



Category	Lean Six Sigma Improvement Project
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Recipe for Failure

Companies committed to customer satisfaction and quality improvement usually expend a lot of time, energy, and resources in the overall effort to ensure success. A major part of the strategy for success is training and education. For organizations that employ Lean Six Sigma continuous improvement methodology and roadmap, investment in Lean or Lean Six Sigma training usually amounts to significant costs. Such training may include black belt, green belt, champion or sponsor, and other levels.

Many organizations, especially those that take the time to properly plan a continuous improvement program, achieve improvement success; however, a significant few—perhaps more—undermine their own success by falling into a variety of traps. Some of these traps are very subtle, but can quickly be amplified, and become a recipe for failure.

One such trap is the focus of this article. It relates to Lean Six Sigma improvement projects and usually involves a project sponsor or champion identifying an improvement opportunity and determining the improvement goals and objectives of a project without the prior involvement or buy-in of a process owner. Has this ever happened in your organization or have you observed this in another organization? Having observed this on more than a few occasions in my consulting experience, I am inclined to believe that this situation occurs more often.

A typical, and often common, scenario occurs as follows – A project sponsor, or champion, eager to pursue lean six sigma improvement projects collaborates with a possible stakeholder to identify an improvement opportunity. The opportunity is defined, logged into a list of potential projects, with improvement goals or targets established. Later, when a green belt or black belt resource is available, a team is assembled and dispatched to engage the process team to initiate and launch the improvement project with high expectations established by the sponsor or champion. What is wrong with this picture?

Upon learning of the high expectations of the sponsor and the “plans” of the green belt or black belt team, the process owner manager, or supervisor, is surprised and appalled at the fact that a specific project with preset goals and



targets were defined without his or her input—let alone buy-in. The resistance movement subsequently begins. The process owner and his or her team are now confronted with a choice of embracing an improvement team that is perceived as an outsider bent on imposing its will at all cost. A recipe for failure is hence established.

This realistic scenario demonstrates a chain of events that increases the likelihood of failure on lean six sigma improvement endeavors. It is vital that continuous improvement project sponsors, project champions, and program managers exercise certain basic diplomatic measures during their effort to prepare and initiate individual improvement projects. These measures should include consultation and collaboration with business process owners during the identification and pre-planning stages of improvement opportunities. Such a move will go a long way to ensure buy-in and to mitigate any potential resistance by the very group that would benefit the most from the improvement opportunity.

After significant financial investment and time commitment to a properly designed and planned continuous improvement program, it would be a shame and a dis-service—to an organization—to have procedural, protocol, or relatively minor interpersonal issues derail the journey to success.

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