

# Synchronized

## Manufacturers should embrace the best of both worlds

Lean? Six Sigma? Lean Six Sigma? What is the right approach to continuous improvement? While both Lean and Six Sigma have become more and more popular as continuous improvement initiatives during the past few years, many organizations are struggling with these questions: Do we go down the Lean path, the Six Sigma path or do we merge the approaches into a single effort called Lean Six Sigma?

The most common answer to these questions among Lean practitioners is, "Use Lean until you run out of Lean opportunities." Six Sigma Black Belts usually responded by saying, "Use Six Sigma. After all, it is statistically based and provides actual data to back up the changes required to reduce variation and improve quality within your processes." And now we are hearing about the combined approach of doing Six Sigma at the speed of Lean. So what is the right answer? Or, more importantly, are any of these three answers correct?

During the past few years, a large and vocal continuous improvement contingent that subscribes to the philosophy of a single methodology most often referred to as Lean Sigma or Lean Six Sigma has emerged. The underlying theme is that Six Sigma projects can be done with the speed of Lean. There does, however, exist a small and growing group of quality and continuous improvement practitioners that through observation and use of both disciplines are proving that it is not a single combined approach. It is a synchronized approach using Lean when issues and opportunities demonstrate waste in the process and Six Sigma when the issues suggest defects or variation in the process.

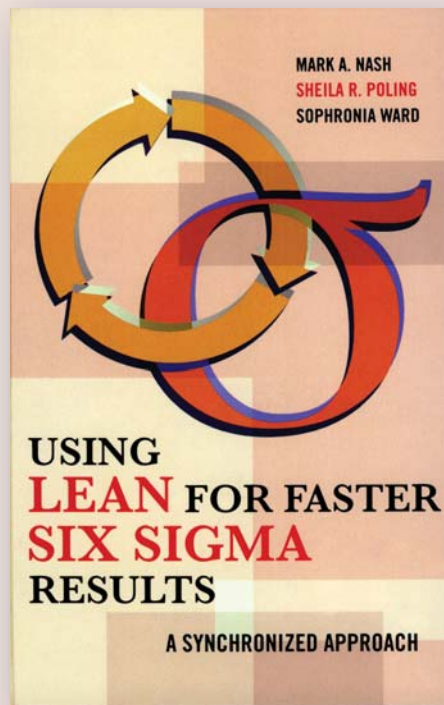
Proper synchronization of the two methodologies allows for faster results in Six Sigma projects and stronger more powerful Lean results through the quick-hitting use of Six Sigma tools when appropriate. This synchronized approach provides optimal results when Lean thinking and methodology can be utilized; first eliminating "low hanging fruit" (obvious waste), and then attacking variation and defect problems through Six Sigma projects.

The underlying success of this synchronized approach is that the methodology does not try to complete Six Sigma projects in 30 days or turn Lean teams into statisticians. The goal is to assist all process improvement teams in using the right tools at the right time, maximizing results and completing projects as quickly as possible within the constraints of the methodologies.

Any organization's overall initiative of continuous improvement should be managed by an executive council, and you must recognize that there still exists some danger in placing the management of this synchronized approach into the hands of one individual. The executive council is critical to this approach because a council can select and assign projects to either Lean or Six Sigma teams based upon criteria, and minimize the impact of subjectivity of which methodology to use for a project. Often, an individual managing such an effort will favor the use of one methodology over the other—consciously or subconsciously. As is shown in the accompanying chart, project selection using pre-

