

Improving Government Service Delivery with Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma is a methodology that improves service delivery. Lean Six Sigma combines two management approaches. Lean maximizes value to customers, both internal and external, while removing wasteful activities and practices. Six Sigma maximizes value by systematically applying scientific principles to reduce variations and thus eliminate defects in product and service offerings. The combined approach emphasizes customer satisfaction, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement, a search for root causes, and comprehensive employee involvement.

The methodology can make government more effective. Both Six Sigma and Lean have evolved from collections of techniques for comprehensive management systems. Both strive to enhance customer service leading to sustained organizational success and both require a supporting organizational culture. Their approaches differ somewhat, leading some to question their compatibility. However, by understanding their fundamental principles, the combined Lean Six Sigma can be a powerful means to enhancing customer satisfaction while managing costs.

Some governmental entities have sustained a comprehensive improvement program over many years. These organizations possess some commonalities, including the following: (1) They initiated and continue to preach a constancy of purpose based on a consistent underlying methodology; (2) Their key leadership positions have been in place for lengthy periods of time; (3) They guarantee that employees will not lose their jobs as a consequence of improvement projects; and (4) They measure their time to success in years rather than weeks or months.

Government can create an infrastructure that supports Lean Six Sigma. Governments desiring substantial change in their service delivery can see results by focusing on four goals: (1) Deploy a sound, consistent, and robust methodology; (2) Build trust by removing fear; (3) Initiate long-term cultural change; and (4) Communicate the vision to all stakeholders. Active commitment of leadership is a must, in both words and action.

To further set the stage for a Lean Six Sigma program, the following actions can help ensure success:

- A centralized, focal person should be identified who is dedicated to firmly establishing the program within the organization
- Departmental involvement should be sought to create a good working relationship and enhance credibility

- Training should be focused on a simple toolbox containing basic Lean Six Sigma skills
- Skilled facilitators, who are critical to project success, should be utilized from external sources or should be developed internally

Within a Lean Six Sigma program, specific projects will be initiated. It is recommended that each Lean Six Sigma improvement project consist of three distinct stages. First, during the Project Initiation stage, the guidelines recommend focusing on a structured mechanism for project selection and project team creation. Second, a disciplined project management structure is recommended for the Project Execution stage to ensure a focus on root causes of problems rather than their symptoms. Third, the Project Communication stage involves delivering project information early and often, using mechanisms that are accessible to as many employees as possible. ■

Resources

["Improving Service Delivery in Government with Lean Six Sigma", by John Maleyeff, Professor, Lally School of Management & Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Hartford Campus \(IBM Center for the Business of Government\) 2007.](#)



This issue brief is one of a series of IBM Center for The Business of Government mission and program issue briefs prepared in anticipation of the 2008 national election and transition in government.

For more information, contact Marty Wagner at marty.wagner@us.ibm.com or (202) 515-4672.

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