

Shaping the Future of the National Guard: Insights from Colonel Donald H. Dellinger Deployment Director, National Guard Joint Continuous Process Improvement Initiative

Whether the call is coming from a state governor or directly from the president of the United States, the National Guard must be always ready to respond and engage whether at home or abroad. Today, like most of the government, the Guard is hardly immune to this period of fiscal contraction and has sought to respond to the new fiscal realities by reducing waste, controlling costs and improving business processes. What is the mission of the National Guard Joint Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) initiative? How is the Guard improving its operations, becoming more efficient, and controlling cost? What is the Guard doing to promote management and organizational excellence? Colonel Donald Dellinger, Deployment Director, National Guard Joint Continuous Process Improvement Initiative, shares his insights into these questions and how CPI is shaping the future of the National Guard.

Colonel, would you tell us more about the mission of the U.S. National Guard Bureau? How does your organization support the overall mission of its dual state and federal force?

☞ Colonel Dellinger ☞

The National Guard Bureau is responsible for the administration of the National Guard of the United States, established by the U.S. Congress as a joint bureau of the Department of the Army and the Department of the Air Force. It holds a unique status as both a staff and operation agency. We work with the states and the adjutant generals within the states and territories to assist in maintaining and developing the National Guard for the future missions and roles. Today, tens of thousands of Guard members are serving in harm's way in Iraq and Afghanistan, as the National Guard continues its historic dual mission, providing to the states units trained and equipped to protect life and property, while providing to the nation units trained, equipped, and ready to defend the U.S. interests.

Most people don't realize the actual size of the National Guard. Currently, we are in 3,300 communities across the nation. On the Army side, there are approximately 350,000 soldiers in the Army National Guard, which is 32 percent of



the total Army force and also 11 percent of the total Army budget. On the Air Force side, there are approximately 1,700 airmen in the Air Guard, which is 21 percent of the total Air Force personnel and six percent of the Air Force budget.

Perhaps you could tell us about your role as a deployment director of the National Guard Joint Continuous Process Improvement Initiative. What are your specific duties and what's the mission of the CPI office within the Guard?

☞ Colonel Dellinger ☞

The Joint CPI office was established in 2009 by General Craig McKinley. The purpose was to assist in maintaining mission-ready forces by removing waste and non-value activities. The mission of the National Guard Bureau Joint Process Improvement Office is to create a culture of continuous improvement by deploying tools, training, and mentoring

to soldiers and airmen throughout the National Guard as a way to reduce waste, control costs, and improve business processes. My main duty is overseeing the entire program from cradle to grave.

Regarding your responsibilities and duties, what are some of your key challenges and what have you done to overcome them?

— Colonel Dellinger —

The top issue or challenge we're facing right now is influencing top-level culture change. The young soldiers and airmen coming into the organization that are exposed to the methodology of Lean Six Sigma or continuous process improvement really see the value of these tools. The real culture change involves senior leadership. They may be used to a specific way of doing business and don't necessarily gravitate to new ways, especially when these new ways of doing things require an investment and there's no way of really knowing how well it's going to work. To address that, my main job is to engage these senior leaders and educate leadership on the importance of continuous process improvement. It is my main focus to show how Lean Six Sigma can help senior leaders achieve their goals, objectives, [and] strategic vision.

Along with changing the culture, another major challenge is sustaining the effort. There are many complexities with how the National Guard operates. It's a dual mission organization—we have a federal and state mission. The National Guard Bureau does not have direct command and control over [state units] to direct them to implement continuous process improvement. We can only recommend CPI and provide resources for them to pursue it if they deem it



Definition of Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma encompasses many common features of Lean and Six Sigma, such as an emphasis on customer satisfaction, a culture of continuous improvement, the search for root causes, and comprehensive employee involvement. In each case, a high degree of training and education takes place, from upper management to the shop floor.

beneficial. Sustaining the CPI effort is very difficult given these operational realities along with frequent changes in leadership. It's critical ensuring that you have a viable training pipeline of new leaders coming in, so that when the old leaders move out, new leaders move in continuing to use Lean Six Sigma. We know best practices and the things that would help facilitate a successful continuous process improvement deployment, but we can only advise as we do not execute. Trying to overcome obstacles involves extensive outreach, many personal meetings, and most of all, the building of relationships.

