

Demystifying Lean Six Sigma

By Uwe H Kaufmann

MYTH: LEAN SIX SIGMA IS THE LEAN, THE SLIM VERSION OF SIX SIGMA.

The truth is: Lean Six Sigma is the advanced version of Six Sigma. It combines two powerful toolboxes, Lean and Six Sigma.

Lean has been developed by Toyota starting after WWII under the name of Toyota Production System which has been contributing as a major factor to Toyota's world-wide success in making the most reliable cars available for an affordable price.

Six Sigma was a major means during and the result of Motorola's successful fight for survival in their bleeding TV business during the mid-eighties.

Whereas Lean focusses on waste reduction in all kind of processes by cutting out unnecessary activities, Six Sigma helps to reduce variation and increase predictability in the steps that are really necessary.

MYTH: LEAN SIX SIGMA HAS MANY TOOLS I DO NOT NEED.

Certainly, life is much easier without the need to choose between 50 advanced tools for problem solving. This is correct. However, if the only tool available is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. In reality, there is a multitude of process problems whose solution needs the appropriate application of a variety of tools. Not knowing these tools and concluding that they are not needed is called ignorance. Knowing these tools and their application and selecting those that add value and dropping those that are not needed in this situation is called making an educated decision.

MYTH: LEAN SIX SIGMA IS FOR MANUFACTURING ONLY.

The truth is there are applications in all kind of organisations in all industries. Yes, the methodology has been developed for the manufacturing environment. Yet, it has been used in basically every process landscape you can think of.

MYTH: LEAN SIX SIGMA IS FOR ENGINEERS, FOR SCIENTISTS.

To the contrary, tools for listening to and understanding customers, for collecting and analysing data about problems and their root causes, for making fact-based decisions about improvements, for managing and motivating project teams and for delivering results whilst developing staff at the same time should be part of every managers tool box.

LEAN SIX SIGMA IS AN OUT-DATED APPROACH.

The fact that this set of tools has been around for decades does not mean it is out-dated. It rather means it is much more than the flavour of the month. There have been a lot of developments around this toolbox. It has been customised for R&D activities, for sales processes, for administration functions and for many other environments. After having mastered the nuts and bolts of the approach, Organisations have tailored the selection of tools for their needs. With all these developments the methodology has been kept current to meet changing needs.