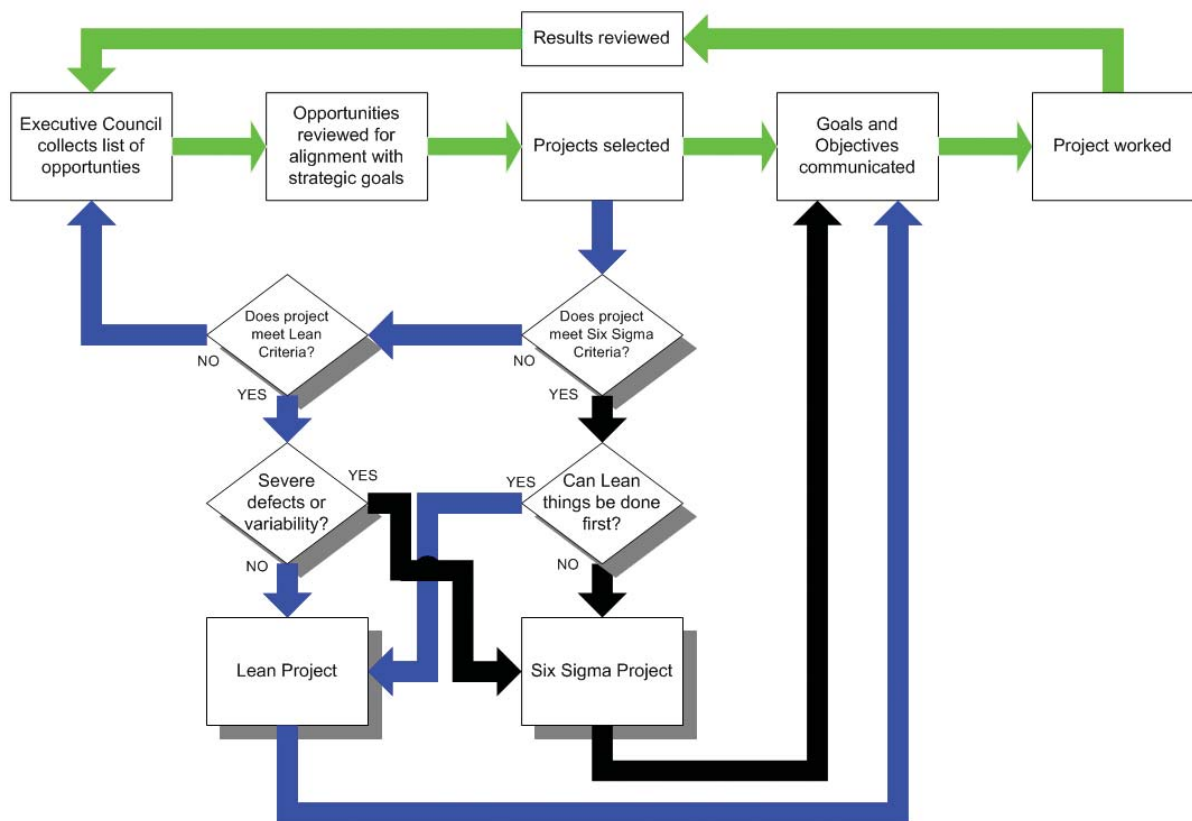
determined criteria can effectively synchronize the use of both Lean and Six Sigma within a single organization.

Even when the organization employs a quality or continuous



*In a new book, Oklahoman Mark Nash, along with experts Sheila R. Poling and Sophronia Ward, explain how companies can synchronize their Lean Manufacturing efforts to achieve faster and better Six Sigma results. The authors, with years of experience, offer a plethora of real-world case studies to illustrate the concept.*

## Lean versus Six Sigma project selection and implementation



improvement manager, the executive council, documented methodology, and predetermined criteria can ensure that the right discipline will be used with the right project at the right time. The results can be astounding. Lean can produce significant improvements and savings quickly, and not get side tracked by complex defect or variation issues that may be frustrating to management and/or customers. At the same time, Six Sigma projects can focus on difficult defect and variation issues resulting in much faster project results since the “low hanging fruit” often associated with Lean work is being addressed by Lean teams, thus allowing the Six Sigma team to focus more quickly on root cause.

Organizations that start out using Lean and then seek out other continuous improvement methodologies when a project’s return on investment begins to plateau or shrink, easily learn the value of this synchronized approach. Companies starting out with Six

Sigma, however, often overlook the value of utilizing Lean early in the journey, or resist Lean altogether—often with an “unscientific” mindset towards Lean. But the proof is in the implementation, just as it is in all quality and continuous improvement methodologies.

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