Colonel, it's important to note that the term Lean Six Sigma is actually the combination of two management terms, one being Lean and the other being Six Sigma. Could you describe these different approaches? How do these two approaches complement each other and what drives the culture of continuous improvement?

— Colonel Dellinger —

People may not realize that Lean Six Sigma, or more specifically, continuous process improvement, has origins within the military, especially during World War II. In the military, we don't have a bottom line or customers as [do] private-sector companies with a focus on profit and expenses. We do have to accomplish our mission and sometimes being successful at that mission may not rest on realizing efficiencies. With Lean, these tools are used to eliminate waste in a process and by doing that you can see a huge improvement very quickly. I think the power of linking the two is being able to deliver what you're supposed to be delivering all the time consistently. For the military I think that's very important.

Continuous process improvement is an organizational framework, a way of thinking. People tend to focus too much on the tools while CPI is about defining and solving problems. The key here is not necessarily the tools, but making sure the tools—Lean or Six Sigma, or both—are linked and informed

The Lean + Six Sigma Benefit = Improve Quality and Reduce Waste

Lean reduces waste, but it alone cannot reduce variation. Variation is any systematic or random deviation from an expected value of process performance or process outcome.



Six Sigma can help reduce variation, but it alone cannot reduce waste or cycle times.



Together, Lean and Six Sigma can be used as complementary approaches on any process to eliminate waste and improve quality through reduced variation in the product or service being offered.

by your organizational strategy. If you take an organization, its strategy, goals, and objectives, then you assess them using metrics, you can better identify areas that need improvement. You can then bring in specific CPI tools to address these areas. I think one of the powers of Lean Six Sigma and the DMAIC process is that it allows you to define the problem. Going through the LLS measurement phase you collect data and information [that] enable you to confirm: 1) Did we define the problem correctly? 2) After defining the problem, is this something that we really want to invest in and tackle? Is it a worthwhile endeavor? This gives leadership an opportunity to make a decision without investing a lot of time.

All initiatives fail without leadership commitment. Without that, you're going to have an initiative that may start off strong but fades. The most effective way to achieve this sponsorship is to align your CPI effort to the strategic vision of the organization. Leaders are going to focus on things that matter to them. When picking LLS projects, make sure they have real value to the organization, so leaders don't view CPI efforts as drains on resources. In the end, it's more than simply improving processes; it's about improving the organization.

What are some of the questions that one should be asked before engaging in a continuous process improvement initiative?

— Colonel Dellinger —

Are you willing to make the investment in time and commitment to actively sponsor and support a continuous process improvement initiative? Senior leadership is key to the

success of a process improvement initiative. Once senior leadership has chosen to implement change, LSS can provide the tools to make processes more efficient and effective. Leadership needs to support the methodology and be willing to invest the time as this is not a quick fix. It's not a silver bullet because what you're trying to do is change culture. Changing a culture takes three to five years. When we discuss the mechanics of Lean Six Sigma with leadership, it's the change management part that's the most difficult. If leadership isn't bought in or there's not a real commitment, we prefer that CPI not be implemented as the organization is not ready. It's key that the methodology be embraced wholeheartedly. There has to be an "all in" mindset.

There are certain preconditions. We meet with senior leaders to understand their circumstances, priorities, and level of commitment. Based on our initial engagement, we then develop a plan of action. There's nothing better than having a "proof of principle" to demonstrate what you're trying to accomplish. So, we highlight CPI successes and demonstrate various success stories throughout the National Guard.

Being directive in nature doesn't necessarily always get you the results that you want. I think the path that we're taking is the right path so that the results that we get and the activity that we get are real. What I mean by real is that people aren't just trying to get a training target or a project target. They're actually trying to find things that are nested within the strategy that are going to move the organization forward. I think that's very important.

Why did the National Guard Bureau select Lean Six Sigma as an integral part of its CPI toolkit?

— Colonel Dellinger —

When we first started down this road we had two separate programs. We had the Air Force Smart Operations 21 (AFSO 21) that focused on Lean while the Army was doing Lean Six Sigma. It became obvious that this wasn't an efficient way of developing a continuous process improvement culture within the National Guard across our enterprise.

