

Failure to Launch?

The Top Five Reasons Why Lean and Six Sigma Initiatives Fail

Reason 3 – Intrinsic Benefit Not Recognized

November 9, 2014

This is the third installment of a series of five papers that will run between now and the end of 2014 on why Lean and Six Sigma initiatives fail and what to do about it. The number one reason will be available in December!

Here is the third most important reason for failure – **Intrinsic Benefit Not Recognized**.

How many times have you seen the hype on Lean and Six Sigma and how they will sweep the organization to world class status, improve margins and yield huge returns on investment? Ok – yes all those can be true. There is a lot written about that and it wasn't all made up. But for that to happen, it has to become a way of life or culture for the organization. For that to happen everyone in the organization needs to feel they receive benefit from that way of working. That is especially true if you are asking people to change their usual modus operandi to a new one. Change is hard and has to be worth it. So, what's wrong with all the hype about ROI and all the extra revenues and profits the organization is going to realize? If you have ever noticed, that message, while it may be motivational for the owners of the business or the CEO or the leaders held directly responsible for P&L, it's really not what motivates the masses in the organizations – not even with typical incentive plans tied to P&L. In fact, pushing that incentive and only that incentive can backfire. If it is necessary for all to get on board and that message doesn't motivate everyone and may even be a disincentive for some, what then?

The answer is actually right in front of you. It is exactly the same for everyone as it is for the CEO. To see it, you just need to dig deeper into the real motivations for the CEO. Ever heard of a CEO or leader of a large organization of any kind – maybe the mayor of the largest city in the USA – that doesn't need any more money -- a motivated leader that already has more money that he or she needs and even gives away large sums? What motivates them? At the most fundamental level it is the feeling of being in control and productive. That is the same for anyone.

What does that have to do with Six Sigma? Lean and Six Sigma are the ultimate methods for enabling control and productivity. That is true whether you are the CEO or the person who receives and qualifies the raw material for manufacture or the person who provides financial analysis for running the business or the person who pushes buttons on the equipment to make product.

A common failure in the implementation of Lean Six Sigma can be traced to pushing the right message to sell the organization's top dog on the reason to implement them – ROI, ability to compete and win markets – but the wrong message for almost everyone else -- ROI, ability to compete and win markets. Some organizations are lucky enough that without even realizing it, the realization of greater control and productivity by individuals at the very heart of the value chain begin to recognize how much more enjoyable and fulfilling their jobs have become as they start applying Lean and Six Sigma methodologies. That discovery of the connection between the methodologies and job satisfaction is so powerful that they can ignite a fire under the entire organization and spark it to success. Twenty-five years later I can still remember the names and almost the moment when those realizations manifested themselves for – Masan – a process engineer, for Gregorio – a manufacturing equipment operator, for Dori – a forklift driver and for Victor -- a lead process technician. In every case they not only went on to advance in their organizations to higher and more influential positions but they became the peer leaders and the real reasons for the successful transformation of the organization. Other organizations aren't so lucky. They simply miss the point and fail in their efforts.

There is no reason to leave it to chance. Ultimately, associates will need to discover the benefit of greater control, ability to make a difference and the feeling of job fulfillment on their own. They will have to inoculate their peers with the same excitement. However, the organization's leaders can prepare the ground and significantly improve the odds of it happening by the way they support the Lean and Six Sigma initiatives. Firstly, leaders need to help associates make the time for the investment it will take in learning the new methodologies. Leaders will need to communicate constantly and consistently about how much they value the application of the methodologies. They will need to ask questions in a way that allow associates to answer proudly about their application of the methodologies. When first introducing the initiative, the motivations leaders explain for wanting to implement the Lean and Six Sigma should talk about the benefits for the organization as whole but should include and emphasize the personal benefits associates will realize. It may be helpful to invite in an external to facilitate getting that message across by conducting a short session that allows associates to experience a microcosm of



the implementation where the participants can sense the added enjoyment they will derive from applying the methodologies and working in the new “to-be” culture. You may want to look at NWCPE’s Lean Six Sigma Continuous Improvement Boot Camp on the NWCPE website. The Boot Camp brings the workshop participants thru a simulation of manufacturing or non-manufacturing processes where they can experience first-hand how the application of Lean and Six Sigma improve results and makes processes easier and their management more fulfilling.

In the end, it’s like the sale of anything else. It’s about radio WIIFM – “what’s in it for me” not only what’s in it for the organization. That’s nothing new. What may be new here is the realization that “what’s in it for me” is something very deep and fundamental to what generally drives most human beings – the sense of being able to contribute something of value and have fun doing it. That’s a whole lot more powerful than artificial carrots and sticks we can dream up to motivate success.

Look for the October installment for reason number two in the count down.

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