

LEAN SIX SIGMA for dummies

The Lean Six Sigma methodology is a holistic strategy for optimising business efficiency. Using specific techniques, the origin of a problem can be identified, inefficiencies can be corrected, and a stronger management culture can be adopted. But how can you do this successfully? In the following article, we'll take a step-by-step look at implementing Lean Six Sigma in your organisation.

SIX STEPS for Lean implementation

- Σ **Map the process.** The first step is to precisely identify the process that needs to be improved and get every last detail of it. To carefully map each step of the process, you need to break it down into flowcharts; this will help you identify where the process has weak points. In order to ensure that you don't miss anything important, consult with an expert or get the wider teams involved to help you set this task up. The goal here is to fix each of the steps, define its main function and link all of them so that the existing process can be represented.

- Σ **Gather data and analyse.** After mapping out the process and identifying all the steps, you need to analyse it to understand where the problems have occurred. There can be delays: not getting the job done right the first time, reallocation of resources, low-quality work, over spending in certain areas, defective products, etc. Examine each of the steps and discuss them with the people affected by the process or other people in the organisation with appropriate skills. Ask employees their opinion, as they may have suggestions for improvement. If you cannot do it yourself and you do not have people with the necessary knowledge at your disposal, you can always hire Lean consults.

- Σ **Identify the waste.** At this stage, you have to identify and examine the problems within the process and determine their origins.
 - Where are bottlenecks forming and why?
 - Where is there a case of high cost and low quality?
 - Which parts of the process are causing delays; at what stage is the job not being done right the first time, and why?



- Where are time and effort wasted on unnecessary activities?
- Why does product or service not meet customer expectations?
- Are there long wait times and why are they occurring?

Σ **Determine opportunities for improvement.** After the problem has been identified, the next step is to rework the process to improve it and ensure that the same problem will not recur in the future. In this phase, it is most effective to work with employees who are directly involved in the process because they have hands-on experience with it, and their ideas may reveal another side to the process. During discussions, make a list of opportunities for improvement, identifying those that are easy to implement and have an immediate effect, and those that will need a long-term approach.

Σ **Implement changes.** This is the stage where the process improvement plan comes into play. Follow the four-step PDCA cycle model (Plan, Do, Check, Act) to control and continuously improve your processes. Implement innovations one at a time and manage them carefully, monitoring each change. You should be able to determine whether or not it adds value to your process. If the situation has improved, leave this change and move on to implement the next one; if not, replace it with another until you see the results. Be aware that changes are never easy, people can resist them. But, if you involve your employees early on in the process, they are more likely to agree.

Σ **Stay the course.** You need to understand that Lean Six Sigma is not a temporary project but an ongoing strategy for your organisation. It is a slow and continuous improvement of processes and waste elimination that rarely leads to instant results, and its successful implementation requires consistency of purpose and patience. Valuable improvements only come with time and dedication, and as new problems arise, the process starts again. As Calvin Coolidge, the 30th president of the United States, once said:

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan ‘Press On!’ has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