Under General McKinley's leadership, we had to consolidate our efforts, establishing a joint program so we all are using the same methodology across this enterprise. The National Guard is very committed to being good stewards of the taxpayer's dollars and to being the most efficient organization possible.

What are some of the steps that you're taking to get the states involved in the initiative and to move towards this vision?

— Colonel Dellinger —

We had to have the buy-in at the most senior leadership level, so we developed a general officers steering committee made up of 10 adjutant generals to be an advisory board to General McKinley on the CPI initiative. General McKinley will have insight from the grassroots as well as the support of the adjutant generals in moving forward with this methodology to make sure that the Guard is capable and ready. With declining resources and tightening budgets, it's very important for an organization to be efficient and effective. We can't afford not to be, especially the National Guard as we're competing for resources with other DOD components. As efficient and effective as we can be on limited resources makes us more valuable to the country because we can provide capability at a lower cost compared to other organizations. I think that's great value and that's what we strive to do.

Would you outline the core values that are the foundation for your efforts within the National Guard Bureau and how do these values tie back to the overall mission of the Guard?

— Colonel Dellinger —

A core value in our program is a commitment to continuous improvement. In the military most people have that mindset anyway. It's a natural tendency for leaders in the military to want to always improve and always do things to make an organization better. We're working on short timelines. You're



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. John Orrell

Air Force Gen. Craig McKinley, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, speaks at the 2011 National Guard Bureau Domestic Operations Workshop.

only in a job two or three years and you want to make the most of that time that you're in the job to improve things. I think the CPI methodology enables us to get to root causes and find solutions that can keep the problem from reoccurring. I think that's key. CPI also enables people to participate and problem-solve at the lowest level of the organization. You're getting input and buy-in from the people that are actually working the process. I think that is very powerful. When you have an organization where everybody feels empowered and has a say on how things are fixed, you get creative solutions and you get people always wanting to improve the organization. A prime example of that is we have a wing out in West Virginia that does the maintenance on C5 aircraft. It took them approximately 137 days to turn one aircraft around. Now that time is down from 137 days to approximately 30 days. Today, the whole group meets every week from the commander down to the junior airmen to identify how to do it faster than 30 days. If you have a mindset as a leader or as a member of a team that you're always striving to do the best, I think that leads to innovation; it leads to an organization that will continue to grow and learn.

I think the other core value is always keeping "the customer" in mind. Who are you servicing? What are you trying to accomplish? For who and to what end? Keeping that focus keeps you on track and keeps you from unnecessarily wasting resources and time. Our biggest resource is time because we don't have the same time as the active duty.

On Building a Successful CPI Initiative

Identify the Burning Platform

- Units must have a compelling reason for implementing process improvement.
- Identifying the issue(s) causing the most “pain” for the state will provide the burning platform.
- Be able to articulate that burning platform and understand how LSS (Lean Six Sigma) can address the problems.

Put Resources in Place

- Choose the right resources: employees, material, or technology, to ensure the initiative will succeed.
- Ensure those resources are committed to implementing change management.
- The employees must be empowered to carry out initiatives.

Teach the Methodology

A Chinese proverb says, Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. NGB-CPI provides the means for the states to “fish” by:

- Conducting Green Belt and Black Belt training classes throughout the fiscal year.
- Assigning skilled Master Black Belts to mentor the Belts through the lifecycle of their project.
- Certifying knowledgeable, skilled Green and Black Belts to ensure the state will be able to support a self-sustaining initiative.

Prioritize Strategically Aligned Processes

“The department must start setting priorities, making real trade-offs and separating appetites from real requirements,” former Secretary Gates said in reference to his announcement to find \$100 billion in savings in the next five years.

- Identify projects that are aligned to the state’s strategic plan.
- Assess projects to ensure they meet the expectations of the organization’s goals.
- Ensure projects will receive the focus and dedication to process improvement that they require.

Establish Ownership of the Initiative

It must be clear who owns the initiative.

- Each state, district, and territory will own its own CPI program.
- Each unit, wing, section, and team will own its process improvement activities.
- With ownership comes empowerment and a sense of pride.
- Empowered members are more committed, accountable, and engaged.

