

LEAN Six Sigma

68

DEFINING THE TOPIC

- **Lean:** The philosophy, tools, and techniques for thinking, organizing, and performing work that causes hidden waste to be illuminated. With the waste uncovered, a company can then derive and implement strategies and practices to reduce or eliminate it. Also called the Toyota Production System (TPS).
- **Six Sigma:** A problem-solving approach and set of tools for developing and implementing rapid, data-driven solutions within targeted operational areas. Continued application leads to consistently repeated breakthrough improvement in product, process, and business performance.
- **Lean Six Sigma:** The name for the blending of Lean and Six Sigma approaches and tools.
- **Continuous improvement:** To continually find and implement improved ways of delivering greater value to customers with less waste. While perfection is ultimately achievable, product, process, and business excellence can be achieved and sustained through continuously pursuing an ideal state.
- **Operational excellence:** An organization's strategy and efforts to use Lean Six Sigma to continuously improve their operations and business.

Lean Six Sigma is a broad and deep topic. Consequently, some general definitions and terms are valuable.

Domains of Application

Has been successfully applied to all industries and organizations. Because of any company or organization who claims, "It won't work here; we're different."

Typical Benefits

A sustained Lean Six Sigma effort results in:

- Higher profit margins and more operating cash
- Higher capacity and throughput; shorter production cycle times and new product time to market
- Higher quality and better customer experience
- Larger market share and greater market segmentation
- Greater market capitalization
- More engaged, happy, productive employees

Japanese Terminology

Much of the philosophy and tools hail from Japan, with several Japanese terms now being global, industry-wide standards. This guide uses those standards for ease of communications, but organizations may find benefit in developing and adopting their own branding of the philosophies and tools.

PRINCIPLES FOR EXECUTIVES & MANAGERS

A sobering reality is that 70% of Lean Six Sigma initiatives fizzle or fail. Why?

W. Edwards Deming provided key clues: "The supposition is prevalent that the world over that there would be no problems in production or service if only our production workers would do their jobs in the way that they were taught. Pleasant dreams. The workers are handicapped by the system, and the system belongs to the management." (Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, MIT Press, 1982)

Incremental, isolated, tool-centric, or partial continuous improvement initiatives will yield remarkable short-term results within the scope of their application.

But the single, most-essential impediment for sustained, long-term improvement is that the organization's managers, leaders, and executives be internally and visibly committed to the principles that support continuous improvement.

Base All Decisions on a Long-Term Vision or Mission of Customer Value

To enable sustained, continuous improvement, a company's stated purpose must include the ideal that its business value proposition centers on delivering increasingly greater value to its customers or to society.

In all their decisions, managers, leaders, and executives must choose an option that is aligned with their company's long-term purpose, even at the expense of pursuing short-term gains.

Understand Quality: What It Is & Isn't

Managers, leaders, and executives must correctly understand quality before they can improve or manage it.

For any product or service, the end customer has requirements for:

- Its characteristic features and functionality and the overall performance or experience those combine to create
 - The quantity or magnitude of the product or service they need
 - The correct timing for its delivery or utilization
- Companies capture and document customer requirements for each product or service characteristic using specifications.

- **Specification target:** The ideal value desired by the customer to maximize the product's value performance or their experience.
- **Specification limits:** Because variability is inherent in all produced product or service characteristics, limits are set for the acceptable range of values allowed around the specification target.

Cost of poor quality (COPQ): Typical companies spend 15%-80% of their revenues addressing issues arising from poor quality.

A traditional view of quality—but nonetheless supported in reality—is that the costs associated with poor quality are uniformly low when production values comply within the characteristic's specification limits and that costs are uniformly high when the limits are exceeded. This faulty view leads to quality efforts centered around quality equating compliance with specifications, which inherently lowers the real quality customer experience and stifles employee engagement and continuous improvement.

