

Wedding Bells for Six Sigma and Lean

Trends in industry are often telegraphed into candidate requirements in job postings and they can serve as a window into the latest corporate initiatives. As trends go, none has been more contested and anticipated than the evolving relationship between Six Sigma and Lean. Today there are increasing signs found in job postings that these two corporate initiatives are headed down the aisle of eternal matrimony.

Based on a recent study of over 3,000 internet job board postings, The Avery Point Group found that Six Sigma still outpaces Lean by a wide margin when it comes to desired skill sets. However, for those companies seeking Six Sigma talent, fully one-third are looking for practitioners to also have Lean expertise as part of their tool set. For companies seeking Lean talent the desire is even greater for candidates to also possess Six Sigma knowledge, with almost half of all Lean jobs posted requiring Six Sigma exposure. The merger between Six Sigma and Lean is also clearly evident for jobs posted at the very heart of Six Sigma's key leadership roles. Almost half of all companies seeking to specifically hire Master Black Belt and Black Belt talent required candidates to also possess Lean as a core part of their tool set.

When it comes to Six Sigma and Lean skill sets, it is becoming increasingly obvious that companies want to have their cake and eat it too. Furthermore, the study found that even though companies may not have a full-blown Six Sigma or Lean deployment underway, they highly desire talent that possesses both Six Sigma and Lean skills to be part of a candidate's DNA. Continuous improvement practitioners on either side of the aisle might want to sit up and take notice that this wedding is clearly underway.

For further evidence of this tryst, one only need look to published books. Six years ago books published on the combined topic of Lean and Six Sigma were virtually nonexistent. Today, however, they dominate the continuous improvement publishing landscape. Over the past two years alone, books published on the combined topic of Lean and Six Sigma represented almost half of the Lean books published and a quarter of the Six Sigma books published.

For some purists, this mixed marriage is viewed only with contempt; for others it is seen as a natural progression - the result of companies seeking to blend the best of both methodologies in order to remain competitive in today's global economy. Those that perpetuate the divide between Six Sigma and Lean are clearly missing the point. Core to both methodologies is the idea that challenges need to be approached with an open mind, because solutions can sometimes come from the most unlikely of sources. True Six Sigma and Lean practitioners will view this marriage with an open mind and realize that these are truly complementary tool sets, not competing philosophies.

About the Author:

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