

Leadership Dependency Model for Lean Six Sigma

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Abstract

The majority of Lean Six Sigma corporate initiatives fail to yield the desired results: many are struggling in turning Lean Six Sigma into a success, citing lack of leadership, changing business focus, internal resistance and availability of resources as the main impeding factors. While a lot of focus is usually put on the technical side of Lean Six Sigma, the Leadership and cultural impact are often an afterthought, causing failure down the line.

The aim of this doctoral research was to assess the impact of organizational leadership on the deployment of Lean Six Sigma in organisations and thereby develop a dependency model to facilitate its successful implementation. A mixed-methods approach, using survey and semi-structured interviews, was adopted.

Building on the existing literature, this research extended and helped refine our understanding of Lean Six Sigma and leadership, identifying the traits a leader needs to display to increase the chances of successful deployment: these traits, although not all completely new in the literature, are organized in a novel way, spanning across different Leadership styles articulated in the literature. A new Leadership style was suggested as the most conducive to Lean Six Sigma deployments. Its traits are as follows:

- Visible
- Excellent communicator
- Inspirational
- Three R's (Roles, Responsibilities, Relations) clearly defined
- Consistent
- Targeted
- Building a philosophy, a way of working
- Leading by example
- Flexible
- Three C's (Connection, Competence, Character)

The research also showed that the more service-centred the sector and the smaller the company, the greater the need for strong leadership to successfully implement Lean Six Sigma, leading to a Leadership dependency model, into which the leadership traits outlined above were integrated.

The leadership dependency model shows how smaller service organizations are particularly dependent on leadership to be visible, inspirational and the ability of its leaders to connect with employees; while larger manufacturing organizations rely more on leadership being targeted, flexible, and capable of building a philosophy of working around Lean Six Sigma. This would help organizations about to embark on a Lean Six Sigma deployment journey to determine where to invest more resources, either on up-skilling their Leadership team or on more stable processes.

Keywords

Lean, Six Sigma, Leadership

Biography

Alessandro Laureani recently completed a PhD in Design Manufacture & Engineering Management at the University of Strathclyde in Scotland (UK), researching the impact of Leadership on the deployment of Lean Six Sigma in organizations. He previously earned an MBA from University College Dublin and a Statistics Degree from University 'La Sapienza' in Italy. He has more than 15 years experience in applying Lean Six Sigma in organizations, having lead projects in Hertz Rent-A-Car and Google, and having trained hundreds of Green and Black Belts over the years. His research has been published in multiple academic journals and he has been a keynote speaker at multiple Operational Excellence and Continuous Improvement conferences.