficult economic times, development of data-based process management systems and the use of working on improvement as a leadership development tool. Practical implications – These findings suggest that improvement is most effective when approached in an holistic manner addressing improvement in all parts of the organization using a holistic improvement methodology such as Lean Six Sigma. Improvement must address the flow of information and materials thorough processes as well as the enhancement of value-adding process steps tha Lean Six Sigma is a method that relies on a collaborative team effort to improve performance by systematically removing waste and reducing variation. It combines lean manufacturing/lean enterprise and Six Sigma to eliminate the eight kinds of waste (muda): Defects, Over-Production, Waiting, Non-Utilized Talent, Transportation, Inventory, Motion, and Extra-Processing. Lean Six Sigma (LSS) has demonstrated the ability to produce outstanding results; over time, however, returns from LSS may begin to slow. One of the more common reasons cited for slowing returns is poorly targeted projects. This occurs because organizations fail to recognize that continuous improvement efforts need to be addressed on a systemic level rather than within a department or function in isolation. I am a very disappointed by this article and at all the accolades it has received so far. Systems thinking, lean manufacturing and six sigma were actually born together. I really would advise against such elementary attempts at taxonomy between various modes of thinking.