In reality, the costs associated with poor quality are the least when production values match the specification target. Costs increase geometrically as production values deviate from the target, even when they are within specification limits. The formalization of this principle is credited to Genichi Taguchi (1924-2012).



Lean Six Sigma's definition for quality: quality = on target with minimal variation.

Improve Continuously

Managers, leaders, and executives must never prioritize or protect the status quo over the pursuit of an improved condition.

Respect People (Employees & Partners)

All business value originates from human life value. Managers, leaders, and executives respect people by:

- Continuously improving employees' work condition and the meaningfulness of their work
- Developing and enabling employees so that they themselves can contribute directly to improving their own work condition and delivering increasingly greater value to customers
- Challenging employees and holding them accountable for performance and improvement
- Treating external suppliers and partners with the same respect as employees

Develop Leadership

Managers, leaders, and executives must live the principles and apply the tools themselves. They must also proactively and continuously develop, coach, mentor, and incentivize future leaders who live the principles and apply the tools.



PROGRAMS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Kaizen: Daily Individual Improvement

Kaizen is Japanese for "continuous improvement."

The heart and soul of operational excellence is implementation of self-directed, daily, incremental improvements (kaizen) by each person in the organization—by executives, managers, and frontline workers alike.

Daily individual kaizen can be improvements in:

- Customer value delivered
- Efficiency
- Waste
- Quality
- Cost
- Safety
- Flex, visibility, level loading, etc.
- Speed
- Consistency or variability
- Convenience or comfort

The size or scope of daily individual kaizen should be:

- Small enough that the individual is unsure if the implemented kaizen will have a substantive impact on overall performance
- Small enough that the individual is sure that he/she can implement the improvement

The organization should incentivize daily individual participation in kaizen.

Yokoten: Regular Sharing or Adopting Best Improvements within or between Teams

Yokoten is Japanese for "sharing."

The best individual kaizens are regularly shared with and adopted by the larger team or group, thus extending the improvement and creating a snowballing benefit.

Best improvements can be selected by the team or by alignment with organization strategy.

Adopted improvements are integrated into work standards to create a continually learning organization.

The organization should incentivize regular sharing, adoption, and standardization.

Kaikaku: Regular, Planned Improvement Projects Aligned with Strategy

Kaikaku is Japanese for "radical improvement."

The team or group comes together for a focused improvement project. A proven improvement project methodology or road map is followed in the pursuit of a targeted objective, which is aligned with the organization's strategy.

The project objective is often ≥75% improvement in a key metric.

Many companies call their kaikaku efforts "kaizens." This is not recommended, since it confuses and ultimately dilutes both efforts.

CYCLICALLY APPLY AN IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ROAD MAP

For kaikaku-style targeted improvement projects, employ a proven project methodology, either DMAIC or PDCA:

Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve & Control (DMAIC)

- **Define:** Establish the context, key metrics, and objectives for the project.
- **Measure:** Quantify the current baseline performance and capability of the process or system. Identify all possible contributing factors.
- **Analyze:** Pinpoint the list of possible factors down to the critical few. Use data to understand the cause-and-effect relationships in the process or system.
- **Improve:** Develop improvements based on the critical few. Validate that process or system changes result in the targeted performance improvements.

Lean Six Sigma Guide

SA Adler



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Table of Contents Lean Six Sigma Guide

1. Understanding the eBook Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide User Reviews and Ratings
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Lean Six Sigma Guide Free and Paid eBooks
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide Public Domain eBooks
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide eBook Subscription Services
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide Budget-Friendly Options

6. Navigating Lean Six Sigma Guide eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide Compatibility with Devices
 - Lean Six Sigma Guide Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Interactive Elements Lean Six Sigma Guide
8. Staying Engaged with Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Lean Six Sigma Guide
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Lean Six Sigma Guide
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Setting Reading Goals Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Lean Six Sigma Guide
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements

- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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Lean Six Sigma Guide :

