

Faster, better, cheaper: Finding the fast lane in a data-driven world



Over 60 percent of global manufacturers have established or plan to establish Continuous Improvement (CI) programs such as Lean or Six Sigma—and 73 percent report that they are currently implementing process improvement programs. Today's organizations are awash in data, providing endless opportunities to build incremental efficiencies in many areas.

Positive outcomes for Six Sigma and Lean are frequently reported; however, like any program that requires significant, lasting change in behaviors, these initiatives are susceptible to disappointing return on investment and deteriorating results over time. For these reasons, industry publications, consultant studies and expert blogs are littered with statistics about just how big this failure rate can be.¹

¹ Sources: *36 Operational Excellence Stats Every Manufacturing Leader Must See*, [LNS Research](#); *Lean Failure Rates, Training with Industry*; *Where Process Improvement Projects Go Wrong*, [Wall Street Journal](#).

No matter your past level of success with improvement programs, the road to Operations Excellence can still be faster, better and cheaper. Success rates can be improved by learning from those who've travelled the Lean and Six Sigma journey ahead of you.

To either optimize an existing CI program or begin the journey, get your bearings and navigate the safest route by asking these questions:

- 1. What are your CI program goals? (In other words, what will success look like?)** By analyzing opportunities to achieve specific goals, you can draw boundaries around what ideas and actions are going to provide the most value.
- 2. Do you have the right team for your improvement goals – and do team members have time to devote to CI?** Who can you enlist to help others buy into the journey? In today's flat, lean organizations, people are stretched to meet even their regular obligations. For project success, participants may need to be released from some duties to work effectively on your project team. Look for those who are enthusiastic, flexible and well respected by their peers. In addition, ensure leadership buys in so they can encourage participation and remove roadblocks as needed.
- 3. Are you using a data-driven decision-making process to select the most critical projects?** Once alternative initiatives and opportunities are defined, it is critical to select only those projects that will keep you on the most direct route. Your objectives must drive these selections. But once you make them, don't forget to assess your final portfolio for risks (e.g. a key department or stakeholder is not involved).
- 4. Who is responsible for acting on risk and opportunity along the way?** You can expect the unexpected; the key is to be prepared. If your team has analyzed the potential risks to your project (e.g. losing resources, slipping timeframes), minimized them in advance and planned effective actions to take if they do occur, it can make the difference between project success and failure. In addition, being prepared to seize opportunities along the way can give you a big results acceleration.
- 5. Are you measuring change and giving recognition for employee and project success along the way?** Sustainability, at its core, is making sure that people stay engaged and aren't punished for taking the time to do the right thing. An effective system for measuring, monitoring and managing the process helps ensure compliance and quality. For most people, it is easier to maintain the status quo than make a change. By coaching and providing feedback and support, people understand what is expected and are empowered to embrace change.

Faster, better, cheaper. Finding the most direct route to performance improvement can yield greater results in an accelerated timeframe. On the road to Operations Excellence, the fast lane is maximized by focusing people and processes around specific objectives and driving targeted improvements. Are you asking the right questions to navigate this journey? See this infographic, "[Navigating Lean, Six Sigma and other Continuous Improvement Programs](#)" for tips to reach your goals and keep improving.



. About Kepner-Tregoe

Kepner-Tregoe is the leader in problem-solving. For over six decades, Kepner-Tregoe has helped thousands of organizations worldwide solve millions of problems through more effective root cause analysis and decision-making skills. Kepner-Tregoe partners with organizations to significantly reduce cost and improve operational performance through problem-solving training, technology and consulting services.