Take the Right Measurements

What cannot be measured cannot be improved.

- Determine baseline performance criteria.
- Use the data in objective decision-making and analysis of variation and waste.
- Focus on the critical factors impacting a process.
- Scope a project narrowly enough to ensure completion; don’t boil the ocean.

Govern the Program

- Create a governance structure within the state to sustain momentum.
- Help to clear any hurdles that may slow a project, allowing the project to adhere to timelines.
- Hold regularly scheduled, productive meetings or review sessions to monitor project completion.

Recognize Contributions

- Recognition of process improvement plays a valuable role in making sure team members remain satisfied in their roles.
- Builds enthusiasm for the program from a top-down and grassroots level.
- Helps drive innovation throughout the organization.

Source: CPI Shapes the Future of the National Guard by Donald H. Dellinger, National Guard Bureau: <http://www.ng.mil/news/archives/2010/11/111010-CPI.aspx>

We're not on duty 365, but we still have the same mission so time is a huge resource and we can't afford to waste it.

Another core value is being receptive to new ideas. People look at Lean Six Sigma and think that the methodology is very rigid and hinders creativity. I would argue just the opposite. The solutions represent the creativity. The methodology keeps you on track and ensures you're solving the problem that you intended to solve and that you get the results that you intended.

I think another core value is making decisions based on data. Cultivating a culture that ensures decision-making is informed by data and not simply by experience.

Colonel, it strikes me that the successful deployment of the CPI Lean Six Sigma program is really not an end in itself. Rather, it's an opportunity to start something new. How critical is it to manage change in order to make your efforts successful?

— Colonel Dellinger —

Change management is the real key to what we're talking about here. The methodology is sound. It's been proven both in industry and in the military. The real question is: how do you get leaders to buy into the methodology to be able to execute in the way it needs to be executed to receive those benefits? It's a continuous dialogue that highlights your success stories and proof of principle. I think once you have that proof of principle, it's hard to deny the results or the potential of what can be achieved.

The change management aspect is so important you can't lose sight of it. There's a tendency to focus on the training pipeline and the number of projects. In order to have a sustainable program, one that's going to improve the organization, you need to have that senior sponsorship and buy-in. The continuous beating of the drum of how important it is and how it's going to help the organization, then communicating those successes, picking the right people, picking the right projects, so people see value is very important and is very critical not only to the sustainment, but is also the best advertisement for the program. I think adding value is the most important thing, and how quickly you do that. Without change management, you have a problem-solving methodology that may benefit a little bit of the organization, but it's not going to have the power or really improve the organization to the extent to which it can.

Would you tell us about some of the current barriers you're facing, and what are you doing to break down some of these barriers?

— Colonel Dellinger —

I think one of our biggest barriers is also one of our greatest strengths as the National Guard. It is how we're organized and structured. The problem is that when you want to get things done in a large organization it takes a lot of relationship-building as we don't have command and control with the state units. It just means you have to work a lot and build those relationships and trust. I think the other piece is getting buy-in, true buy-in. I think when you see that happen it's amazing to see how much you can get done and how quickly you can get it done. I think organization and buy-in are really the key things that we have to work on within the National Guard. I'm happy to say that in the second year, we've trained over 384 practitioners. We have completed some 68 projects with about \$32 million worth of benefit to the National Guard. We have another 236 active projects that are being worked on now. Some may say \$32 million in a budget of billions isn't that great. I think a program starting from nothing and realizing \$32 million is a huge achievement. Right now, we have 35 states that are currently implementing continuous process improvement.

Time and personnel are two of our greatest resources challenges. Any time that you're able to give back time to the soldier or reallocating resources to a higher priority, I think this is very beneficial to any leader or organization. I think everybody in their lifetime wants to say when it's all said and done that you've added value or you did something that you can be proud of. I think being a public servant is something that you can be very proud of at the end of the day. ■

To learn more about the National Guard Bureau, go to www.ng.mil/default.aspx



To hear *The Business of Government Hour's* interview with Colonel Dellinger, go to the Center's website at www.businessofgovernment.org.



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To read the full transcript of *The Business of Government Hour's* interview with Colonel Dellinger, visit the Center's website at www.businessofgovernment.org.