Section 11-3: Exploring Mendelian Genetics Flashcards All genes show simple patterns of dominant and recessive alleles. Description: One allele is not completely dominant over another. The heterozygous phenotype ... 11-4 Meiosis (Answers to Exploring Mendelian Genetics ... Genes for different traits can segregate independently during the formation of gametes. dominant recessive false. 10. codominance multiple ... 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics Flashcards the inheritance of biological characteristics is determined by genes that are passed from parents to their offspring in organisms that reproduce sexually Exploring Mendelian Genetics Exploring Mendelian Genetics. Section 11-3. Independent Assortment. In a two-factor cross, Mendel followed _____ different genes as they passed from one ... 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics Mendel crossed the heterozygous F1 plants (RrYy) with each other to determine if the alleles would segregate from each other in the F2 generation. RrYy × RrYy. 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics What is the difference between incomplete dominance and codominance? • Incomplete dominance = heterozygous phenotype is somewhere in between the 2. Section 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics Section 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics. (pages 270-274). Key Concepts. • What is the principle of

independent assortment? • What inheritance patterns exist ... Answers For CH 11, 13, 14 Reading Handout Section 11—3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics 9. What was the ratio of Mendel's F₂ generation for the two-factor cross? (pages 270-274) 10. Complete the Punnett ... 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics Aug 14, 2014 — 11-3 Exploring Mendelian Genetics. Key Concepts: What is the principle of independent assortment? What inheritance patterns exist aside from ... Answers to All Questions and Problems Aug 14, 2015 — CHAPTER 1. 1.1 In a few sentences, what were Mendel's key ideas about inheritance? ANS: Mendel postulated transmissible factors—genes—to. World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History Richard Ingersoll's World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History, Second Edition, provides the most comprehensive and contemporary survey in the field. World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History The result is a comprehensive method for understanding and appreciating the history, cultural significance, and beauty of architecture from around the world. World Architecture - Paperback - Richard Ingersoll Jul 9, 2018 — Richard Ingersoll's World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History, Second Edition, provides the most comprehensive and contemporary survey in ... Ingersoll, World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History 2e Richard Ingersoll's World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History, Second Edition, provides the most comprehensive and contemporary survey in the field. Richard Ingersoll World Architecture A Cross Cultural History Apr 26, 2020 — Richard Ingersoll's World Architecture History book. World architecture : a cross-cultural history A chronological and geographic introduction to the world's greatest architecture. World architecture : a cross-cultural history World architecture : a cross-cultural history | WorldCat.org. World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History - Softcover World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History by Ingersoll, Richard; Kostof, Spiro - ISBN 10: 0195139577 - ISBN 13: 9780195139570 - Oxford University Press ... World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History 2nd edition World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History 2nd Edition is written by Richard Ingersoll and published by Oxford University Press. The Digital and eTextbook ... World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History Dec 13, 2012 — World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History is an entirely new, student-friendly text by Richard Ingersoll. Building on Kostof's global vision ... Factors Doctoral Candidates Attribute to their Persistence Hearing their Voices: Factors Doctoral Candidates Attribute to their Persistence ... The study aims to examine the views of doctorate students and graduate ... Factors Doctoral Candidates Attribute to their Persistence by LS Spaulding · Cited by 424 — Hearing their Voices: Factors Doctoral Candidates Attribute to their Persistence. Lucinda S. Spaulding, Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw. "Hearing their voices: Factors doctoral candidates attribute ... by LS Spaulding · 2012 · Cited by 424 — These findings provide a composite understanding of the essence of the struggles inherent in the journey and the factors associated with doctoral persistence. Hearing their voices: factors doctoral candidates attribute to ... The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to examine persistence factors associated with the successful completion of a doctoral degree in the field ... Factors doctoral candidates attribute to their persistence Hearing their voices: Factors doctoral candidates attribute to their persistence ... doctoral education, many students do not complete their studies, and very ...

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