

Lean Versus Six Sigma... And the Winner is?

By Tim Noble

Today's competitive global business environment leaves little room for error and inefficiency, which explains why Six Sigma and Lean have become part of today's everyday business language. Many extol the virtues of these continuous improvement methods as a way to drive out waste and reduce variation in everything from customer service to overall process performance. However, which continuous improvement methodology is more prominent and popular?

Based on the following three key indices, Six Sigma still dominates Lean as the more prominent and popular methodology by a wide margin.

Books Published: Over the past five years both methodologies have seen an explosion of books published covering their topics, which will only help to elevate the interest in Six Sigma and Lean as more business leaders become immersed in the published materials now being made available. Each year, however, books published on the topic of Six Sigma consistently outpace Lean by a wide margin.

Internet Keyword Searches: Based on Internet search engine keyword search counts, Six Sigma search inquiries still outpace Lean inquiries by a 2-1 or greater margin. However, keyword searches on Lean have been gaining ground recently.

Job Board Postings: Based on Internet job board postings, the use of the keyword Six Sigma outpaces Lean consistently by more than 50%.

The difference in prominence between Six Sigma and Lean maybe due to the fact that Six Sigma has been able to move beyond its roots in manufacturing into other disciplines, while Lean is still largely perceived as a tool to improve manufacturing processes. This perception is changing as more and more businesses across the board are looking to blend the best of each methodology to accelerate their continuous improvement efforts. Companies are increasingly realizing that these are truly complementary tool sets and not necessarily competing philosophies.

In the end, the real winner is any company that successfully engages in some form of continuous improvement, regardless of whether it is Lean, Six Sigma, or some other well-executed approach. Today there are few, if any, companies that can claim to have reached world-class performance without utilizing some form of continuous improvement approach. World-class status is a constantly moving target defined by both your customers and your competitors. Without a continuous improvement approach you're not even treading water in today's global economy.

About the Author:

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