

Process Improvement Leveraging Six Sigma

You are considering being a Six Sigma based company, or you already are, and you want to expand your continuous improvement and Six Sigma based initiatives. But you are worried about the added internal resource, training and deployment cost, complexity of Six Sigma implementation and whether you will recover your investment any time soon. Many of your non-engineering operational staff understand standard process improvement fundamentals, and may be “scared off” with some of the Six Sigma terminology. Adding pressure, you know that if you act quickly you can capture additional value for the company. What is the best approach to obtain those benefits?

BLCN recommends a combined approach to leverage the simplicity and effectiveness of fundamental process improvement and the power of various Six Sigma tools. Depending on the existing internal methods and approach, Six Sigma can be easily linked or incorporated into the standard process improvement methods. Below is a comparison, showing the similarity, of the standard process improvement phases and the Six Sigma DMAIC methods.

Process Improvement Phases

•Baseline (AS IS)

- Understand the scope, processes and expectations
- Identify current actual and future desired measures

•Analysis

- Issue identification
- Customer touch points / value
- Root Cause (5 Whys, trend and Bottleneck analysis)
- Solution design points

•Detail Design

- TO BE Design & control points
- Transition Planning: People, Process and Technology changes

•Continuous Improvement

- Process validation and continuous improvement actions

DMAIC

•Define (Baseline & Expectations)

- Voice of the Customer
- Charter (Understanding the scope, processes)

•Measure

- Define current metrics /variance
- Develop new metrics–

•Analyze

- Root Cause (5 whys, trend analysis)
- Statistical Analysis, Design of Experiments

•Improve

- Define TO BE process, control points & plan implementation

•Control

- Control charts, Kaizan events & continuous improvement actions

Process improvement, using a job role based process mapping approach, is a standard approach understood and accepted by most organizations. Six Sigma tools are very powerful in eliminating variances in products to achieve performance within tolerances. Also, where high automation is involved such as in the manufacturing process, many Six Sigma tools can be incorporated into Lean Manufacturing / plant floor analysis and design.

For a company looking at starting Six Sigma for additional improvement, we recommend using a process improvement methodology as a base methodology for the majority of the enterprise improvement, then leverage internal, or external Six Sigma Black belts for the product specific or highly automated areas of the business.

For companies that have embraced Six Sigma and the DMAIC methods, BLCN can provide the added resources to better utilize your existing internal Six Sigma expertise and address supportive business area issues. Below is an example of this approach:

1. The BLCN team performs the initial steps of the initiative (prep, planning) with the internal staff.
2. The BLCN team performs the Baseline / As Is mapping efforts and the identification of the business issues and opportunities using the BLCN Methods end-to-end mapping techniques.
3. The identified issues will be divided between the internal Six Sigma team, performing analysis on the deeper issues requiring the data and statistical analysis for root cause solutions, while the BLCN team works with the owning organization on standard root cause analysis and the overall To Be design. The BLCN and internal Six Sigma experts then develop the transition plan with the owning organization.
4. Where needed, BLCN would perform the various organizational change management activities to support the effort.

Continuous Improvement: The objective of continuous improvement phase is to grow the value received from the initial deployment. BLCN leverages it's continuous improvement phase to validate that open items are closed, test the process design for any new changes due to internal or environmental changes. During the workshop, the Six Sigma experts would review the metrics, actual to planned, and analyze for gaps or inconsistencies that need to be reconciled. If the gaps result in process impacts, they would work with the BLCN team to define root cause, change the process design and develop the change plans.

The end result is obtaining the maximum value from the simplicity of process improvement and the power of Six Sigma tools. The combination of process methods, Six Sigma and organizational change management is a powerful way to successfully execute your Six Sigma initiatives with limited resources. If needed, BLCN can provide additional Six Sigma skilled resources.

For more information about this offering, or BLCN, please contact:
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